Six Local Priorities for Thunder Bay Community Safety & Well-Being Plan

The following six local priorities have been identified through Phase 1 Community Engagement and a local data review. These priorities will form the basis of the Thunder Bay Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

1. Racism and discrimination

We heard numerous accounts, concerns and impacts of racism and discrimination from participants during our consultations process, as well as calls to address systemic racism. Racism and discrimination create inequities in systems that underlie many of the community challenges we see today, including significant health disparities and community violence. Identifying this as a priority issue will help to address a range of other issues in our community. This priority area will also include justice-related issues, including the over-representation of Indigenous people and other marginalized groups in the criminal justice system.

2. Housing

Housing was identified as a top priority in the consultation process and community level data. Thunder Bay has a large homeless population, which is disproportionately represented by individuals who experience racism, discrimination and health inequity. Our emergency shelter system is often over capacity and there is a shortage of safe and affordable housing, including much needed transitional and other supportive housing options. We need to recognise the important work underway in this area and look for opportunities to support and enhance this work, and fill gaps.

3. Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being was identified as a key concern during the consultations, across all groups and demographics. Themes emerged around the need for increased awareness of available programs and services, increased supports and services at all stages along the continuum of care/services, including detox and treatment capacity and options, counselling and harm reduction support, and social supports. This priority area includes mental health, substance misuse, stigma and social isolation. Alcohol and its impacts, including public intoxication, were also identified as keys challenges, and local health data supports this. The prevalence of opioid use and poisonings in Thunder are included in this priority area.

4. Poverty Reduction and Financial Empowerment
Poverty was identified as a critical barrier to safety and well-being during community consultations. Related issues include homelessness, mental health, discrimination, unemployment, food insecurity, and challenges meeting basic needs and other social determinants of health. Financial empowerment creates opportunities to improve outcomes for people living on low-incomes. Addressing this priority challenge will help address other aspects of community safety and well-being.

5. Community violence with a focus on gender-based violence
Addressing community violence was identified as top priority in the consultation as well as the community level data analysis. Guns and gangs, human trafficking, home takeovers and hate crime were also identified as significant concerns in the consultation data. Thunder Bay consistently has one of the highest (and often the highest) rates of violent crime and domestic violence in the country. People are fearful. A stronger focus on addressing violence will increase safety and well-being, and also help people feel safer.

6. Supports for Children, Youth and Families
More opportunities for children and youth, and to strengthen families was identified as a top priority in the consultation data. A stronger focus here could include more upstream approaches to support children, youth and families, efforts to mitigate the impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and help build resilience to improve outcomes across the lifespan. A focus here could include becoming a trauma and violence-informed community.

NOTE: COVID-19 has disproportionately affected individuals who were already excluded or marginalized by systemic racism and structural inequities. The pandemic has highlighted the gaps in healthcare and other systems, and exposed these inequities that continue to exclude or marginalize certain individuals and groups. We will need to use a lens of intersectionality to analyze and address the impacts of the COVID-19 in our community.