

Montreal
Indigenous
Community



NET
WORK

FROM OUR EYES TO YOURS



A Closer Look at the Realities of Indigenous Peoples Experiencing Homelessness in Montreal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



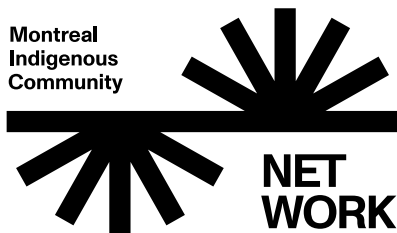
From Our Eyes to Yours: A Closer Look at the Realities of Indigenous Peoples Experiencing Homelessness in Montreal

April 2024

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ISBN# 978-2-9821275-3-1



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We wish to thank our financial partners.

This report was made possible through direct funding contributions from Infrastructure Canada, the City of Montreal, and Secrétariat aux relations avec les Premières Nations et les Inuit via Service régional de l'itinérance de la Direction des services généraux et des partenariats urbains du Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

*Secrétariat
aux relations avec
les Premières Nations
et les Inuit*

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*Centre intégré
universitaire de santé
et de services sociaux
du Centre-Sud-
de-l'Île-de-Montréal*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following the 2013 and 2018 versions, the “From Our Eyes to Yours” Report is the third report produced by the Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK focusing on the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Tiohtià:ke. The completion of the present report would not have been possible without the work carried out in the two previous versions.

The essential contribution of Heather Johnston, former Executive Director of Projets Autochtones du Québec (“PAQ”) (2020-2023) also deserves special recognition. We would like to express our gratitude to Heather Johnston for sharing her professional experience with us for the purpose of this research.

Finally, we would like to thank the organizations that participated in the content revision, making this report even more accurate, and to the entire NETWORK team, who participated, in one way or another, in making this project a reality.

- Bobby Manning-Leduc
Main Writer and Researcher



We want to thank the following organizations for contributing to this report.



From left to right:

The Southern Quebec Inuit Association (SQIA), Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ), Indigenous Support Worker Project (ISWP), Plein Milieu, and Résilience Montréal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
.....	
ABOUT THE NETWORK	8
.....	
PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT	10
.....	
DEFINING HOMELESSNESS	12
.....	
METHODOLOGY	16
.....	
PORTRAIT IN NUMBERS	18
.....	
SUMMARY OF MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS	19
.....	
RECOMMENDATIONS	31
.....	
CONCLUSION	39
.....	
REFERENCES	40
.....	

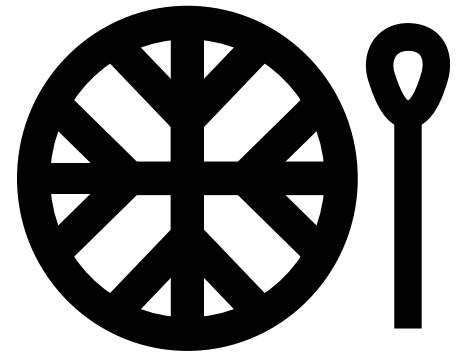


ABOUT THE NETWORK

Our Vision

The Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK (The “NETWORK”) envisions an urban setting where the well-being and growth of urban First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities throughout Tiohtià:ke/ Montreal are led by Indigenous communities. The NETWORK contributes to establishing and fostering an environment centered on relationship-building and community connections that ensure safe and abundant access to culturally relevant information, services, and resources. We are working towards an urban setting which honours, respects and celebrates the diversity of Indigenous knowledge, cultures and innovation.

Heart of the community:
Listen, Connect, Support



Our Values



INDIGENOUS-LED

Led and created by and for urban Indigenous communities



COMMUNITY-ORIENTED

Priorities and solutions identified and developed by the community



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Building and nurturing relationships between the community sector and strong allies

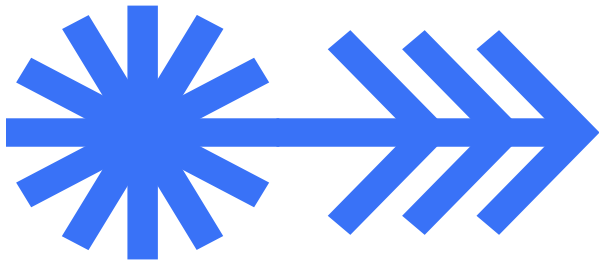


COLLECTIVE HEARTBEAT

Working together for the betterment and empowerment of Indigenous communities

Our Mission

As an umbrella organization, the NETWORK is in a unique position to connect various segments of urban Indigenous communities by supporting Indigenous and Indigenous-serving organizations working directly with community members in and around Tiohtià:ke/Montreal.



Our Partners

To better serve the urban Indigenous communities, we work in collaboration with our partners:

Projets Autochtones du Québec, The Native Friendship Centre of Montreal, The Indigenous Support Workers Project, The Southern Quebec Inuit Association, The First People's Justice Centre of Montreal, Native Montreal, Résilience Montréal, Quebec Native Women, the Indigenous Health Centre of Tiohtià:ke, Quavvivik, Mitsuap, Rising Sun Daycare, Tasiutigiiit, Médecins du Monde, Plein Milieu, The Women's Center of Montreal, The Open Door Montreal, and Chez Doris.

1. Gathering those who directly serve community members

We ensure the safety, belonging and well-being of urban Indigenous community members by facilitating collaborative spaces for frontline community organizations to share information, identify gaps in services, determine priorities and develop long-term, sustainable solutions as a collective. We invite non-Indigenous guests to listen to the needs and solutions developed by community organizations in order to strengthen strategic, action-based partnerships that will directly benefit Indigenous community members.

2. Alleviating the burden

We influence the allocation of public funding and take on administrative tasks such as funding distribution through community consensus-based decision-making circles. We communicate with public officials to alleviate the bureaucratic burden placed on the Indigenous community sector that directly serves community members.

3. Transferring knowledge

We transfer knowledge to the general public through advocacy and awareness-building by collaborating with strategic partners, developing educational tools, publishing NETWORK-initiated research reports, and providing workshops for people working toward meaningful allyship.

4. Empowering Indigenous leadership

We provide capacity-building opportunities for community workers, organizers, and existing leaders to develop and refine their leadership skills and practices. With a special eye on the future, we amplify Indigenous youth voices and generate empowerment opportunities through mentorship, skill and confidence-building activities and gatherings designed to promote a sense of belonging and cultural resurgence in urban Tiohtià:ke/Montreal.

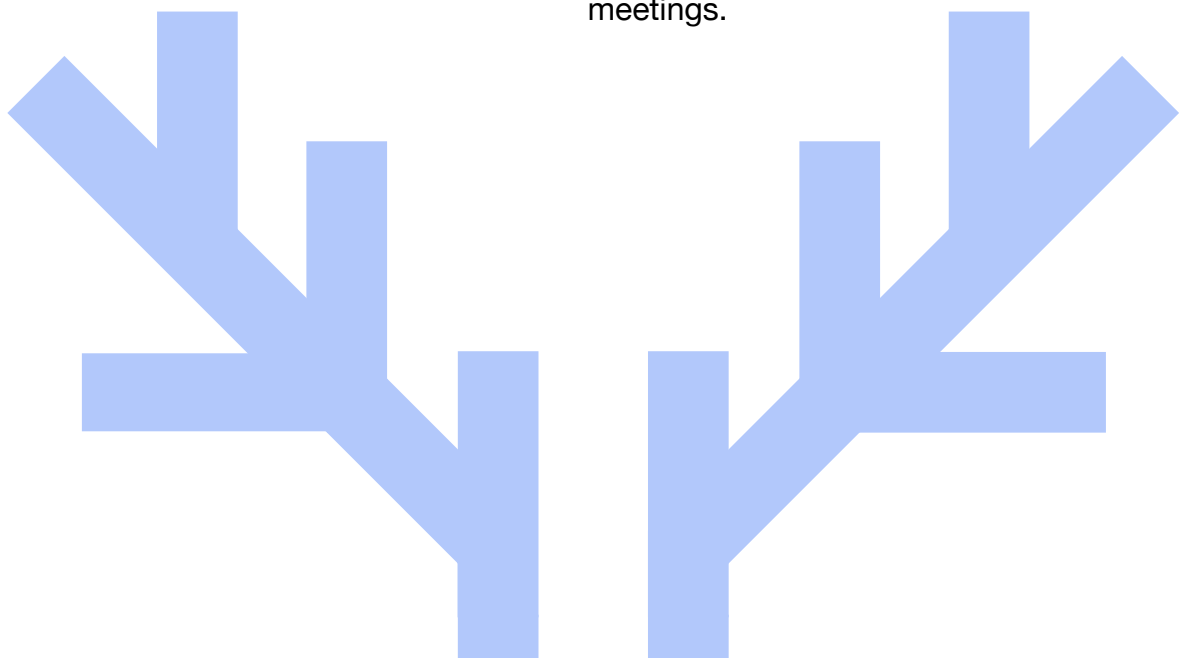
PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK (“The NETWORK”) **From Our Eyes to Yours report sheds light on the complex and intersecting factors contributing to the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal.** The identification of these factors will support the formulation of recommendations to governments, and community organizations in Montreal, with the aim of enhancing collaboration in addressing the issue at hand.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the NETWORK and its partner organizations witnessed an increase of unmet needs within the urban Indigenous community. Montreal is home to numerous Indigenous¹ and Indigenous-serving² organizations, approximately 30 of which are recognized by the City of Montreal and around 62 identified by the NETWORK.

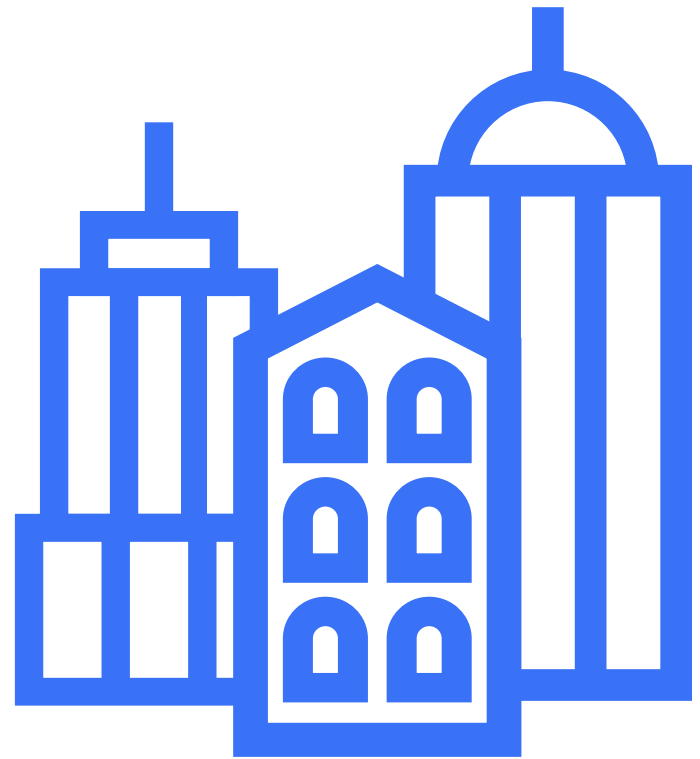
These organizations cover a wide range of areas, including community, arts and culture, joint action, education, training, employment, housing, political representation, health and social services, daycare services, and legal services.³ Many of them offer specialized services related to housing, justice, substance use, addiction, nutrition, and more. While prevention efforts are a focus for most community organizations in Montreal, some have also become experts in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness.

In order to accurately mobilize during the pandemic, Indigenous and Indigenous-serving organizations in Montreal collaborated through regular meetings called the COVID-19 (C-19) Working Group to address the growing needs of urban Indigenous community members and collectively find solutions. These meetings facilitated direct calls to action to every level of government and the provision of various services to the Indigenous population in Montreal. The NETWORK played — and continues to play — a coordinating and facilitating role in these meetings.





Addressing homelessness among the Indigenous community presents unique challenges for Indigenous and Indigenous-serving organizations. They must respond to immediate needs for shelter, food, hygiene supplies, and clothing, while also dealing with complex caseloads. At the same time, they recognize that their work is only a temporary solution to the wounds caused by settler-colonialism - the ongoing systems of power that perpetuate the genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures.⁴ **Indigenous and Indigenous-serving organizations must allocate significant time and resources to advocate for systemic change within a system that often fails to understand Indigenous realities.** The burden is further amplified by the need to hire, train and retain a majority of Indigenous staff, navigate funding proposals that may not align with the needs of Indigenous communities, and meet reporting requirements that do not accurately reflect the impact of their work.



“They recognize that their work is only a temporary solution to the wounds caused by settler-colonialism”

1. The NETWORK defines an “Indigenous Organization” as an organization that meets the following criteria : The organization was founded by an Indigenous person or group; the organization is led by Indigenous people - more than 50% of the decision makers must be Indigenous (Board of Directors, Steering Committee, Director or other decision-making positions); the organization is made up of Indigenous people, with a minimum of 50% of its employees being Indigenous (this criterion does not apply to organizations with fewer than five employees); and more than 50% of the organization’s members and beneficiaries are Indigenous.

2. The NETWORK defines “Indigenous-serving organization” as: an organization that has a 30% or more Indigenous clientele, and that has at least one specific program that directly serves Indigenous community members.

3. Ville de Montréal, 2020

4. Cox, 2017

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

Use of terminology: Homelessness vs Houselessness

Throughout this report, the NETWORK will use the term homelessness as this is the term used within our citations, references of existing research, documentation, and reporting. We do acknowledge there is much discussion on using “homelessness” versus “houselessness”. We would also like to acknowledge that within an urban Indigenous context, “homelessness” can imply that Montreal is not the home to many Indigenous peoples or that Indigenous peoples do not belong here. **Tiohtià:ke/ Montreal is Indigenous land, and all Indigenous peoples are welcomed here.** The NETWORK will reflect on standardizing and clarifying its language in future reports. However, for the purpose of this report, we will be using the term homelessness.

The Reaching Home (Government of Canada) Definition:

As the funding program of the Government of Canada’s homelessness strategy directives, they define Indigenous homelessness as:

“Indigenous Peoples who are in the state of having no home due to colonization, trauma and/or whose social, cultural, economic, and political conditions place them in poverty. Having no home includes: those who alternate between being sheltered and unsheltered, living on the street, couch-surfing, using emergency shelters, living in unaffordable, inadequate, substandard and unsafe accommodations or living without the security of tenure; anyone regardless of age, released from facilities (such as hospitals, mental health and addiction treatment centres, prisons, and transition houses), fleeing unsafe homes as a result of abuse in all its definitions, and any youth transitioning from all forms of care.”⁵

5. Government of Canada, 2022

Describing Types of Homelessness

In this section, the seven types of homelessness that guided the production of this report will be defined. Inspired by the definition and categorization of homelessness of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness,⁶ and complemented by the writings of other researchers in the field, our categorization of homelessness better encompasses the lived reality transmitted to us by our partners working directly with Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal.

It is important to remember that some community members experiencing homelessness may not fit into one of the seven types of homelessness, may oscillate between the subcategories presented below, or show characteristics of more than one definition listed in this section simultaneously, as **there are many different ways an individual can experience homelessness.**⁷ Please be aware that these definitions are to provide this report with a general idea; there are no standardized definitions on homelessness amongst community organizations, governments and/or academia.



6. Dionne et al., 2023
7. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, et al., 2020
8. Government of Quebec, 2021
9. Government of Quebec, 2021
10. Eberle et al., 2009

Chronic Homelessness:

Chronic homelessness is the most visible form of homelessness,⁸ and it refers to a person who has experienced homelessness for a minimum of one year or on a repeated basis. The people experiencing chronic homelessness are typically older, and/or struggling with other underlying issues such as mental health, addiction(s), physical and/or mental disabilities.



Cyclical Homelessness:

People who are experiencing cyclical homelessness alternate between having a home and living on the streets.⁹ This could be a result of a change in the individual's situation, such as the individual repeatedly losing their home due to frequent exposure to violence, stays in a hospital, jail or prison for extended periods of time, or due to the community member unable to maintain stable employment.



Hidden Homelessness :

People who are experiencing hidden homelessness are temporarily without housing, but still manage to find places to sleep. This is done either by living with family or friends, couch-surfing, finding short-term rentals, living in squats or living in other insecure accommodations.¹⁰

Situational Homelessness :

People who are experiencing situational homelessness are experiencing homelessness due to situational issues related to punctual and circumstantial events related to healthcare, financial issues, an instance of violence, a mental health crisis, the loss of a job or other housing related issues. Situational homelessness is the most common form of homelessness.¹¹



Seasonal Homelessness:

People experiencing seasonal homelessness tend to find insecure shelter during the colder months, occasionally committing minor crimes to obtain this shelter,¹² while during the warmer months they may decide to return to living on the streets.



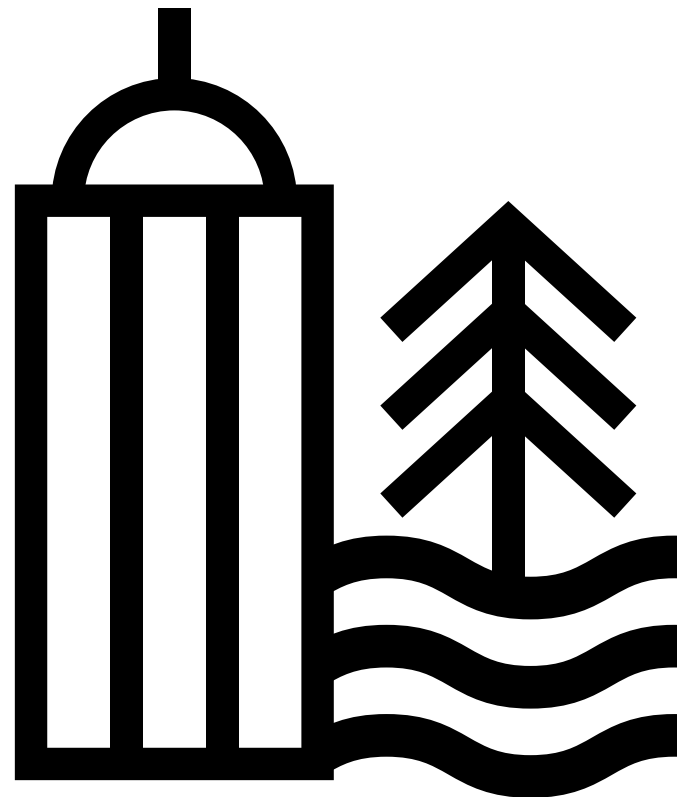
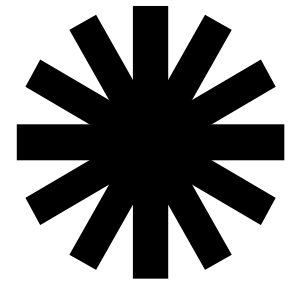
At Risk of Homelessness:

People who are at risk of homelessness face a combination of problems that may eventually lead them to experience homelessness. Thousands of people are at risk, with the most common causes of homelessness being poverty, illness, and addiction.¹³



Spiritual Homelessness :

Refers to a state of mind where an Indigenous community member feels disconnected from their land, cultural traditions and identity¹⁴ which can have a negative impact on their mental health. These feelings of spiritual homelessness can be further exacerbated by the negative effects of forced relocation and forced sedentarization.¹⁵



-
11. Government of Quebec, 2021
 12. Public Safety Canada, 2008
 13. Mouvement pour mettre fin à l'itinérance à Montréal, 2015
 14. Young, 1997
 15. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, et al., 2020

THE NETWORK'S

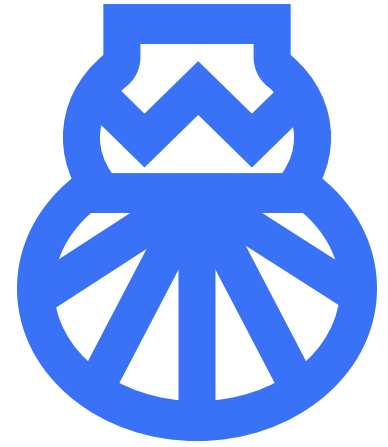
DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS:

In addition to the state of lacking permanent, stable, and/or basic living conditions, the NETWORK's understanding of homelessness experienced by Indigenous peoples can be described by the historic and ongoing displacement, geographic separation, mental disruption, imbalance, cultural genocide and spiritual disconnection experienced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals, families, and communities. Those at risk of homelessness consist of individuals facing housing and/or financial insecurity due to a number of factors such as renovations, being subject to a volatile rental market, as well as Indigenous families and communities experiencing geographical, cultural, and spiritual disconnection.



METHODOLOGY

The report utilized a range of methods to gather information on Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal. A holistic approach was taken when collecting the information found in this report, taking into consideration the human aspect to researching Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness.



These methods included:

- 1. Gathering information** from the NETWORK's Community Project Managers (CPMs): The CPMs have expertise in bringing together multiple segments of urban Indigenous communities by coordinating and facilitating various working groups. In these working groups, frontline workers and CPMS may share their lived experiences, or the experiences of Indigenous community members they work with. This provides primary data on Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness and the organizations serving them.
- 2. Reviewing meeting notes** from the Montreal Indigenous Health Advisory Circle (MIHAC) and COVID-19 (C-19) meetings: The MIHAC meetings consist of Indigenous organizations and Indigenous-serving organizations working towards equitable and culturally safe access to healthcare for Indigenous peoples in Montreal. The C-19 meetings focus on identifying the priority needs of the community, particularly those experiencing homelessness.
- 3. Conducting an interview** with the former Executive Director of Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ), Heather Johnston: The interview focused on the launch of the PAQ-2 shelter — a shelter that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic — and provided additional insights into the efforts to address challenges faced by Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal.



4. Considering the experiences of Indigenous youth advisors: Youth Advisors are young Indigenous individuals between the ages of 12 and 35 who live in Montreal and participate in a wide range of activities to share their experiences and perspectives on the issues that affect them. The NETWORK hosted youth advisors in gathering events, including discussion groups and workshops, to foster multigenerational relationships and reduce isolation. These sessions focused on topics important to Indigenous youth, which informed, and aligned, with the NETWORK's *STRATEGY for Safety, Well-being, and Belonging of Indigenous peoples in the Greater Montreal area*.¹⁶

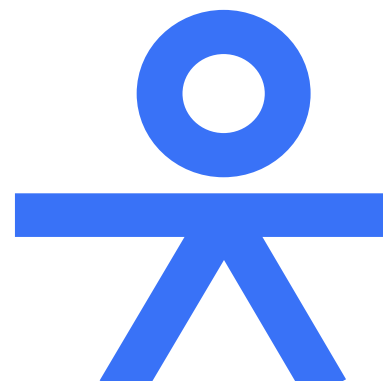
5. Reviewing existing studies and research: The report drew on various studies and research conducted on the subject of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness to provide a broader understanding of the issue.

6. Utilizing quantitative data: The report incorporated quantitative data from various sources, such as the 2016 Census, and the 2018 and 2022 Homelessness Counts, to complement the qualitative information and provide statistical context.

7. Reviewing the report with Executive Directors and frontline staff working in Indigenous organizations: The report was shared with Executive Directors and some frontline workers who have direct experience working with Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness. Their feedback and expertise helped ensure the accuracy and relevance of the report.

By employing these diverse methods of information gathering and review, the report aims to accurately portray the realities and complexities of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal.

16. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, 2022





PORTRAIT IN NUMBERS

The majority of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada reside in urban areas, with this population expected to grow in the coming years. It was found in the 2016 Census that 52% of Indigenous peoples living in Canada lived in urban centres,¹⁷ with an estimated Indigenous population of 34,745 in the greater Montreal area — an increase of 211% since 2001.¹⁸ Additionally, Montreal has one of the largest urban Inuit populations in Canada,¹⁹ with approximately 1,500 Inuit living in the city.²⁰

It has been indicated in the “Dénombrement des personnes en situation d’itinérance sur l’Île de Montréal, le 24 avril 2018” that **Indigenous peoples make up approximately 12% of Montreal’s visible unhoused population,²¹ despite only making up 0.6% of the city’s total population.²²** Inuit community members are estimated to represent between 40%- 45% of the Indigenous population experiencing chronic homelessness in Montreal.²³

-
- 17. Seltz & Roussopoulos, 2020
 - 18. Ville de Montréal, 2020
 - 19. Landry, 2020
 - 20. Fanelli, 2021
 - 21. Latimer et al., 2019
 - 22. Latimer et al., 2018
 - 23. Ville de Montréal, 2020



SUMMARY OF MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The contributors and causes of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal are **deeply rooted in systemic and institutional discrimination and racism, particularly stemming from the history of settler-colonialism and government policies.** These contributors and causes of homelessness are felt by Indigenous community members on a daily basis, and collectively contribute to the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal

Addressing the causes and contributors leading to Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness requires systemic change, including repairing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, providing culturally appropriate support services and preventative initiatives, and creating opportunities for Indigenous communities to thrive culturally, socially, and economically.



∞ Settler-Colonialism and Government Policies:

The history of settler-colonialism in Canada, along with government policies, has had a significant impact on Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness. Some of these policies include the Indian Act of 1876, revised in 1985, and the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, where in exchange for specific rights outlined in the agreement, and the negotiated benefits, the Indigenous parties must give up the land they took care of.²⁴ Aggressive assimilation policies, such as the establishment of residential schools,²⁵ aimed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous peoples and disrupt their healthy family structures, lead to intergenerational trauma and instability. These

policies traumatized generations of Indigenous children and families who experienced abuse in the residential school system. Without access to proper mental health and addiction support, the cycle of abuse is passed on unconsciously to younger generations. When a group of people have been subjected to traumas over a long period of time, the following generations continue to be impacted long after the original traumatic events occurred.²⁶

This intergenerational trauma has affected multiple generations of Indigenous children, and has prevented them from acquiring the necessary tools to construct a secure sense of identity connected with their culture, build self-esteem and learn and practice necessary life skills that are required to live a flourishing life.

24. Papillon & Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2008

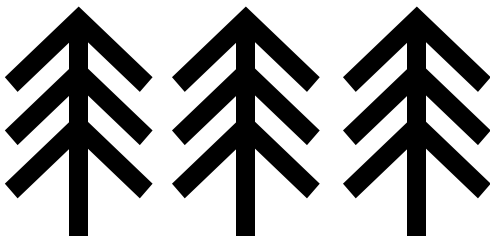
25. Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network, 2012

26. Collective Healing, 2022

∞ Residential Schools:

The legacy of residential schools has had a profound and lasting impact on Indigenous individuals and communities. Many Indigenous peoples in Montreal have either attended residential or federal Indian day schools themselves, or have immediate family members who did.²⁷

The traumatic experiences and negative impacts of residential schools contribute to the challenges faced by Indigenous community members, and have created mistrust towards public services like health, social, and educational services, as well as public systems.²⁸



“Many Indigenous peoples in Montreal have either attended residential or federal Indian day schools themselves, or have immediate family members who did.”

∞ The Child Welfare System:

In 2023, the rates of Indigenous children and families being targeted by the child welfare system,²⁹ removed from their families and placed in foster care, are at higher rates than the children who previously went to residential schools.³⁰ The lack of culturally appropriate programs, resources, and support for Indigenous youth transitioning into adulthood further contributes to their vulnerability to homelessness.

Also part of Canada’s legacy of Indigenous children removal, birth alerts disproportionately

affected Indigenous children and families. Birth alerts is a system where child welfare workers notify hospitals when a new patient is admitted to the hospital for childbirth and deemed high risk of being a non-fit parent in colonial standards. These alerts were issued without the parent’s knowledge or consent, and would often result in their newborn child being traumatically apprehended and placed in foster care immediately after birth. **This practice officially ended in Quebec in May, 2023, becoming the last province in Canada to end this controversial practice.³¹**

27. Ville de Montréal, 2020

28. Seltz & Roussopoulos, 2020

29. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada & Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada, 2015

30. Seltz & Roussopoulos, 2020

31. Hwang, 2023



∞ Forced Relocation:

Policies like the Indian Act have forced Indigenous communities to relocate to remote and isolated areas with limited resources, away from their communities traditional hunting grounds. Specifically, for Inuit in Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut, starting in 1949, Inuit families were pressured by the government and church to send their children to federal day schools under the pretext of providing them with a better education. **As a result, many Inuit families followed their children to where they were taken, fearing what might happen to the child when handing them over to strangers.**³² The removal of their children, as well as economic impacts related to the devaluation of the fur trade, were forcing Inuit families to relocate. The relocation, for many Indigenous populations, resulted in communities facing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and housing conditions, limited job opportunities, high food costs, and inadequate health, social, and educational services. In search of better opportunities and access to resources, many Indigenous community members are compelled to move to urban areas, often without secure housing.

∞ Educational Barriers:

A 2008 study indicated that 51.5% of First Nations peoples living on reserves in Quebec aged 18 and above had not completed their secondary studies,³³ and as of 2016 only 45% of Inuit reported obtaining their high school diploma.³⁴ While nearly 33% of Canadians have a university degree as of 2021, with this percentage increasing, the percentage of Inuit in some regions of Inuit Nunangat, like Nunavik, is only 10.2%.³⁵ **Lower levels of education contribute to Indigenous community members experiencing underemployment, unemployment, poverty, housing issues, substance use, family violence, and poor health outcomes.**

32. Lauster & Tester, 2014

33. First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) & Harvey, 2016

34. Fanelli, 2021

35. Canada Research Chair on Comparative Aboriginal Condition, 2021

∞ Financial Barriers:

According to a 2018 report, Indigenous community members in Montreal often receive low levels of income, with approximately 66% of respondents receiving between \$500 and \$750 per month from sources such as welfare, disability insurance, employment, or pension.³⁶ A Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) survey of 1,700 First Nations and Inuit individuals living

outside of their communities found that 33% of First Nations and Inuit individuals living in urban areas are unemployed, with 4.5% of the those surveyed **receiving no employment insurance, or welfare benefits at all.**³⁷ Unemployment rates among First Nations people and Inuit living in urban areas are significant, increasing the risk of not being able to afford rent and facing homelessness.



“Indigenous peoples are now 6 times more likely to be stopped by an officer than a white person, with women and elders being more at risk of being street-checked.”

∞ Policing:

Racial and social profiling practices, as well as targeting individuals experiencing homelessness, have been observed in Montreal. A 2019 report found that in Montreal, an Indigenous person was 4 times more likely to be stopped by an SPVM street-check than a white person.³⁸ A research conducted in 2023 showed an increase in that number: Indigenous peoples are now 6 times more likely to be stopped by an officer than a white person, with women and elders being more at risk of being street-checked.³⁹ **People experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous individuals, receive a disproportionate number of statements of offence under municipal and public transportation regulations.**⁴⁰ Indigenous women face particularly higher rates of police stops compared to non-Indigenous women.⁴¹ Receiving statements of offence, or arrest followed with charges, increases the likelihood of criminalization, and thus an individual's precarity in becoming homeless. **It is also concerning to witness the dramatic increase of spending on policing in Montreal, compared to that on homelessness. The budget allocated to policing by the City of Montreal in 2021 was \$660 million, which is 220 times larger than the \$3 million⁴² budget set aside for homelessness.**⁴³

36. Latimer et al., 2018

37. Viens & Québec (Province). Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019

38. Armony, 2019

39. Armony et al., 2023

40. Bellot et al., 2021

41. Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, 2020

42. The Defund the Police Coalition, 2020

43. Ville de Montréal, 2020

∞ Incarceration:

According to the Correctional Investigator of Canada (CIC), the “over-incarceration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (...) in correctional facilities is among the most pressing social-justice and human-rights issues in Canada today”.⁴⁴ A 2016 NETWORK study found a correlation between unstable housing and incarceration among Indigenous community members.⁴⁵ Incarceration increases the precarity of an individual, either becoming or at risk of becoming homeless. The rate of representation of Indigenous peoples in federal prisons was at 33% in 2023.⁴⁶ Higher rates are seen among Indigenous women, and of Inuit men and women. **Indigenous women make up less than 4% of the Canadian population, and despite this, Indigenous women made up 48% of all admissions to federal custody in 2021.**⁴⁷ Some individuals may resort to committing petty crimes to avoid living on the streets, seeking short-term stays in prison for shelter, food, psychological support, and access to cultural activities. However, this can result in the attribution of a criminal record, limiting future employment opportunities and long-term housing options.⁴⁸ Too often Indigenous peoples who are incarcerated, especially Indigenous women, are released with little to no support, resulting in them returning to an unsafe place and ending up back in prison.⁴⁹

44. Collective Healing, 2022

45. Latimer et al., 2018

46. His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Public Safety, 2023

47. Collective Healing, 2022

48. Dingwall, 2020

49. Collective Healing, 2022

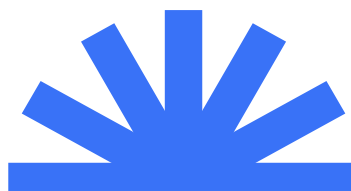


∞ Inaccessible Housing:

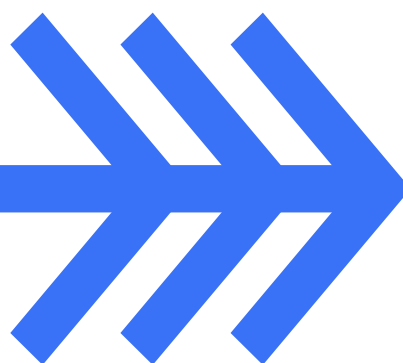
Accessing affordable and supportive housing can be challenging for Indigenous community members. Supportive housing, meaning subsidized housing with on-site supports, has been proven to help people with serious mental illness, substance use issues, and other challenges to achieve long term stability.⁵⁰ However, the **selection requirements of some supportive housing programs can exclude those living on the streets**, and administrative hurdles involved in accessing supportive housing (such as getting proof of revenue, identification card, etc.) can be a barrier to those who need such support. This leads to prolonged experiences of homelessness, or falling back into homelessness, while trying to navigate the system.

∞ Precarious Housing Conditions:

Unsafe housing conditions, such as mold, overcrowding, insect infestation, and poor building maintenance, contribute to poor health outcomes in Indigenous communities.⁵¹ In northern Indigenous communities, **overcrowding is prevalent and creates unsafe and unhealthy living environments, leading to displacement and homelessness.**⁵² The 2006 Census found that Cree and Inuit homes still remained far more overcrowded than the homes of non-Indigenous people, with 31% of Cree and Inuit homes experiencing overcrowding, compared to 3% of non-Indigenous homes.⁵³ Many Indigenous community members in Montreal also face substandard and unsafe living conditions.



“Supportive housing, meaning subsidized housing with on-site supports, has been proven to help people with serious mental illness, substance use issues, and other challenges to achieve long term stability”



50. Latimer et al., 2018

51. First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) & Harvey, 2016

52. Savoie et al., 2016

53. Papillon & Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2008

∞ Accessing Services Not Found in Other Communities:

Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities do not have the capacity, resources, or infrastructure to build independent services, such as health centres and addiction treatment services, within their current communities. **This forces Indigenous community members to relocate to urban areas to access essential services including specialized health services, hospitalization, education, housing, employment, support for people escaping family violence and more.** This displacement increases the risk of homelessness as they seek necessary services in urban centres that can be foreign to them.



∞ Violence:

Indigenous community members, particularly women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples face heightened risks of violence and exploitation, including human trafficking and sexual exploitation. A 2018 count of the homeless population on the Island of Montreal found that women experiencing homelessness for the first time had done so more recently than men had, and that 18% of women were experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence.⁵⁴ Over-targeting by predators, including police, contributes to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Boys, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. The trauma and grief associated with these experiences along with inadequate access to social and psychological support may lead to individuals seeking self-medication, which can lead to substance abuse, further increasing vulnerability to homelessness.⁵⁵

54. Seltz & Roussopoulos, 2020

55. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, et al., 2020

∞ Health:

There is a significant link between homelessness and physical and mental health issues. Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness often express a desire for medical services and addiction support.⁵⁶ Those who are stably housed have lower hospitalization rates compared to those who are not stably housed.⁵⁷

Indigenous community members travelling to Montreal for healthcare may become stranded in the city due to various circumstances, such as being discharged from hospitals without being provided support in finding accommodations, navigating public service systems in a language that they don't understand, or losing identification cards.

This leads to issues like not being able to board airline flights to go back home or being blocked from accessing further medical and public services, which can ultimately contribute to homelessness. Indigenous community members also face discrimination and racism when accessing health, social and educational services, with Inuit being particularly vulnerable to direct discrimination in Montreal.⁵⁸

Discrimination has a significant impact on people's choices when it comes to accessing the services they need, taking control over their health, and acquiring opportunities to increase their social mobility, all of which contribute to increasing the risk of homelessness.

∞ Substance Use:

Substance use is closely intertwined with homelessness. **Drop-in centres, day and night shelters, housing programs, subsidized apartment programs, hospitals, and out-patient clinics may deny Indigenous people access to their services if they don't refrain from substance use,** deterring community members from accessing these services. The intertwined nature of substance use and homelessness makes it challenging for Indigenous community members to escape the cycle of homelessness.⁵⁹



“Indigenous community members also face discrimination and racism when accessing health, social and educational services, with Inuit being particularly vulnerable to direct discrimination in Montreal.”

56. Seltz & Roussopoulos, 2020

57. Latimer et al., 2018

58. Fanelli, 2021

59. National Assembly of Québec, 2008

∞ Addiction:

Addiction can be the reason some Indigenous community members end up on the streets.⁶⁰ Self-destructive behaviours, such as excessive drinking and self-harm, may develop as an unhealthy coping mechanism to deal with past trauma, emotional pain, and current deficiency of quality of life. **Higher rates of alcohol-related problems and addictions are linked to a lack of connection and access to cultural practices, history, language, land, traditions, ceremony and community.**⁶¹

There is an over-representation of addiction in Indigenous populations, with 25% of Indigenous peoples in Canada suffering from addiction, compared to 17% of the general population.⁶² **Meanwhile, there continues to be a lack of culturally safe substance abuse treatment centres and services in Montreal, with treatment programs in languages spoken and understood by Indigenous community members, which further hinders Indigenous individuals from accessing the necessary support and treatment for their substance abuse issues.** The limited availability of these services contributes to the barriers Indigenous community members face in accessing appropriate care and overcoming their addiction(s).



“There continues to be a lack of culturally safe substance abuse treatment centres and services”

∞ Lack of Access to Culturally Safe Mental Health Services:

Many Indigenous community members in Montreal face barriers in accessing the mental health care they need. The lack of funding for public mental health care facilities, **lack of culturally and linguistically adapted mental health services and limitations in First Nations and Inuit health benefits** contribute to inadequate access to inpatient and outpatient mental health services.

The lived experience of community members exposed to racist staff and caretakers ignorant of Indigenous realities, or that have survived neglectful, even harmful treatment, has hindered their desire to seek essential mental health services. These barriers contribute to chronic and cyclical homelessness, as individuals do not receive the necessary mental health support.



60. Mouvement pour mettre fin à l’itinérance à Montréal, 2015

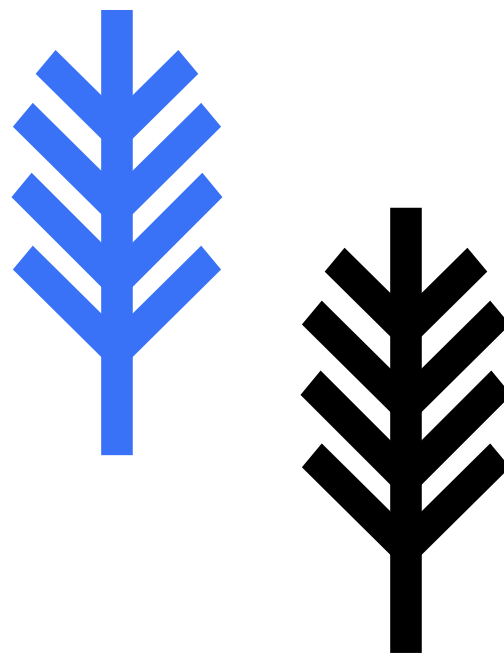
61. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK et al., 2020

62. Toth, 2022

∞ Disabilities:

Indigenous community members with physical and/or neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) face a higher risk of homelessness. **Accessing shelters that can meet their specific or complex medical needs becomes a challenge.** Within the Indigenous community, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) — resulting from alcohol exposure during pregnancy — is an under-recognized determinant of complex medical issues that can lead to long-term developmental disabilities.⁶³ Research indicates that a significant number of individuals with FASD have had interactions with the justice system.⁶⁴

Underdiagnosed and untreated ADHD symptoms is also a factor. The number of Indigenous children found to have symptoms associated with ADHD is significantly higher than expected based on prevalence rates in the general population.⁶⁵



∞ Being Barred From Services:

A portion of Indigenous community members have been and are excluded from existing services, including shelters, day centres, and treatment services, due to severe mental or physical health issues. Shelters often have specific written and unwritten rules and policies that some community members may struggle to adhere to, such as curfews or sobriety requirements.

To understand the varying mental health issues that can lead to physical violence, it is imperative to acknowledge symptoms such as poor impulse control and anger management as part of mental health issues, and the physical health struggles experienced by community members.⁶⁶

Low-barrier shelters that accommodate the unique needs of Indigenous community members are necessary to minimize violence escalation.

63. Government of Canada, 2017

64. Flannigan et al., 2018

65. Baydala et al., 2006

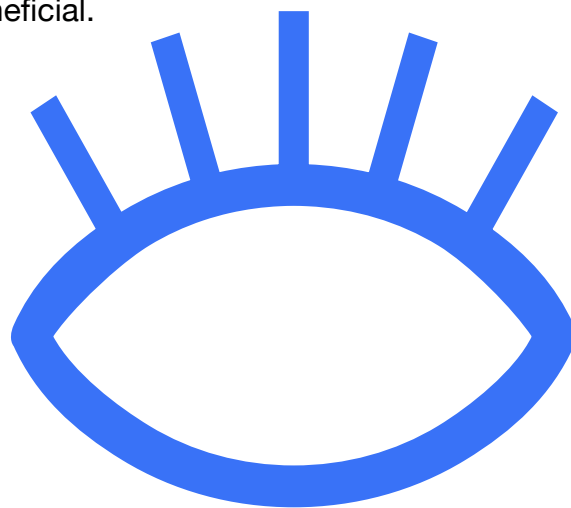
66. Duke University, 2016

∞ Lack of Resources in Indigenous Organizations:

Indigenous community members access resources primarily through Indigenous and Indigenous-serving organizations. **A large amount of public funds intended to meet the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit community members are often allocated to non-Indigenous organizations and institutions.** This poses a number of risks, including the duplication of services, language barriers between Indigenous community members and non-Indigenous staff, diversion of funds from Indigenous led organizations, less economic and professional opportunities for Indigenous people, and efforts that meet neither the specific needs of the individuals being served nor the priorities identified by the communities.

Additionally, many Indigenous community members are more reluctant to access public services due to discrimination and systematic racism.^{67 68} **Well-funded public systems often fail to meet the needs of the Indigenous communities, requiring underfunded and understaffed Indigenous organizations to take on the burden of advocating for systemic change while developing essential programs and services themselves.** Multi-year funding is currently lacking, although essential to be able to support core services, operations, and address gaps in government support.

Moreover, hiring, training, and retaining Indigenous employees in the standard in which organizations operate has proven to be difficult given the multiple barriers Indigenous people face throughout their lifetime. The constant lack of human resources and long-term underfunding create an unsustainable sectoral environment where the need to provide consistent services and programs for individuals to reach stability in their life is simply not met. The needs of Indigenous community members are different from the general population, and **frontline workers need specific skills, such as cultural competence and trauma related intervention expertise, to ensure services are provided in a culturally safe way.** A basic level of competence understanding some Indigenous languages would also be extremely beneficial.



“Multi-year funding is currently lacking, although essential to be able to support core services, operations, and address gaps in government support.”

67. Viens & Québec (Province). Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019

68. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada & Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada, 2015

∞ COVID-19:

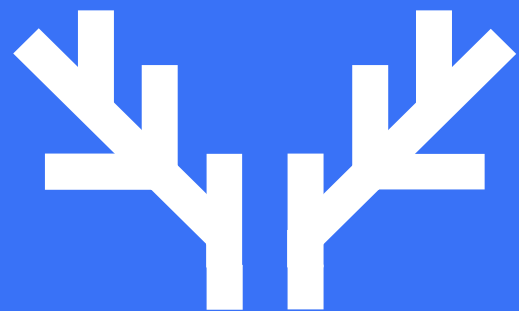
The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing issues and structural gaps. Closures of public places and reduced capacities of shelters and community services left people experiencing homelessness without regular access to essential resources such as toilets, water, and protection from the weather. The pandemic also led to an increase in substance use, addiction, poverty, unsafe living conditions, family violence, sexual violence, and visible homelessness.⁶⁹

∞ Choosing to Live on the Street:

Although living on the street is generally regarded as an undesired state, some Indigenous community members may choose to remain on the streets for various reasons. This may include a sense of not belonging to mainstream society, comfort with the street lifestyle, a desire for freedom, a desire to be outdoors, and a feeling of safety among peers and public spaces.

Contributors and Causes of Homelessness Not Included in This Report:

There are additional contributors and causes leading Indigenous peoples to experience homelessness that were not covered in the report due to insufficient data, or lack of access to data, and to the limited capacity of a community organization to comprehensively investigate a systemic and complex phenomenon that is firmly established in colonial history. These include factors specific to unhoused Indigenous adults and seniors over 40 years old, including those potentially impacted by the 60's Scoop, individuals experiencing homelessness due to human trafficking, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous community. Other unreported factors encompass educational barriers specific to Inuit, sexual violence, partaking in sex work, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis, traumatic brain injuries, Indigenous life expectancy, the racial background of those who have died on the streets, and more.

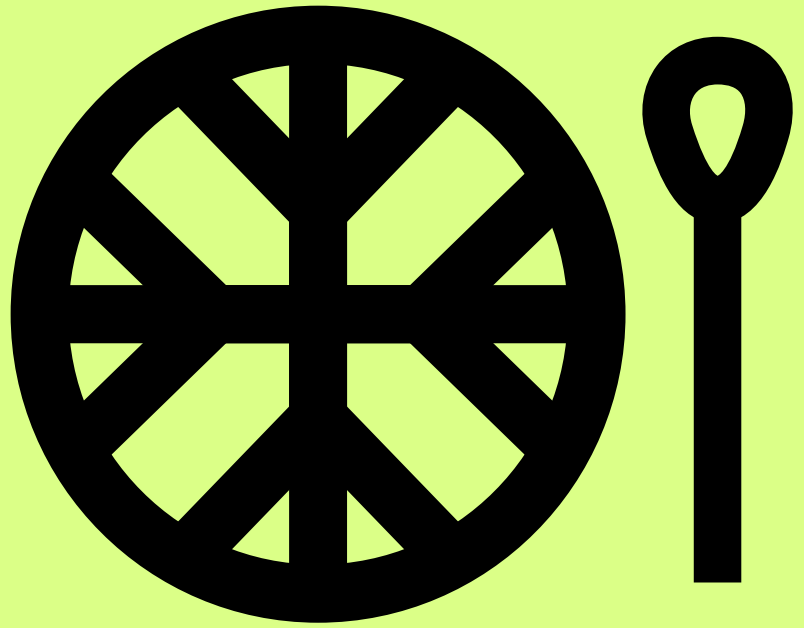


Tangible improvements in the funding and advancement of ethical Indigenous research for the benefit of Indigenous communities, improved access to and possession of pertinent data and race-based data,⁷⁰ as well as a genuine societal and political will to support Indigenous organizations in building their capacity, will have a significant impact on filling the data gaps and providing more informed solutions to the challenges that Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness face on a daily basis.⁷¹ We hope that the present study will inspire other agencies to deepen knowledge shared in this report and to look further into the contributors and causes leading to Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness.

69. Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM), 2022; La Direction des communications du ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2021

70. Rizvic, 2020

71. Skye, 2020



RECOMMENDATIONS

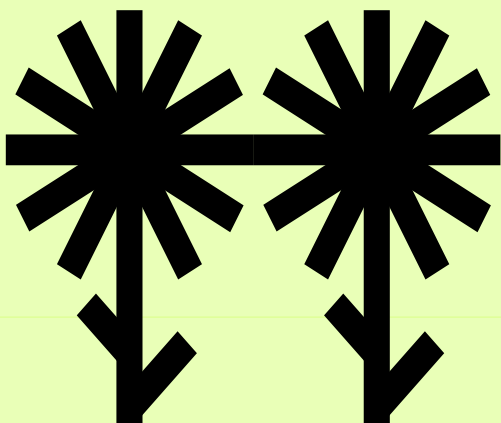
Alleviating the lack of accessible housing for Indigenous communities means ending colonial practices, with a priority towards proper housing structures on reserves, in communities, as well as within the urban context. It means Indigenous self-determination over the child welfare system, education, health and social services, and overall justice and policing systems. It also means the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures, life skills, and access to emotional, spiritual, and mental health support.

The following recommendations provided by the NETWORK call upon the various levels of government and community organizations to take action on, implement and support, in order to prevent Indigenous peoples from experiencing homelessness in Montreal. The recommendations are broken down into categories and were made using knowledge obtained in the quantitative and qualitative data gathered to produce the present report.



FUNDING

1. **Prioritize Indigenous organizations** for the distribution of Indigenous-specific projects, services and programs.
2. **Require non-Indigenous organizations and governmental bodies** that seek funding to deliver Indigenous programming **to build partnerships with Indigenous communities and obtain recommendation letters** from local Indigenous organizations.
3. **Engage and consult ethically with Indigenous organizations** in the beginning phases of project management and use criteria recognized by Indigenous organizations to determine priority projects/ areas/axes to be funded, adapt reporting to the reality of Indigenous organizations, and transfer the management and decision-making authority of funding distribution to Indigenous organizations.
4. **Provide all Indigenous organizations with funding to cover core operations and services** in multi-year agreements of at least 5–10 years.
 - a. Work with Indigenous organizations to assess the Human Resource requirements and needs in order to implement projects, programs, training, reporting and improve on data knowledge of people experiencing homelessness. Funding streams need to be geared towards covering operational costs.
5. Redistribute funds from inflated police budgets. **Increase funds to programs and resources that actively combat homelessness and prevent the need for police intervention.**⁷²



72. Government of Canada, 2017



INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

6. Incorporate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) principles into the Governments of Québec's laws, regulations, and policies.

7. Continue, at all levels of governments, to support urban Indigenous organizations and communities self-determination in the administration of:

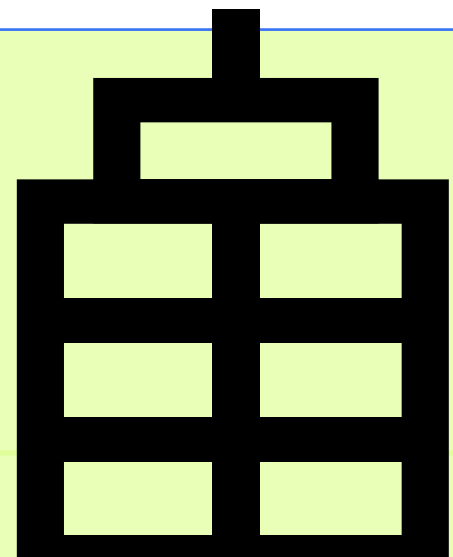
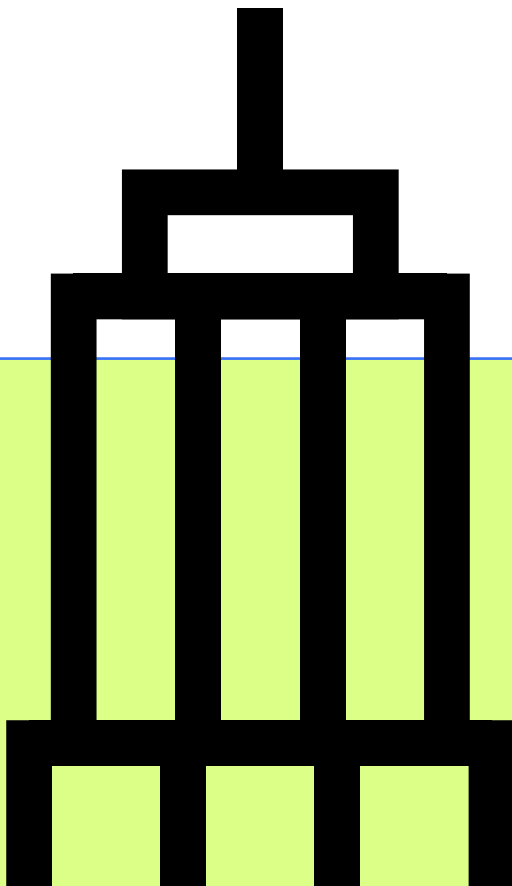
- a. Child Welfare System
- b. Incarceration and judicial system navigation
- c. Education and employment
- d. Health care services
- d. Housing
- f. Arts and culture

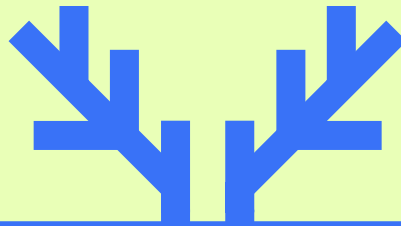
8. Transfer Infrastructure and Land: We call upon the three levels of government, as well as institutions like churches and educational facilities, to work with Indigenous organizations and peoples to take action to transfer appropriate infrastructure and lands to Indigenous communities.

9. Partner with Indigenous communities and organizations to purchase parking lots, unused lands and vacant properties to be used to address the needs of the Indigenous communities living on the street.

10. Include Indigenous organizations and communities as primary partners and stakeholders in consultations, think-tank committees, or any other form of knowledge sharing and production around health, homelessness, justice, education, employment, urban planning and development, and all other aspects that affect at-risk Indigenous people's lives.

- a. **Remunerate Indigenous peoples appropriately for consultation.**





INFORMATION SHARING, RESEARCH AND COORDINATION

11. Indigenous organizations and communities must be able to collect, manage and own data about their communities. See the OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession),⁷³ IQ (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit)^{74 75} principles, and ITK's (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) National Inuit Strategy on Research.⁷⁶

12. Ensure that all Indigenous and Indigenous-serving **organizations are made aware of, and have access to funding** as soon as it's available.

13. Sharing and coordination of information between local, regional, provincial, national and international Indigenous groups, governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and grassroots organizations must be strengthened.

14. Ensure funding for Indigenous organizations for strategic partnership development and coordination of information to support Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness.

a. Improve on data and system knowledge: create a HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System⁷⁷), create an up-to-date mapping of housing conditions, and create housing strategy for off-reserve and out of community Indigenous peoples.

15. Work on capacity building: Governments, NGO's and universities are called to prioritize building capacity among Indigenous organizations and Indigenous researchers before attempting to do their own research on Indigenous peoples.

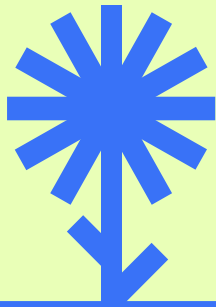
73. First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.

74. Government of Nunavut, 2017

75. The Conference Board of Canada, 2017

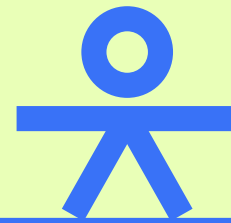
76. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018

77. Government of Canada, 2022



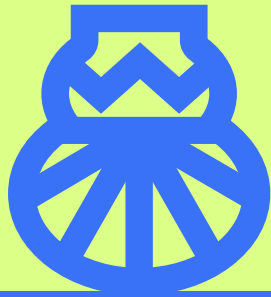
CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

- 16. Provide onsite cultural support** for existing services, organizations, and housing like Elder support, Indigenous knowledge keepers, language services, and have staff be trained in cultural safety.
- 17. Provide adequate public amenities**, including but not limited to: toilets, drinking fountains and garbage collection in key areas where Indigenous street communities gather.
- 18. Hire and support outreach workers who speak Inuktitut.**
- 19. Establish ongoing and lasting reconciling initiatives**, such as annual cultural events like powwows, Inuit feasts, and craft fairs for Indigenous peoples to gather together. **The building of an Indigenous Cultural Hub is needed in the city.**
- 20. Provide ongoing support for intervention and street workers with culturally sensitive training** like deescalation, crisis intervention, suicide prevention services, and harm reduction to better support Indigenous community members.



HOUSING

- 21. Create better housing support for Indigenous children** who are aging out of foster care and/or transitioning out of the child welfare system.
- 22. Develop infrastructure around social and community-based living** that meets the needs of Indigenous communities, notably the Inuit community (i.e. Community kitchen, gathering spaces, spaces for cultural activities).
- 23. Create reliable and effective housing programs and services to meet the needs of various demographics of Indigenous peoples**, including single people, families of varying sizes (including single Indigenous women and men, single mothers and fathers), people fleeing domestic violence, and students.
- 24. Create more supportive housing with wrap-around services.**
- 25. Increase transitional housing for Indigenous peoples transitioning out of treatment programs and incarceration.**



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

26. Complete TRC Call for Action number seven (7): ***Federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.***⁷⁸

- a. This Call to Action is currently in progress and not complete.
- b. Accurately track the progress of this Call to Action to ensure that it is not a performative measure and action, to ensure the Municipal, Provincial, and Federal Government is accountable in completing this action.
- c. Accurately track data to determine the impacts of this Call to Action and to ensure that it is actually reducing the gap.
- d. Since 2015, a total of 13 of the 94 Calls to Action have only been completed.⁷⁹



MENTAL HEALTH

27. Provide **more culturally safe mental health care within emergency services.**

28. Provide more mental health awareness and **mental health first aid training**, and increase the hiring of mental health respondents within the Montreal SPVM.

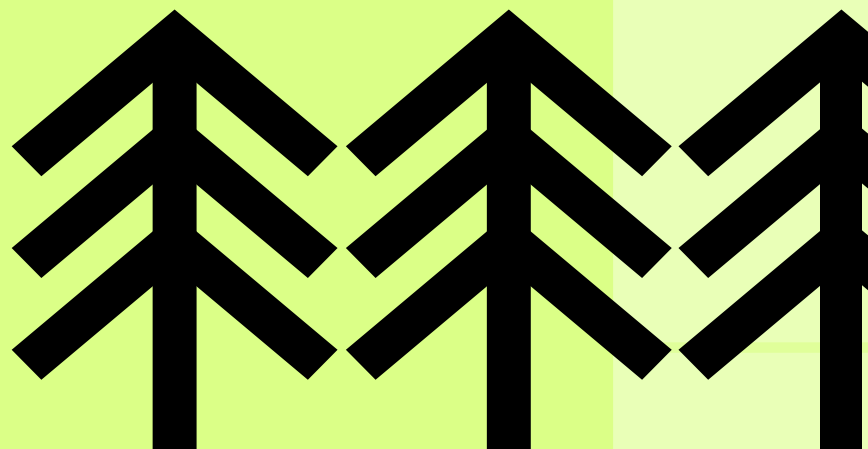
29. Create **culturally safe and trauma informed** mental health and addiction support.

- a. Support Indigenous communities in building their own mental health support systems.

30. **Reduce barriers** to accessing mental health support.

78. Government of Canada, 2023

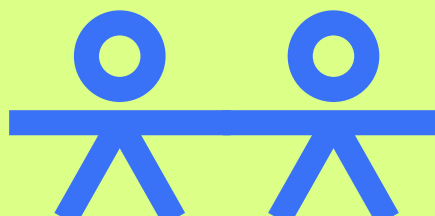
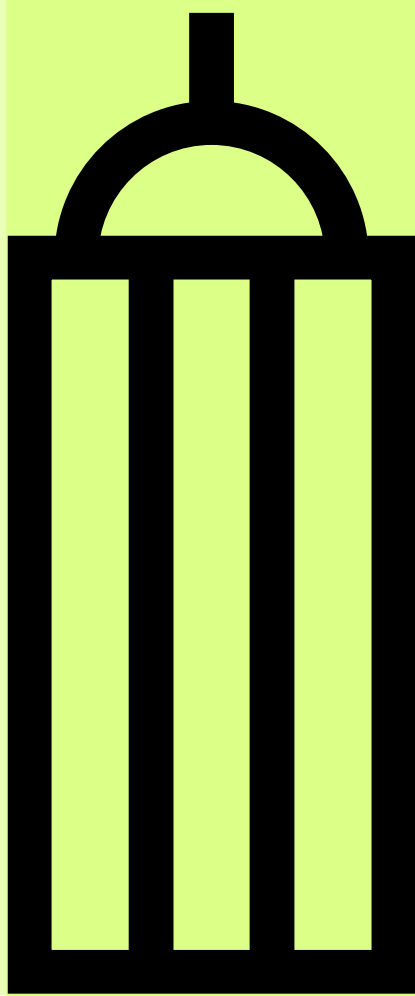
79. Jewell & Mosby, 2023





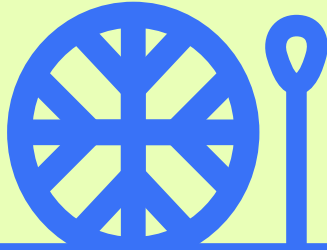
SUBSTANCE USE AND ADDICTION

31. **Provide more harm reduction supplies** to community members in need.
32. **Create community housing and programs that promote harm reduction** and offer supervised onsite substance use.
33. **Create programs for people who use substances** to access cultural practices.
34. **Include cultural practices in addiction treatment programs** for Indigenous peoples.
35. **Implement an Indigenous owned and led addiction treatment centre** in the City of Montreal that can provide treatment programs in Indigenous languages.



VIOLENCE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION

36. **Increase Indigenous owned and led cultural spaces** for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.
37. **Create Indigenous owned and led 2SLGBTQIA+ social services.**



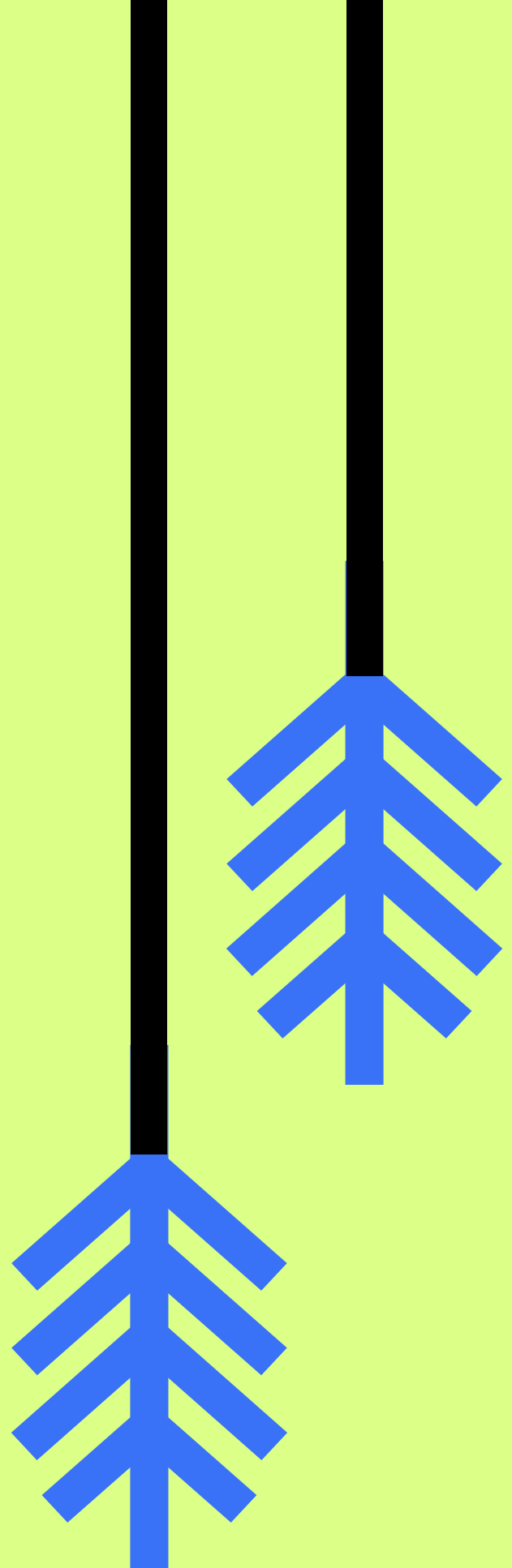
INDIGENOUS JUSTICE AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

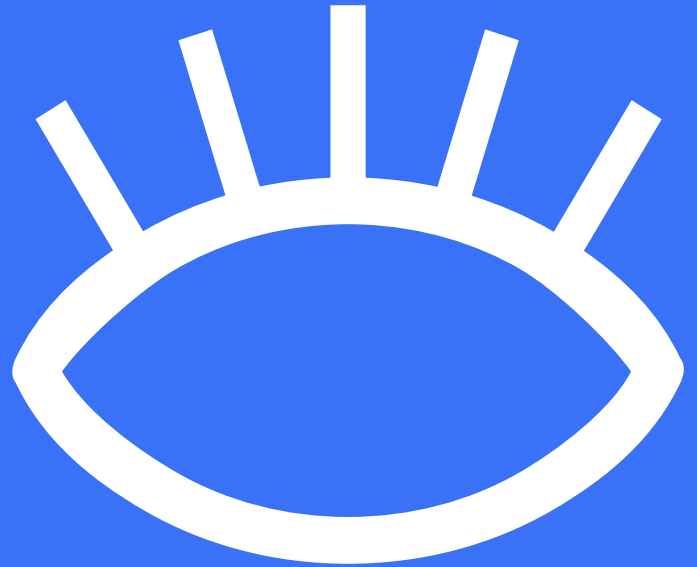
38. Support the implementation of Indigenous justice circles and restorative justice models as alternatives to colonial justice courts.

39. Create more Indigenous peer support services within the justice system, and culturally sensitive programming and activities.

40. Create employment training programs for Indigenous peoples living in hospitals, youth detention centres and prisons.

41. Connect health, housing, and employment services and supports **with Indigenous peoples before they exit detention centres and prisons.**





CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this report, like those that have preceded, reiterates the urgent need to support Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Montreal. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the cultural, socioeconomic, historical, and legal particularities that contribute to the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness, and the need for settler-institutions to prioritize and support Indigenous-led solutions.

By shifting funding to better support Indigenous organizations, promoting Indigenous governance, and improving information sharing and coordination, we can create a more effective and comprehensive response to prevent Indigenous peoples from experiencing homelessness. It is crucial to provide culturally appropriate support services, enhance access to healthcare and mental health services, and increase the availability of safe and affordable housing options. Additionally, working on substance use, addiction, violence protection, support for women and youth, education, employment, and Indigenous justice are essential components of a comprehensive approach.

The recommendations provided aim to address the various factors contributing to Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness and to promote collaboration among different stakeholders. Their implementation will require ongoing commitment and support from multiple levels of government, community organizations, foundations, and other stakeholders. By working together and prioritizing the unique needs of Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness, we can make significant strides towards addressing this issue and improving the lives of Indigenous peoples in Montreal.

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