
MEDICINE HAT COMMUNITY WELL-BEING PLAN

Tackling Misconceptions About Well-Being in Our Community

This document reviews some common misconceptions that community members may have about topics related to well-being in Medicine Hat, helping to build understanding and empathy about complex challenges some of our most vulnerable community members face daily.

Misconception 1:

Other communities send homeless people to Medicine Hat

- Medicine Hat was the first city in Canada to reach functional zero chronic homelessness in 2021 (meaning there were no more than three individuals facing chronic homelessness in our city for three consecutive months). We are extremely proud of this accomplishment.
- We have seen homelessness increase in our community in recent years, for many reasons: impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, income instability/inequality, mental health and substance use challenges, and rapid overall increases to the cost of living (among many others).
- Medicine Hat is a regional service center for many communities in our region. This means that many people travel to Medicine Hat to access services and programs that may not be available in their own community.
- Many common myths surround homelessness, including that individuals are being sent to Medicine Hat and other communities by the bus load. We have heard of similar myths in communities like Peterborough, ON and Kamloops, BC in communities in the United States.¹
- There is no evidence that other communities are transporting housing insecure or homeless individuals to Medicine Hat en masse.

Misconception 2:

People are sleeping rough in our community because there are no shelter spaces or housing supports available in Medicine Hat

- There are three emergency shelters in Medicine Hat: McMan Roots Youth Shelter (4 beds), Medicine Hat Women's Shelter (30 beds), and The Mustard Seed (30 beds)
- During the last Point-in-Time (PiT) count of homelessness within the community in September 2022, 48 individuals were utilizing emergency shelters, 31 were unsheltered, and another 32 were in transitional housing.
- There is adequate shelter space within Medicine Hat for those sleeping rough. However, many choose not to access the shelter system for a variety of reasons: history of trauma, fear of violence, mental health challenges, and simply personal preference.
- Individuals sleeping rough may be struggling with several complex issues that hinder their comfort in accessing emergency and transitional housing supports in our community.

¹ <https://www.readfrontier.org/stories/we-fact-checked-social-media-claims-and-urban-myths-about-homelessness-in-oklahoma/>

Misconception 3:

Mostly seniors live in Medicine Hat

- The 2021 Census data for Medicine Hat highlights a diverse age range, with 62% of the population falling within the 15-64 years old bracket, showcasing a vibrant mix of working-age individuals.
- Furthermore, the statistics indicate that 17.4% of the population is under the age of 14, underlining the presence of a significant youthful segment within the community.
- According to Statistics Canada, the median age of residents in Medicine Hat is 43.2, reflecting a balanced distribution across different age groups and contributing to the overall age diversity of the city.

Misconception 4:

Medicine Hat's population isn't very multi-cultural

- The 2021 Census Data for Medicine Hat underscores the cultural tapestry of the community, including 3,225 individuals identifying as Indigenous.
- Furthermore, the data reveals a noteworthy presence of newcomers, with 2,755 residents who are not Canadian citizens, adding a dynamic and global dimension to the community.
- Delving deeper into the immigrant population, the statistics highlight a diverse range of origins, including 930 individuals from the Americas, 2,110 from Europe, 580 from Africa, and 2,440 from Asia. This breakdown emphasizes the multicultural nature of Medicine Hat.

Misconception 5:

Violent crime is out of control in downtown Medicine Hat

- Numerous misconceptions circulate about downtown areas being synonymous with violent crime. Nevertheless, the recently launched crime map on the Medicine Hat website challenges these assumptions, shedding light on the fact that service calls in the downtown area do not necessarily indicate violent criminal activities.
- The updated map demonstrates that a significant portion of reported calls downtown pertain to vehicle-related incidents and public assistance, dispelling the notion that all service calls are linked to violent offenses. This information provides a more nuanced understanding of the downtown community, emphasizing that service calls encompass a wide range of situations beyond what might be traditionally associated with crime.

Misconception 6:

Drug overdoses only happen to people who are homeless

- While the visibility of the drug toxicity crisis has increased in Medicine Hat in recent years, the most common location that someone overdoses and dies as a result of unintentional opioid poisonings is in a private residence, usually their own home, alone²

² https://healthanalytics.alberta.ca/SASVisualAnalytics/?reportUri=%2Freports%2Freports%2F1bbb695d-14b1-4346-b66e-d401a40f53e6§ionIndex=0&sso_guest=true&reportViewOnly=true&reportContextBar=false&sas-welcome=false

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- The toxicity of the drug supply at any moment in time can vary widely, with substances such as benzodiazepines and carfentanil greatly increasing risk of unintentional drug poisonings, which in turn can also affect where individuals overdose
 - Many substance users are dealing with complex social needs, including mental health challenges, trauma, and other lived experiences that further complicate service providers' abilities to provide support.

Misconception 7:

Medicine Hat is so affordable, everyone can afford to live here

- Recent insights from the Alberta Living Wage Network reveal a 2023 living wage rate of \$17.35 for Medicine Hat. Considering the current minimum wage in Alberta at \$15.00 per hour, some individuals find themselves navigating financial constraints.
- According to the 2020 Census data, 21.2% of the population of Medicine Hat aged 18 and older are categorized as having low-income status.
- The Medicine Hat Real Estate board further highlights the economic landscape, indicating a steady increase in property values from 2019 to 2023 based on MLS listings, adding an additional layer to the affordability concerns.
- Beyond property values, the early 2023 CMHC report notes a concerning trend in rent, indicating an 8.1% increase for a two-bedroom unit during 2022. In concrete terms, the average rent escalated by \$82 per month, reaching \$1,009 by October of 2022. These cumulative factors bring attention to the complex affordability landscape in Medicine Hat, emphasizing the need for a nuanced perspective on the city's economic dynamics.

Misconception 8:

Disabilities do not affect many people in Medicine Hat

- The 2022 Canada Disability Inclusion Action Plan emphasizes the prevalence of disabilities, with over 22% of Canadians, totaling 6.2 million people, identifying as having a disability. If this percentage is applied to Medicine Hat, it means that there are nearly 14,000 residents living with a disability in our community.
- Working-age persons with disabilities face a stark economic disparity, being almost twice as likely as their peers without disabilities to live in poverty, with rates of 23% versus 12% in 2017. This unfortunate circumstance affected nearly 917,000 working-age persons with disabilities, and over 550,000 were grappling with deep poverty.
- Only 59% of persons with disabilities are employed, in contrast to the 80% employment rate among persons without disabilities. These barriers underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies and initiatives to foster greater inclusion, support, and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Canada.