

Investigating Shelter (In)Justice in Peterborough

Survey results: Housing and homelessness
priorities according to local sector
professionals

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January 2023



Introduction

The Research for Social Change Lab at Trent University is currently conducting a review of Peterborough's homelessness system. We're engaging people with lived experience, frontline workers, system managers, and other stakeholders in frank and inclusive discussions to identify what's working, what's not, and what can be improved.

As part of our project, we interviewed over 30 professionals working in Peterborough's housing and homelessness sector in late 2022 and early 2023.

In order to widen our sample and encourage the participation of more frontline housing staff in particular, we also conducted an online survey in December 2022. The survey's goal was simple: to ask sector professionals what they thought were the most pressing priorities when it comes to addressing homelessness locally.

The survey was available from Dec. 8 to Dec. 21, 2022. Along with a request to share among others working in or with this sector, the survey was distributed to the following:

- Interview participants and contacts
- CAB (Community Advisory Board)
- PFAN (Peterborough Food Action Network)
- PDS (Peterborough Drug Strategy)
- BBD (Building Back Differently research group)
- United Way members
- and among the Research for Social Change Lab team and the team's own networks

The criteria for participation was:

- a current or recent former employee of an agency or organization in the Peterborough area that works with homeless or housing-insecure people or the housing and homelessness system
- over 18 years old

We understand that this criteria may have excluded the expertise of many who work in the housing sector on an unpaid basis. However, we sought the input of those with more formal ties to this sector.

The survey asked participants to identify their role in the sector, whether they had current or previous need for housing services, and the actions they believe need to be taken to address local homelessness.



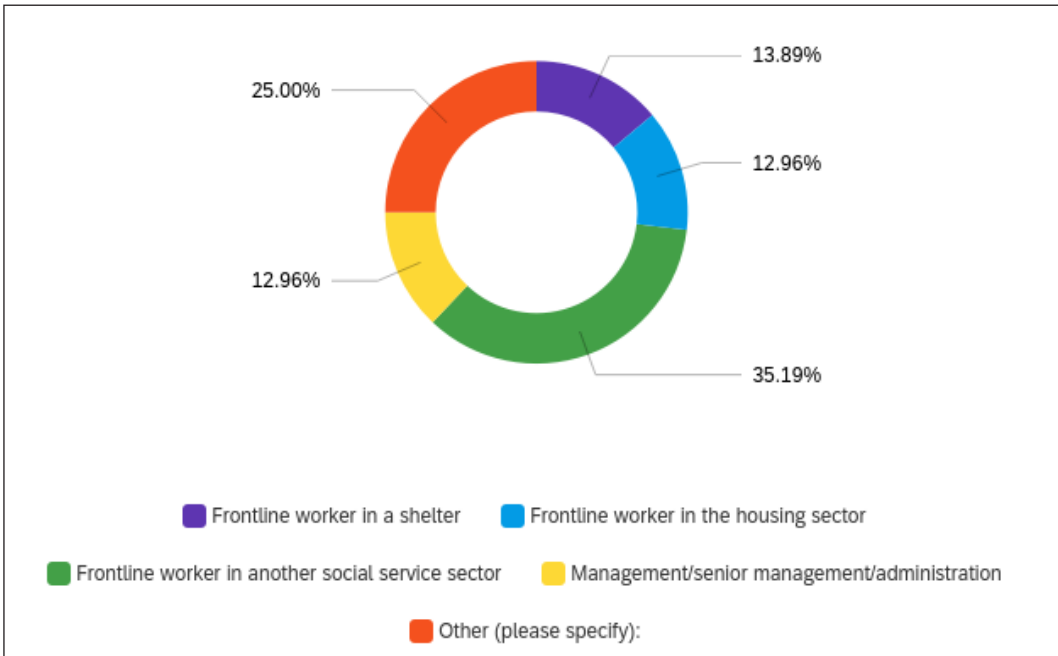
The Respondents

Overall, 115 responses were recorded. Of these, 110 respondents agreed to the consent-related questions and met the inclusion criteria.

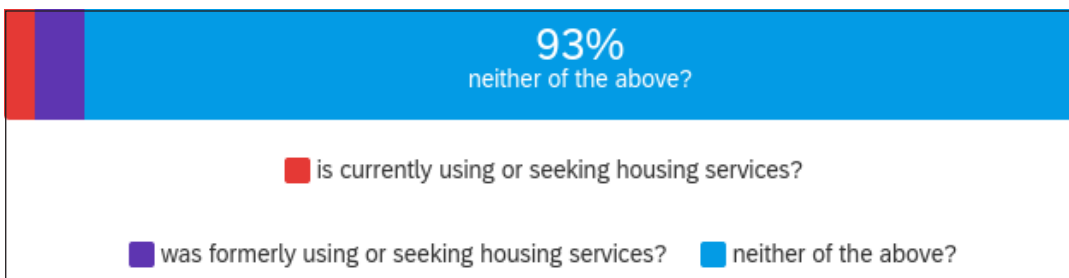
Of the 108 respondents who shared their role, the largest proportion were frontline workers who defined themselves as from a social service sector other than housing or as Other (including multiple respondents each from the health sector, social service sector, harm reduction, policy, students, or multiple roles).

The vast majority of respondents (100 of 108) answered that they did not currently or formerly seek or use housing services. Only 5 were formerly and 3 were currently seeking or using housing services.

Select the option that best defines your role in Peterborough City or County:



Do you identify as someone who:



Results: Top housing and homelessness priorities among sector professionals in Peterborough

The substantive survey question asked respondents to select 5 of 30 options for addressing local homelessness. We asked:

We understand that homelessness is a complex problem requiring complex, multi-pronged solutions. The following list has been compiled from our conversations with people working in the housing and homelessness system. We ask you to do your best to select the top 5 actions that you believe must be taken in order to address local homelessness. Feel free to add additional options in the Other box. You will have an opportunity later in the survey to clarify or elaborate on your choices.

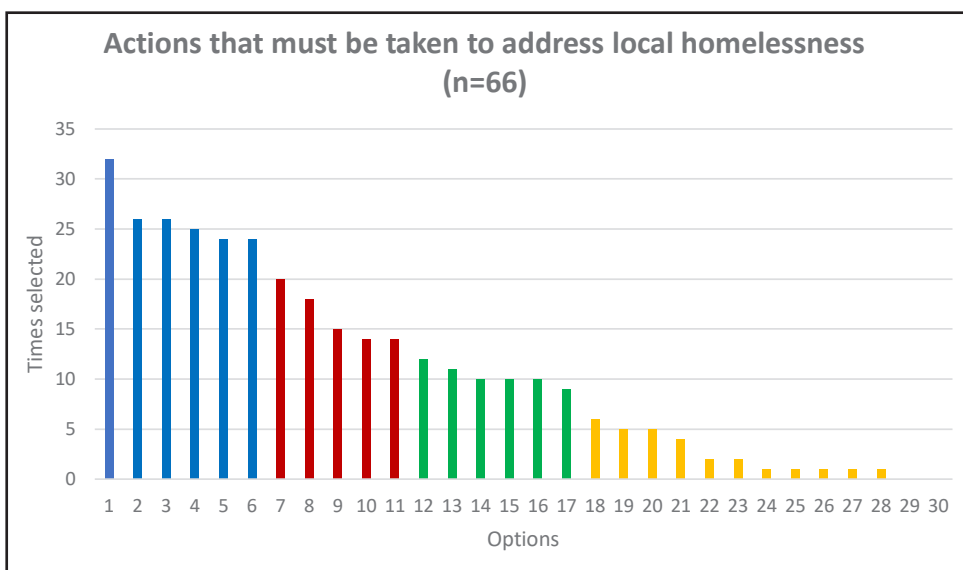
Overall, 98 respondents completed this question. However, it would seem that respondents found it challenging to restrict their choices to only five. The following analysis is based only on the 66 responses from those who chose no more than the requested 5 options (65 chose 5 and 1 chose 4).

Highest-priority actions to address homelessness

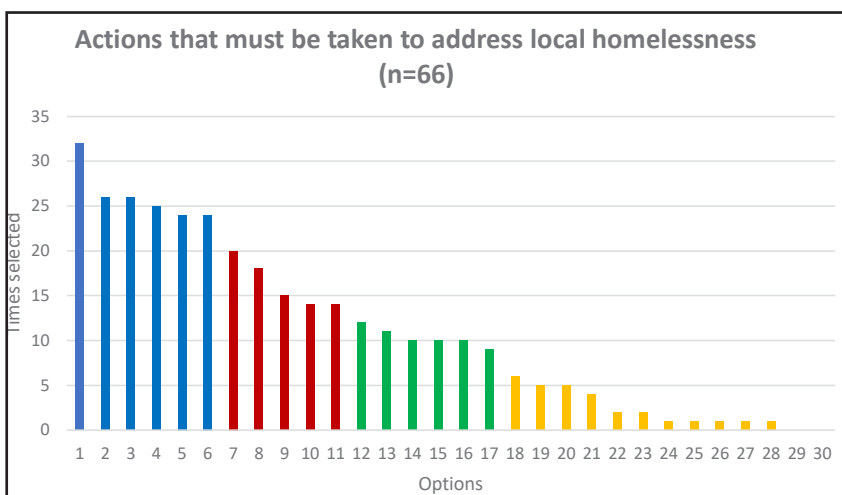
(Based on 66 responses from professionals working in Peterborough's housing, homelessness and adjacent sectors)

1. More RGI units or rent supplements/subsidies (32)
2. Advocacy for higher OW and ODSP rates (26)
3. More supportive housing or high-staffed tenement for people with high acuity needs (26)
4. Support for people living in public parks (25)
5. More accommodating shelter spaces for people with various needs (24)
6. Reframing housing as a human right (24)





	Options	Times Selected
1	More rent-geared-to-income units or rent supplements/subsidies	32
2	Advocacy for higher OW and ODSP rates	26
3	More supportive housing or high-staffed tenement for people with high acuity needs (such as physical health, mental health, and addiction related challenges)	26
4	Support for people living in public parks (e.g., permitting tents, dedicating specific outdoor spaces with washrooms and supports; revoking Section 12f of the Parks and Facilities Bylaw, which requires permits for tents in public parks)	25
5	More accommodating shelter spaces for people with various needs (e.g., low-barrier, no-barrier, or for those with partners and pets)	24
6	Reframing housing as a human right	24
7	Better discharge planning and community supports for people leaving corrections facilities, Child Welfare, and hospitals	20
8	Advocacy to the Ontario government for strengthened rent controls and other tenant protections	18
9	Building more housing units generally, including market housing	15
10	More support for tiny house/sleeping cabin projects	14
11	City commitment to finalize a winter housing strategy by a certain date each spring or summer	14
12	More shelter funding (e.g., for new shelters, existing shelters, or the Overflow shelter)	12
13	More supports to prevent housing loss	11
14	Incentives for landlords to house people on low incomes	10



	Options	Times Selected
15	Harm reduction practices at shelters (e.g., amnesty lockers, peer-supervised consumption rooms, provision of harm reduction supplies)	10
16	Changes to shelter ban/restriction processes	10
17	Structures to ensure policy and program direction from people with lived experience of homelessness (e.g., a municipal housing advisory group)	9
18	Permanent safe consumption and safe supply sites in the community	6
19	More indoor spaces for unhoused people to go during the days	5
20	Other (See page 7)	5
21	Training in trauma-informed care for anyone working in or with this system	4
22	Keeping statistics on the number and causes of homeless deaths	2
23	More or stronger networks to increase communication among agencies/institutions	2
24	More transparency around housing statistics from the City, e.g., how long people are housed for	1
25	More research and support for addressing Housing Unit Takeovers (HUTs)	1
26	Training for landlords on working with people with mental health or addiction issues	1
27	More consistency across organizations in using the By Name List	1
28	Mandate for relevant organizations to participate in case conferencing	1
29	More municipal investigation of building standard compliance	0
30	Local residents being more vocal about addressing homelessness	0

Priorities among respondents who selected any number of options

The forgoing analysis excluded respondents who selected more than five options from the list. When all responses were considered (n=98), the following options were also prioritized:

Frontline shelter workers (11): More shelter funding; Advocacy to the Ontario government for strengthened rent controls and other tenant protections; Incentives for landlords to house people on low incomes; Better discharge planning and community supports for people leaving corrections facilities, Child Welfare, and hospitals

Frontline housing sector workers (13): Advocacy to the Ontario government for strengthened rent controls and other tenant protections; Building more housing units

Frontline other social services (35): Better discharge planning and community supports for people leaving corrections facilities, Child Welfare, and hospitals

Management (14): Harm reduction practices at shelters

Other (24): More support for tiny house/sleeping cabin projects

“Other” actions suggested

Of the 98 respondents who selected any number of options, 12 selected “Other” as one of their choices and specified what they meant in an additional field. The following table captures how these respondents described “Other.”

Respondent Type	Description of “Other”
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	Need housing for lgbtq+ folks
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	Housing homeless people is not enough. It’s a bandaid solution at best. As a coordinator of a housing program, I often see people get worse when they are housed. Sometimes it feels like we are putting people into concrete boxes where they continue to self-destruct in isolation. People need purpose and belonging in order to not use drugs and not be in despair, and that is much harder to figure out then putting someone in a building. Personally, I would approach this whole issue very differently, but that would require something the current social service sector is unable and unwilling to do.

Respondent Type	Description of "Other"
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	The most important factors in my opinion are a reframing of housing as a human right, this action comes with the implication that the government would follow with changes to reduce rates of houselessness and improve community supports for individuals living on the street. I have noticed trauma informed care is often misunderstood or under implemented in shelter spaces and even more so in related service sectors, I would like to see regular training offered not only for shelter workers, but also for upper management, emergency services, and related services. The lack of trauma informed perspective leads to individuals interacting with these services feeling unheard and being treated with less compassion and respect, which can worsen their situation and be harmful to wellbeing, I have witness restricts being given where they didn't need to be because the situation was escalated due to a lack of understanding on the part of the worker in previous shelters. Major concerns voiced to me by individuals living on the street include: a lack of community resources such as washrooms and showers, shelters having too many barriers, and housing costs being too high, as well as stigma and a general feeling of being unsupported by the systems are in place. housing being accepted as a human right would hopefully lead to these changes being implemented. I believe that prevention is extremely important, as past research and personal experience has shown that the likelihood of re obtaining housing drastically reduces after the first 6 months. Rent rates in Peterborough have increased to a dangerous amount, making it difficult to maintain housing for many and even harder for those who have already lost their housing, a government implement control on rental rates would greatly reduce this issue. Finally, it is important we listen to people who have lived experience with houselessness and work to understand and implement the strengths and needs they have observed within their communities to improve the housing crisis issue.
Frontline (Other)	significant changes to Air bnb etc which historically would have been rental properties
Frontline (Other)	Just give a shit about people.
Management	More "affordable" housing not market rent housing
Other	Universal Basic Income PLUS advocacy for higher OW/ODSP
Other	Community based support framework for those with highest acuity, to ensure success.
Other	implementation for a living wage geared to community COL.
Other	create Jobs geared to the homeless (ie hire to build tiny homes)
Other	More support for non-profit organizations to own housing
Other	increase supportive housing for frail elderly and keep them in the community and out of inappropriate ltc's

Additional comments from respondents

Our survey ended with an open-ended invitation to respondents to share any additional comments they thought were relevant. Twenty respondents chose to offer an additional comment.

Respondent Type	Additional Comment
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	not everyone “chooses to be homeless. There is a reason for this
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	It was very difficult to choose only 5 - most of the options are important and necessary. I chose based on local context and our current need for immediate action.
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	See “other” in the previous section.
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	More empathetic staff.
Frontline (Housing or Shelter)	People need supportive environments that accept and validate them as a whole. This includes any experience they are having with substances, mental health or trauma. People need to feel safe and validated before they can grow. If we can offer this treatment at every level of care a person receives they will have more motivation for change. Currently rents are too high for even people who are working full time to afford. It is impossible for someone who low income to afford safe secure housing.
Frontline (Other)	As frontline worker, when I encounter someone whose housing is insecure, it seems their options are very limited and most potential solutions involve significant barriers and wait times. No one wants to stay long-term in a shelter and some people don’t want to go at all. Barriers to finding adequate housing in a timely manner (unavailability of RGI housing, cost of rentals, poor quality of rentals, limited access to supported housing, OW and ODSP rates that hardly pay for a room) must be addressed along with supports for those who, inevitably, seek an immediate solution for themselves (camping).
Frontline (Other)	Difficult to pick my top 5 as many of the choices overlap one another. Each city needs to acknowledge that those living in insecure housing, are homeless, or are at risk of homelessness, require more than a one-stop solution (i.e. shelters). Some people are unable to reside in a shelter for multiple reasons, and therefore a layered solution approach is required. In my opinion, these layers start with people who want to camp by themselves and away from others, those that want to camp in a structured area (i.e. with washrooms/social service supports), those willing to live in tiny cabins (with social services supports), and those willing to stay in the shelter system.

Respondent Type	Additional Comment
Frontline (Other)	I geared my answers to be more long-term, big picture priorities that would make the biggest impact. However, many things on the list of suggestions would also make life changing impacts in the community, potentially more quickly. This should also be accounted for, since people are desperate for change NOW. Even just legally allowing tenting in the parks would be life changing for many people.
Frontline (Other)	I honestly don't think that the order in which I put my answers is accurate or relevant. All of the actions I chose desperately need to be done, and they need to be done together.
Frontline (Other)	Professionally I think that Councilors and MP's should put more money into non-profit housing
Management	I choose 5 things that I believe need to happen immediately.
Management	The most success I have seen with housing people with varying needs (addictions, mental health issues, behavioural issues and so on) is providing them with regular supports by paid staff. Without staff support I don't think more money or more housing will be truly successful. I am saying this from experience as I have worked in the field for over 20 years. People experiencing homelessness have complex needs and with that comes difficulties in maintaining housing in a safe manner. I have seen vulnerable people leave their housing due to HUT situations, people living in units full of bedbugs and cockroaches that don't know what to do in an infestation or don't know how to prep their unit to prepare for treatment. Without staff support I have seen units become inhabitable due to hoarding issues. Without staff support many/most vulnerable individuals cannot maintain their units and it leads to eviction over and over again. Individuals
Management	Absolutely need more affordable units being constructed and prioritize homeless clients for social housing units.
Other	Change the current dynamic of handing everything out and offering services, and provide opportunities to earn money to provide for them selves or to have pride in possession of property. more connection to rehabilitation services
Other	I am a PATH volunteer as well and am committed to seeing a permanent tiny home community evolve from the initial transitional sleeping cabin project.
Other	Ranked the way I did because if we have affordable units, discharge planning, and livable shelter conditions there would be less of a need for people to camp.
Other	There needs to be more of everything that was listed as an option, but it needs the support in order to ensure that things get done. There should be no one unhoused and my answers are to reflect that as a value and standard. All options in the first question are needed though.
Other	Ultimately the increase in homelessness is driven by the lack of affordable housing. People who work full time jobs are barely making ends meet as it is.

Respondent Type	Additional Comment
Other	all of the suggestions made are important/relevant; difficult to narrow it down to 6
Other	reverse the Province's latest policies re moving people from hospital to LTCs that are out of their community. Stop Bill 23 that will allow more urban sprawl while not increasing affordable housing in communities.

Conclusion

The Research for Social Change Lab would like to thank all the respondents who took the time to fill out this survey. Your experiential knowledge of Peterborough's housing and homelessness systems is invaluable.

Having completed our data collection for this project, our next step is to analyze the interviews we conducted with sector professionals and consider them in conjunction with these survey results.

The research team will then open community conversations to check its perspectives on the local housing and homelessness system. What is working well? What is not working well? What are the priorities of those who understand the system best? And what are the soundest actions we could take to advance a housing and homelessness response that is more effective in meeting the needs of local residents who need it?

Throughout this process, we've been struck by the strong commitment shared by people working in the housing and homelessness sector to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. We look forward to continuing our community consultations.



The Research for Social Change Lab is a community-engaged research collective in pursuit of justice and equity in Nogojiwanong/Peterborough.



This report and the research it draws on is supported in part by Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy and United Way Peterborough & District.