



# VitalConversation



Abbotsford Community Development Council

The Abbotsford Community Development Council (ACDC) is comprised of senior representatives from the following organizations:

- Abbotsford Community Services, Abbotsford Community Foundation, Abbotsford Police Dept., Abbotsford School District, City of Abbotsford, Fraser Health, Mennonite Central Committee, Ministry of Children and Family Development, United Way of the Fraser Valley, and University of the Fraser Valley.



## HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness has been a systemic Canadian problem since the 1980s, intensified by economic and policy changes which widened the gap between the rich and poor. During the 1980s federal government policy shifted toward a focus on home ownership, with less emphasis on social housing investment, resulting in an increase in the number of Canadians without housing. Two other factors contributing to the increase in homelessness are deinstitutionalization of mental health care and the prevalence of 'drug culture'.

Factors contributing to homelessness include systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable/appropriate housing, financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, nor do they become homeless overnight. Instead it is the result of a constellation of risk factors that, when combined, may lead to homelessness.

### THE STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN ABBOTSFORD:

- The 2017 point-in-time count conducted March 8, 2017, surveyed 274 individuals who live homeless in Abbotsford compared to 151 in 2014.
- During the night of March 7/8, 2017, 133 people stayed overnight in the Abbotsford shelter system.
- Men constitute 63% and women 36% of people who live homeless.
- Persons between 30 and 60 years of age constitutes 60% of people who live homeless.
- 52% of individuals surveyed in 2017 have lived in Abbotsford for 11 years or longer.
- Of the persons interviewed 74% reported living with addiction to substance use, 51% reported having mental illness and 33% live with a physical disability.
- Youth homelessness (age 15-19) constitute 15% of Abbotsford's homeless population.

### Housing Market:

**Abbotsford population (2015)**  
• 143,000 total residents  
• 46,450 total households

**Abbotsford homeowners**  
• 34,850 homeowner households  
• 11,870 renter households

### Income

- Overall Household Income: \$77,409
- Average Renter Household Income: \$49,661
- Average Rent: \$866
- Average Secondary Suites Rent: \$1,058

### Vacancy Rate

- Fall 2014: 3.1%
- Fall 2016: 0.5%

Sources: National Housing Survey, Canada Census; CMHC Market Rental Report



### Abbotsford Rental Housing – Compared

	October 2014	October 2016	Difference
<b>Rates</b>			
1 Bedroom	\$684	\$744	
2 Bedroom	\$835	\$909	
3 Bedroom	\$958	\$1,254	
Average total	\$758	\$837	\$80
<b>Vacancy</b>			
Units Available	3,1%	0.5%	-2.6%
	3,625	3,982	357

Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report for Abbotsford  
\*This is a market survey and may not account for all market factors. Reports of rents often being higher than what is recorded in this data set.

### Based on Vital Conversations, ACDC Recommends:

- Create an anytime drop-in centre that has a bathroom (including a shower).
- Increase the range of facilities including consumption safe injection site, detox beds in Abbotsford (with beds and low barrier), OAT (Opioid Antagonist Therapy).
- Advocate for the development of a provincial poverty reduction strategy', (e.g., include advocating for youth aging out of care programming, create drop in and shelter space, as poverty reduction strategies).
- Advocate for an increase in shelter assistance rates.
- Advocate for sustainable projects and fewer pilot projects.
- Continue efforts to be a Designate Community for Service Canada.
- Continue to track numbers (i.e. homelessness count).

1 The Vital Conversation was held in May 2017, prior to the BC Government announcing that they will launch a poverty reduction strategy. It will therefore be important to link to any provincial table that is working on poverty reduction.

## POVERTY

A very complex social issue, the burden of poverty creates further conditions such as high stress, racism, classism, addiction, depression and other factors which sometimes make it difficult to do what is required to climb out of poverty. Many poor people are born into poor families, communities and environments. Some may become poor over the course of their lives.

In the past twenty years the wealth gap between the rich and poor has been growing in Canada, due to structural issues within our society that are not the fault of the individual.

Poverty creates inequality within a society, realized as negative impacts on physical and mental health, educational outcomes, community and social life, crime rates, the health and wellbeing of children, drug abuse, and others.

In understanding poverty, it is essential to be aware that it touches many populations in our society. While no one is immune, the majority of poverty is concentrated within the populations of: aboriginals, people with disabilities, recent immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers, LGBTQ2 individuals, single parent households and the elderly.

### FAST FACTS

- 39% of individuals accessing Abbotsford Community Services Food Bank are children, and 1 in 5 children in BC are living in poverty – that's over 170,000 children, enough to fill Roger's Arena over nine times.
- Almost one in five children in Abbotsford (19%) live in poverty.
- There are over 5,000 working poor individuals in Abbotsford.
- BC is one of the wealthiest provinces in the country, however, it's estimated that, 13.2% of the population live in poverty.
- With one of the highest rates of poverty in Canada, BC remains the only province without a poverty reduction strategy.
- The BC Poverty Coalition estimates that the investment in a poverty reduction plan would be \$3-4 billion dollars, while the cost of doing nothing is \$8-9 billion. \*

### Based on Vital Conversations, ACDC Recommends:

- Increase the availability of affordable housing.
- Increase the types of housing (subsidized, incentivized, integrated and supportive).
- Create and support a range of food security programs for all people (e.g. working with local farmers, school food programs, community gardens, green roofs).
- Improve access to employment services and increase skills training programs.
- Identify and create holistic services that tackle the root causes of poverty.
- Advocate for guaranteed basic income and other forms of poverty reduction policies and programs.
- Identify relevant poverty reduction strategies for the Fraser Valley.



Members focus on the impact of larger social, cultural, political and economic forces in our society. Its objectives include undertaking research on social trends, needs and issues; providing policy analysis and research-based proposals to public policy-makers at the local, provincial and federal levels and promoting community awareness and education on social issues.

ACDC recognizes there is a fentanyl crisis in Abbotsford and a significant problem with gang violence. It chose to identify and research four key issue areas contributing to these and other social problems: Homelessness, Poverty, Diversity and Parenting.

## DIVERSITY

Diversity refers to human identity by race, ethnicity, gender/gender identity, socio-economic status, nationality, citizenship, religion, sexual orientation, ability and age. It also includes the unseen dimensions of identity such as beliefs, ideologies, value systems, world-views, traditional knowledge and lifestyles, and personal interests.

### Geography

Abbotsford is located on the traditional, unceded, ancestral territory of the Sto:Lo People. It is important to recognize that all non-First Nation residents of Abbotsford, are immigrants. Efforts in building relationships with First Nations youth, leaders and communities are a crucial aspect of diversity, and recognizing the legacies of colonization in Abbotsford.

### Cultural and Racial Tension

The two largest ethnic groups in Abbotsford, Anglo-European and South Asian, often experience a socio-cultural and geographical rift, a result of historical settlement patterns that have been augmented by ethnically segregated commerce hubs, neighbourhoods and school demographics. These patterns lead to a broader separation among visible minority and white communities, which contributes to misunderstandings and generalizations, and often strengthens commonplace stereotypes.

### Racism, Youth & Crime

Gang violence among youth is an increasing issue for Abbotsford, and is often linked to race. Community outreach and prevention strategies attempt to bridge these gaps through relationship building and community support. The critical examination of root causes, including poverty, racism and isolation are crucial for devising long-term service initiatives and prevention plans.

### Gender, Sexuality and Women

The issue of domestic and sexualized violence against women affects all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, however, minority women are at greater risk when available supports are not culturally appropriate. Service providers should devise supports that consider the additional fears that immigrant, non-English speaking, non-white women face in domestic abuse, such as isolation from her community and family if abuse is reported.

Resources and supports for LGBTQ residents have increased, but there is still discrimination, harassment and disregard within the community at large. Much more structural support is needed across all districts, schools and neighbourhoods.

### FAST FACTS

- Population of Abbotsford is approximately 143,000 residents.
- Abbotsford is BC's fifth largest and fastest growing city.
- Over one-quarter of residents are recent immigrants largely from Asia, Africa and South America.
- Abbotsford is the third most ethnically diverse city in Canada.
- Over 30% of residents have a mother tongue that is not English or French.



### Based on Vital Conversations, ACDC Recommends:

- Create a cross-cultural and diversity education program to be implemented in various sectors (e.g. School District, Health, Social Services, Non-Profit).
- Create more safe places for the LGBTQ+ community.
- Advocate for more businesses to offer multi-lingual services across Abbotsford.
- Improve access to recreation centres and programs for individuals with disabilities (physical and developmental).
- Provide up-to-date and LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual education in Abbotsford School District.
- Increase involvement and participation of diverse populations in community events.
- Encourage organizations to hire diversity educators and make diversity training a priority.
- Centralize community information on diversity into one place (e.g a website).
- Create opportunities for more inter-faith connection.
- Advocate for a Council (City of Abbotsford) statement on Diversity.

## PARENTING

Parenting challenges in Abbotsford include physical and mental health (parent and/or child), lack of food security, affordable child care and adequate housing for low income and poverty stricken families. Immigrants face additional challenges including language barriers, and cultural differences.

### Child Care

Affordable child care crosses all cultures and social-economic lines. Two earners barely bring home today what one breadwinner did in the 1970s, necessitating a transition from typical 40 hour work weeks in some households, closer to 80 hours. The result in many cases are exhausted parents and children living in unstable environments.

### FAST FACTS

- The City of Abbotsford is one of the youngest communities in the Lower Mainland. According to the 2011 Census, 26% of the population is under 19 years of age. More than 37,000 families live in the community representing 79% of the total population. Approximately 17% of children under the age of 18 are considered low-income.
- In Abbotsford, Aboriginal children aged 14 and under, represented 30.4% of the total Aboriginal population and 5.4% of all children in Abbotsford. Non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under accounted for 19.0% of the non-Aboriginal population. (2011 Census)



### Based on Vital Conversations, ACDC Recommends:

- Develop a current, comprehensive inventory of children's and youth programs (e.g. 0-6, 6-12, 12-18), and identify gaps.
- Create opportunities for parents to be aware of what professional services and resources exist.
- Create cultural training programs that relate to family dynamics.
- Increase and promote services for parents that can be accessed outside of regular business hours or for those who have mobility issues.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of mental health supports for all family members.
- Create a mentorship program for parents (e.g. for all cultural groups, for parents of children and youth).

## Some Common Recommendations and Themes

During the Vital Conversation (May, 2017) many themes were repeated by different groups as were some of the recommendations. The list below suggests some of the recommendations across topics.

- Increase community collaboration and the intentional coordination of organizations.
- Increasing assistance rates (e.g. shelter rates, persons with disabilities, income assistance).
- Increase prevention and upstream services (e.g. mental health, addictions, health services, wrap around services, services for youth)
- Creation of one website that promotes and links all the services available in Abbotsford.

ACDC will work with community and governmental organizations to discuss these recommendations, going forward.