

DIGNITY OVER DISPLACEMENT

ADOPTING A HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE RISE OF ENCAMPMENTS IN SASKATOON

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OVERVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS IN SASKATOON

There were 1,499 individuals experiencing homelessness in 2024 – this is nearly **3x** the number recorded in 2022, and it is only increasing.¹

What are the primary reasons people in Saskatoon are homeless?

- Eviction (55.1%)
- Insufficient Income (32.8%)
- Substance abuse (19.6%)²



Many unhoused individuals in Saskatoon are choosing to live in encampments

There was a 145% increase in the number of encampments in Saskatoon from 2022 to 2024.³

What are encampments?

Encampments are informal settlements on public property or privately owned land that are established by those experiencing homelessness in an attempt to meet their basic needs for shelter and safety.⁴

How is the city of Saskatoon currently addressing the rise of encampments?

- The Saskatoon Fire Department leads the response, working in unison with Saskatoon Police Services
- Their perspective: the development of large encampments can contribute to significant safety concerns
- Make contact and clear the area within 48 hours and direct residents to alternative service options⁵

To properly address and understand the rise of encampments across Saskatoon, the city must take a human rights-based approach to housing.

EVERYONE HAS A 'RIGHT TO HOUSING'

International human rights law recognizes that everyone has a right to access safe, adequate, and secure housing.⁶

The National Housing Strategy Act, 2019:
4 It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to (a) recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law;

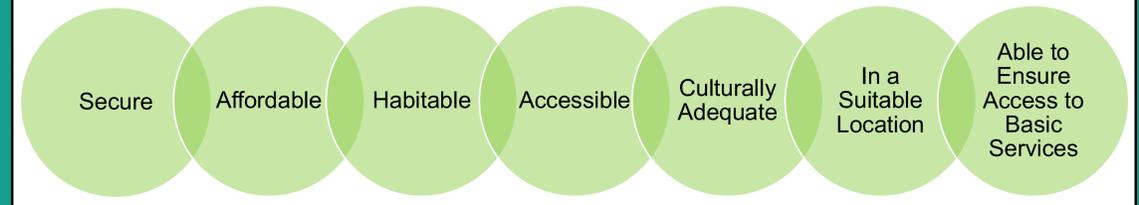


What is a human right-approach to housing?

Individuals experiencing homelessness and living in encampments must be viewed as holders of human rights entitled by law to have their right to housing realized in full.⁷

WHAT IS ADEQUATE HOUSING?

Adequate housing is housing that is:



Encampments do not meet the definition of adequate housing – therefore, it is necessary to find a solution that transitions encampment residents into adequate housing.⁸

CHARTER RIGHTS & THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

Despite having a “right to housing”, the Charter does not impose a positive obligation on the government to provide a certain level of assistance to individuals experiencing housing insecurity.⁹

Charter success & the right to housing

Section 7 of the *Charter* has been successfully relied on in other Canadian jurisdictions to establish a constitutional right to shelter in public spaces when the number of homeless individuals exceeds the availability of adequate shelter spaces.¹⁰

Availability in shelters is not simply a matter of counting available spaces

“To be of any real value to the homeless population, the space must meet their diverse needs... If the available spaces are impractical for homeless individuals, either because the shelters do not accommodate couples, are unable to provide required services, impose rules that cannot be followed due to addictions, or cannot accommodate mental or physical disability, they are not low barrier and accessible to the individuals they are meant to serve.”¹¹

Current Saskatoon bylaws prohibit sleeping outside between 9pm and 6am and erecting a temporary shelter in parks and public squares. This particularly impacts unhoused individuals living in public spaces.¹²

WHAT ARE REGULATED ENCAMPMENT SITES?

Regulated encampments are designated sites across the city where residents can lawfully camp outside. These sites can be equipped with portable toilets, garbage pick-up, storage options, bottled water, etc.¹³ The goal of these sites is to provide a short-term solution, which will no longer be necessary once the city has increased affordable, adequate housing options available.

| CREATE REGULATED ENCAMPMENT SITES | vs | CLEAR EXISTING ENCAMPMENTS |
|--|----|--|
| Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of where encampments are located & increased safety • Encourages autonomy and invites collaboration • Decriminalizes homelessness Disadvantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encampments do not meet the definition of adequate housing • Saskatoon winter weather conditions • Neighbourhood concerns | | Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses fire safety and criminal activity concerns • Points people to other services that can assist them Disadvantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not lead to safer conditions • Takes away autonomy • Uses significant resources |



RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed recommendations are intended to build on the work currently being done to reduce homelessness in Saskatoon:

- Five-year affordable housing strategy “*HOUSING Saskatoon*” set to be unveiled from 2025-2030
- The focus of this plan is to increase the supply of affordable housing. The implementation of any recommendation must include intentional engagement and consultation with encampment residents.¹⁴

Short-Term Recommendations

Goal: Provide immediate assistance to those living in encampments

- 1. Adopt a regulated encampment system**
 - While encampments do not meet the definition of “adequate housing”, they provide individuals autonomy to choose where they live
 - Can be located near warming centres and residents can be provided with more weather resistant forms of shelter, safe sources of heat, fire extinguishers, and fire safety training
 - Sites can be staffed/regulated to assist with neighbourhood safety
 - Education to public on city’s homelessness strategy
- 2. Create a policy for police approaches to encampments**
 - Reduce police involvement to criminal conduct
 - Sets clear expectations for residents about who is allowed in encampments and who will be dealing with what issues
- 3. Change bylaws that criminalize homelessness**
 - Remove restrictions on sleeping in parks/erecting shelter
- 4. Prohibit forced evictions of encampments on public property**
 - Encampment residents must be adequately consulted before being relocated
 - Governments must explore all alternatives to eviction¹⁵

Long-Term Recommendations

Goal: Provide immediate action towards developing long-term housing options and assist in combatting the avenues that lead to homelessness

- 1. Continue to establish affordable housing**
 - Look at other strategies beyond *HOUSING Saskatoon* to develop adequate housing options
- 2. Change public posting of eviction decisions**
 - Landlords are using eviction decisions as a “screening tool”
 - No longer have these decisions posted publicly or make them anonymous
- 3. Fund & support dedicated “enter the workforce” programs**
 - Assist as many people as possible enter or re-enter the workforce

REFERENCES

Scan the QR code below for sources.

