

# Coordinated Community Winter Response (CCWR)

## IMPACT REPORT

September 14, 2022

*Cold weather brings a community together.*



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## Introduction

Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) stewards investments of public funds and coordinates systemic responses in alignment with its purpose of guiding the fight against homelessness. In response to an increasing population living unsheltered and a growing number of anticipated extreme weather events, City Council directed Administration to develop and deliver an urgent response. Utilizing strategic investments from The City of Calgary, the United Way of Calgary and Area (UW), and Service Canada's Reaching Home (RH) program, Calgary Homeless Foundation resourced and convened a Coordinated Community Winter Response initiative between December 2021 and March 2022.

City Council invested \$750K with an additional \$100K contribution from United Way toward three outcomes, led by Calgary Homeless Foundation: create more warming spaces through existing infrastructure, reduce barriers to accessing shelter, and distribute more basic winter weather essentials.

"We're in a unique position to manage the project because of the expertise and relationships needed to bring the community together," said Matt Nomura, vice president of strategic investments and community impact at Calgary Homeless Foundation.

We brought the right people together, including shelter agencies, community organizations, and grassroots outreach teams, that are highly skilled and with the passion needed to create a strategy for each of the outcomes.

"The level of collaboration and cooperation amongst funders, community service providers and peer outreach groups showed the power of working together for a common goal," said Sandra Clarkson, Drop-In Centre.

"It was great to learn about how different sectors think about this issue and consider solving it, as well as how the different sectors would leverage their resources and skills to work together to support each other through the process," said Kerrie Green, Emergency Management & Community Safety (CEMA).

"Sometimes we may feel ungrounded when mandates and jurisdictional lines are blurry, but ultimately people showed up to problem-solve collaboratively with a high level of respect and professionalism," said Brett Whittingham, Community Strategies. "People went well above and beyond regular duties—there appeared to be a genuine commitment to doing whatever it took to do better together."

The Coordinated Community Winter Response is a tangible example of the power of collaboration between multiple stakeholder groups who came together and worked toward a common goal.

This report outlines the context for the initiative, the activities undertaken, the impacts achieved, and an outline of a desired future state for coordinated outreach services in the City of Calgary.

## Calgary Homeless Serving System of Care (CHSSC)

In Calgary, services and supports for people at risk of homelessness, who experience homelessness, or have a history of experiencing homelessness are provided via the Homeless Serving System of Care. The Homeless Serving System of Care is comprised of three direct service types: supportive housing, emergency shelters, and street outreach. For over a decade, service providers in these three domains have been working towards increased coordination capacity to provide effective system-wide services and be more responsive to emerging needs in the community. Supportive housing with recovery supports is a thoroughly integrated system, which utilizes access to shared data, collective learning, collaborative planning and coordinated operations to provide housing and appropriate recovery supports to over 2000 individuals and families exiting homelessness. Many, though not all, emergency shelters participate in the Homeless Serving System of Care by contributing data to Calgary's By-Name List<sup>1</sup>, but their planning and operations remain bounded at the organizational level. Street outreach efforts in Calgary are at a relatively low level of coordination – data, planning, and operations are coordinated either informally in self-selecting collaboration groups or not at all. All three of these groupings also liaise with public systems<sup>2</sup> and civil society<sup>3</sup> resources to link people to health and community supports.

The Homeless Serving System of Care community of housing, shelter and outreach providers have repeatedly highlighted a need for specialized cold weather response for those who experience the highest degree of isolation from supports and are sleeping outdoors. These calls-to-attention had not translated into calls-to-action in previous years.

In December 2021 City Council directed Administration to implement an emergency response to extreme weather. The City of Calgary allocated \$750,000 and engaged Calgary Homeless Foundation to co-design and manage the delivery of the project. The United Way contributed an additional \$100,000. Calgary Homeless Foundation also leveraged Reaching Home funds.

Three primary streams of activity were identified as immediate goals of the emergency response: (1) leverage street outreach efforts to provide access to basic winter weather essentials, (2) create more warm spaces through existing infrastructure and programs, and (3) support community efforts to reduce barriers to accessing shelters. In parallel, Calgary Homeless Foundation identified an underlying strategic opportunity to build additional coordination capacity for the sector, particularly for the multitude of outreach groups operating in the city.

## How we operationalized the Coordinated Community Winter Response

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<sup>1</sup> A real-time list is the list of all known people experiencing homelessness in Calgary in CHF's Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA)

<sup>2</sup> Public system encompasses government ministries that offer services that relate to health, justice, and child welfare for example.

<sup>3</sup> Civil society comprises **organizations that are not associated with government**

In order to deliver on these three goals in a short timeframe, Calgary Homeless Foundation resourced the project by recruiting a team of 2.0 FTE project leads for a four-month period and leveraged the supports of its internal teams as appropriate. Planned project activities included research and analysis, funding allocation, developmental evaluation, and capacity building. The work of the project is described below and organized by project goals.

### **Goal 1 - Provide access to basic winter weather essentials**

Thirty-one (31) outreach groups, ranging from volunteer-based to organizationally supported organizations, were identified as potential partners in the project. With financial resources in place, the key challenge of ramping up basic needs distribution was due to the urgent nature of timelines combined with the diverse and not-well-understood needs and approaches of the 31 outreach teams. In order to create as responsive and flexible a platform as possible, Calgary Homeless Foundation created four pathways for outreach teams to access supplies to be distributed:

- **Direct access via Calgary Homeless Foundation**  
Any outreach group could request specific supplies from Calgary Homeless Foundation project leads. Project leads would purchase/secure requested supplies and provide them to the group directly.
- **Direct access via the Calgary Drop-In Centre's Basic Needs Distribution Centre**  
Calgary Homeless Foundation partnered with the Calgary Drop-In Centre to amplify resources and leverage their existing depot for direct access by any outreach group.
- **Project funding**  
Registered charity outreach groups could apply for project funding, including basic needs supplies and other program costs including staffing, for up to \$25,000 per project.
- **Purchase reimbursement**  
Any outreach group could, after securing approval, purchase basic needs supplies and submit receipts (up to \$5,000 per initiative) for reimbursement.

### **Goal 2 - Support community efforts to reduce barriers to accessing shelters**

The initially hypothesized barriers to shelter access included shelter-initiated policies or bans, such as:

- Lack of access for those with pets
- Lack of access for couples
- Lack of access for those with bans

Calgary Homeless Foundation project leads undertook research activities, including shelter data, shelter staff and leadership interviews, outreach team engagement, and direct surveys of the

unhoused population. The results showed that these barriers were at play for a very small percentage of the population. More significant barriers were identified such as:

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of desire to access shelter due to perceived safety concerns

The first of these was addressed in partnership with Calgary Transit by dedicating specialized bus routes during extreme weather events.

The second represents an ongoing need for capacity-building at the resource level and relationship-building at the community level. These are longer-term goals which are part of the future state strategy presented in the final section of this report.

### **Goal 3 - Create more warm spaces through existing infrastructure and programs**

Three organizations – The Mustard Seed, The Alex, and Woods Homes – were engaged to provide additional resources as part of the winter response. Each program added some combination of increased opening hours (earlier opening and later closing, and weekend hours) during specified cold weather conditions; however, neither the conditions nor the extended availability were standardized. In addition, Woods Homes warming centre program created transportation options during several of the events.

### **Goal 4 – Build capacity through coordination**

Explicit attention was paid to capacity-building coordination activities, organized along four streams:

1. Engagement and trust-building among outreach groups, in a series of one-on-one conversations and multiple group settings
2. Engagement and practice coordination among warming centres, in a series of community of practice meetings
3. Field-building activities including co-created categorization of outreach groups, support for shared scheduling and data sharing among outreach groups
4. Cross-system integration with shelters, housing providers, and City of Calgary stakeholders.

## **Coordinated Community Winter Response Outcomes**

## By the Numbers

Between December 2021 and March 2022:

- 11,585 interactions provided by outreach teams
- 7,087 visits to warming centres
- 15 outreach teams accessed the Basic Needs Distribution Centre
- 85,695 basic needs items were distributed, including:
  - 12,745 water bottles/juice boxes
  - 10,712 snacks
  - 6,234 pairs of socks
  - 4,144 handwarmers

A summary of outcomes including how funding was allocated can be found in **Appendix 1 and 2**.

## Results of increased collaboration

Increased collaborative capacity across a variety of players was noticeable in multiple instances. When an issue emerged – unrelated to extreme weather but during the winter response months – of a needed clean-up of the large encampment at Dermot Baldwin Way, the winter response team acted as a liaison between City of Calgary, Transit, Calgary Police Service, and community service (shelter and outreach) teams. As a result of the collaboration, the collective response was highly effective with all campers supported to move-off the space with dignity and without any incidents.

Calgary Transit’s “Safety For All” plan was another important element that led to increased collaborative capacity. Non-profit and volunteer-based outreach groups collaborated with Calgary Transit to support people sleeping at transit stations to move them to emergency shelters effectively.

The Homeless Serving System of Care’s supportive housing work also benefited from a more coordinated approach to outreach. The “Rough Sleeper Triage” process, which prioritizes unsheltered individuals for placement in available supportive housing spaces, was able to engage additional information and contact capacity via outreach teams; resulting in significantly increased referral effectiveness compared to the previous year.

## Proposed actions to build on our initial success

Calgary Homeless Foundation sees the need to continue building upon the successes and learnings of the initial project. Continued efforts in the summer months have revealed the potential positive impact of this work year-round. Through a coordinated city-wide response to data collection, outreach, and service provision, we will ensure availability and accessibility of services, supports, and safe spaces for vulnerable Calgarians year-round. Based on the four goals of the Coordinated Community Winter Response, the following section highlights the key objectives that will contribute to a year-round response.

## **Goal 1 - Provide access to basic winter weather essentials**

**Objective:** *A coordinated approach to the deployment of basic needs and services for vulnerable populations in Calgary.*

Coordination across Calgary's Homeless Serving System of Care to deliver winter essentials was critical to the projects' success. Continuing these collaborative efforts will ensure sufficient resources are available and deployed efficiently to provide vulnerable Calgarians with access to essentials year-round.

Key indicators include:

- Services provided are barrier-free and person-centred
- Services provided are responsive, and effectiveness is enhanced
- Financial stewardship and oversight
- Engagement with four levels of government
- Empowerment and integration into the community

## **Goal 2 - Support community efforts to reduce barriers to accessing shelters**

**Objective:** *A transparent and shared understanding of the encampment and living unsheltered situation in Calgary.*

Complimenting previous research activities under the mandate of the Coordinated Community Winter Response, this understanding will inform future direction and community efforts to address encampments and support unsheltered individuals. This includes providing greater direction on actions to reduce barriers to shelter access.

Key indicators:

- Mapping person-centred journey
- Stages of change approach
- Demographics
- Daily quantitative and qualitative insights
- Enhanced data collection and shared understanding.

## **Goal 3 - Create more warm spaces through existing infrastructure and programs**

**Objective:** *Ensure availability and access to warm spaces during extreme cold weather conditions.*

The creation of more warm spaces will continue to be prioritized as we prepare for extreme cold weather conditions during the winter months. This will be achieved through the continuation of engagement and coordination with sector partners and include identifying physical spaces that



could be used as warming centres, extending availability amongst existing warming centres, and providing transportation to shelter during extreme weather conditions.

Key indicators:

- New warming spaces help meet demand for services
- Improved accessibility and increased use of existing warm spaces
- Individuals in need are provided transport to warming centres
- Decrease in weather related injuries, illnesses, and deaths amongst unhoused individuals

#### **Goal 4 - Build capacity through coordination**

**Objective:** *A co-created system-wide response to outreach services is achieved.*

The initial project demonstrated the benefits of coordinated outreach efforts. Working towards a co-created system-wide response will continue to support the four streams of coordination activities associated with this goal. These include engagement and trust-building among outreach groups; engagement and practice coordination among warming centres; and cross-system integration with shelters, housing providers, and the city of Calgary.

Key indicators:

- City-wide standards and guidelines
- Support services agreements for the provision of services
- Evaluation and learning of services
- People with lived experience informing and participating in the response

## **Appendix 1 – Financial Summary**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Mustard Seed Foundation	102 Support Centre Expansion	44,451
Woods Homes	Inglewood Hub Winter Response	66,825
Calgary Drop In Centre	Basic Needs Supply Hub	68,346
Calgary Alpha House Society	Downtown DOAP Winter Response	147,990
Alexandra Community Health Centre	Warming Centre	34,820
Mustard Seed Foundation	Outreach Team Winter Response	22,322
Calgary Drop In Centre	Basic Needs Hub Extension #1	71,238
Calgary Drop In Centre	Basic Needs Hub Extension #2	79,290
Calgary Homeless Foundation	Emergency Basic Needs Cap	13,087
Calgary Homeless Foundation	Outreach Coordinator Contract Payment	21,719
<i>Calgary Homeless Foundation</i>	<i>Allocated to future project and basic needs funding in 2022</i>	<i>279,912</i>
		<b>\$850,000</b>

# Appendix 2 – Coordinated Community Winter Response Infographic Summary

## Need #1: Provide access to basic winter weather essentials

### 10 Most Requested Items:

1. **10,712** Snacks
2. **7,610** Latex Gloves
3. **6,545** Juice Boxes
4. **6,234** Pairs of Socks
5. **6,200** Bottled Waters
6. **4,144** Hand Warmers
7. **3,956** Underwear
8. **3,690** Masks
9. **3,130** Toques
10. **2,961** Band-Aids

More than **85,000** items distributed in 12 weeks by 12 outreach teams.

*Numbers reflect total items requested by Outreach Teams.*

January 12 - March 31, 2022  
**Outreach Basic Needs Distribution Centre Opened at the DI**

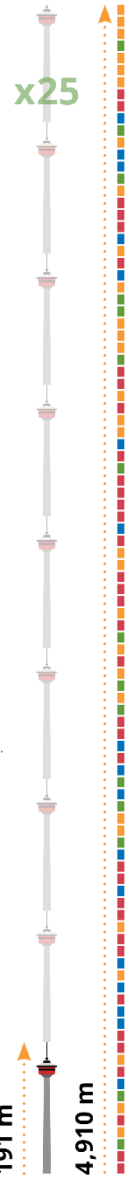
Provided immediate support to Outreach Teams distributing essential goods to help people cope. Since opening, close to **\$400K** has been spent purchasing items.



**10,712** is a lot of snacks! Even if they were small snacks, like Timbits, their combined weight would be **267 kg (589 lbs)!**

**6,200 bottles is 31,000 litres**

About as much water as you would need to fill **275** bathtubs.



## Need #2: Support community efforts to reduce barriers to accessing shelters



**Expanded hours of operation** increased services, including **increasing capacity** and **expanding outreach capacity** to find and refer individuals to appropriate community resources.

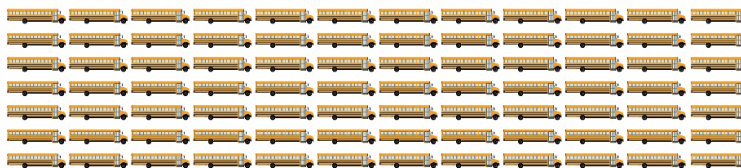


Calgary Transit ran **111** Transit Shuttle Transports, with a total of **510** interactions.

**DOAP Team** (transports) assisted vulnerable Calgarians across the city, providing resources and amenities to support their wellbeing. **The team transported 3,965 people.**

**Moving 3,965 adults**

at the same time would require **84 school buses.**

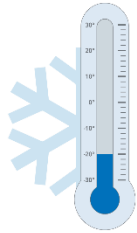


**2,148 blankets**

were distributed. Stacked end-to-end, they would reach **25.7 times higher than the Calgary Tower!**

## Need #3: Create more warm spaces through existing infrastructure and programs

**5 warming centres** were added.

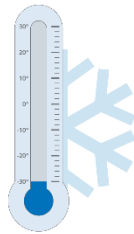


**18 nights below -20°C**

At -20°C with a bit of wind, **frostbite is possible within 30 minutes.**

**2 nights below -30°C**

At -30°C and colder, exposed **skin can freeze in under 10 minutes.**

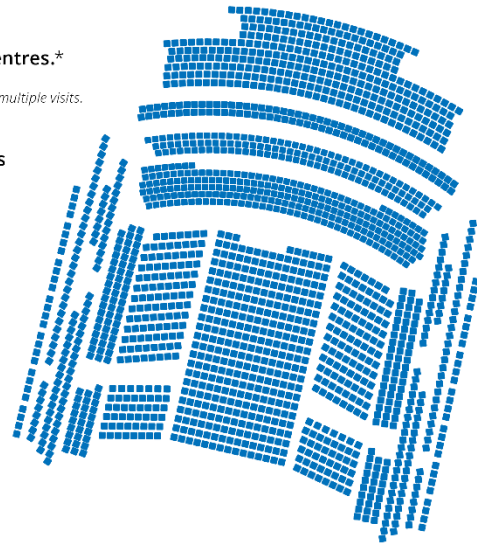


**7,087 total visits**

between the five warming centres.\*

\*Not a unique number—individuals made multiple visits.

**7,087** is more than four times the seating capacity of the Jack Singer Concert Hall!



## Four Additional Outcomes



1. The first **Community of Learning** session was held on Jan. 27, 2022, between the warming centres to discuss learnings, understand emerging needs and trends, opportunities for improvement or adjust the response accordingly. Collaborative conversations are ongoing.
2. An in-depth understanding of **supply requirements for outreach teams** utilizing the distribution centre.
3. Ongoing coordination with outreach groups, including the development of **coordinated data tracking** to understand the emerging needs and ongoing successes.
4. Responding to **new partnership opportunities** outside of the traditional homeless-serving system of care (i.e., faith communities and donation centres).



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