Environmental justice and wildfire evacuations: the case for nonprofit collaboration among homeless-serving organizations in Yellowknife, NWT

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Table of Contents

Executive summary

In August 2023, a nearby wildfire forced the city of Yellowknife to evacuate as it posed a threat to community safety and infrastructure. This operation was complicated by the housing crisis, with local service providers asked to perform the important task of evacuating people experiencing homelessness, with little planning, support, or resources. Policy makers perceive the evacuation as a success due to the fact that there was no loss of life or structure from the fire. However, service providers dispute this 'success', citing challenges like service users being lost in the system, host communities lacking support for vulnerable people, and difficulty returning to Yellowknife post-evacuation. It is clear that there were failures in the system, largely attributed to policies that have caused chronic homelessness, and government planning that does not account for the vulnerable. To a lesser degree, the problems were made more difficult by the vacancy in the position of City's Homelessness Specialist leading up to and during the evacuation, and the siloing of services. This report aims to explore the connection between homelessness and evacuations, critically exploring the challenge of collaboration and coordination among service providers. Although the City of Yellowknife largely lacks jurisdictional responsibility for the evacuation, the recommendations and accompanying examples explore how changes to current programs could better support collaboration among service providers.

Important context

Over 312 people are experiencing homelessness

Canada is currently confronted by a housing crisis due to the financialization of housing (August, 2022), insufficient housing stock (Whitzman, 2023), and reduction of government support for public housing programs (Dart, 2023). This is exacerbated in northern and remote locations like Yellowknife where there are limited rental opportunities (Freeman & Christensen, 2021), high construction costs (Falvo, 2023), and the Yellowknife's service hub character (City of Yellowknife, 2021) The city's most recent Point in Time (PIT) count, now outdated, found 312

individuals experiencing homelessness, with 50% considered chronically homeless and 91% citing Indigenous heritage (City of Yellowknife, 2021). It is clear that homelessness is an urgent and worsening issue that agencies and all levels of government must work to address.

In the Yellowknife context, all levels of government have a role to play in the governance of homelessness. The federal government sets the tone for housing policy, and after neoliberal policies that pulled back funding to affordable and public housing in the 1990s (Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, 2022), has recently re-invested into housing programs through the National Housing Strategy (NHS) Act, which includes the Reaching Home program (Dart, 2023; Nichols & Martin, 2024). The Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) plays a role in funding[1] and governing homelessness initiatives (Falvo, 2023) and sets priorities for the territory through plans like *A Way Home*, a comprehensive strategy that identifies actions within the Territory's jurisdictional responsibility (GNWT, 2023).

The City of Yellowknife, the recipient of this report, is responsible for administering Reaching Home funding through the Community Advisory Board (CAB) which allocates $2.7 million annually across five priority areas: housing services, prevention, client support, capital investments, and resource allocation (City of Yellowknife, n.d.). The CAB supports five organizations: Salvation Army Centre for Hope, Home Base, Yellowknife Women's Society, YWCA, and Arctic Indigenous Wellness. Due to its intermediary position and financial constraints, the position of municipalities like the City of Yellowknife is challenging (Nichols & Martin, 2023) as it is the closest to the community and yet lacks the resources to address local challenges.

Wildfire risk is increasing

While Canada as a whole is experiencing warming at twice the global average, the Canadian north is warming nearly three times as fast due to arctic amplification (GNWT, 2022). The City of Yellowknife warmed by 2.0ºC between 1958 and 2012, and July 2023 was the equal-warmest month on record, tied with 2012 (Williams, 2023). Indeed, climate change has been linked to an increased wildfire risk as the weather, fuel, and ignition risk increase with our

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[1] The GNWT is the most significant funder of homelessness initiatives in Yellowknife (Falvo, 2023).

warming climate (Climate Atlas of Canada, n.d.). In particular, "the regional movement towards longer, warmer, and drier seasons resulting from global climate change is expected to increase the vulnerability of forested areas to fires" (Kochtubajda et al., 2006). For example, the Northwest Territories had its second-worst wildfire season in 2014 which burned 57% more land than average costing $56.1 million (Hinchey, 2015). The 2023 wildfire was the worst known fire in history, burning vast areas and forcing thousands of people across the territory to evacuate. In light of this mounting challenge, it is critical for Yellowknife to enhance its preparedness and resilience against future wildfires and other climate-related emergencies.

Vulnerable people experience wildfires differently

People experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to wildfires and emergency evacuations due to their lack of access to services like healthcare and banking, lack of resources like income asset reserves and social supports, reduced capacity to cope and recover, and increased exposure to hazards and threats (Wisner, 1998). Environmental justice means that everyone has the right to a healthy environment, fair access to resources, participation in decision-making, and protection from disproportionate harm (Klein & Riemer, 2011). There are three principles of environmental justice: distributional justice examines the fair distribution of costs and benefits; procedural justice is concerned with how inclusive and fair the process is for making decisions about policy; and restorative justice addresses the past or expected harm (Schinko et al., 2023). The unequal harms of wildfires to people experiencing homelessness in conjunction with their intersecting identities (Schinko et al., 2023) make it clear that homelessness is an environmental justice issue.

When planning for the increasing threat of wildfires, it is important to consider justice in prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery (Schinko et al., 2023). Thus, it is critical to understand the evacuation experience for vulnerable people throughout all phases of wildfire planning and response to identify service gaps and improve them.

Research methods

This report, prepared for Mayor Rebecca Alty, was developed in response to the 2023 wildfire evacuations. Although consulting firm KPMG conducted an after-evacuation audit, there were notably pieces that needed further exploration. For example, while the report identified the need for better systems to care for individuals experiencing homelessness, it did not describe this in depth (KPMG, 2024). This research serves to inform and direct the City of Yellowknife on options to better its emergency response.

> Report purpose: to understand the challenges faced by service providers during the 2023 wildfire evacuation, and to propose how the City of Yellowknife can better support the collaboration of service providers and coordination of services, to ensure that critical elements of justice are considered for people experiencing homelessness.

> Site visit:
> - June 24-28, 2024.
> - 12 interviews, countless informal conversations and observations.
> - Key informants: Mayor Rebecca Alty, Dan Ritchie (City of Yellowknife, Homelessness Specialist), Tammy Roberts (Executive Director, Home Base YK), Renee Sanderson (Executive Director, Yellowknife Women's Committee), and Tony Brushett (Executive Director, Salvation Army Centre of Hope), Community Roundtable on Homelessness.

In addition to the site visit, I conducted a literature review to understand best practices in collaboration and coordination of services, engaged with Dan Ritchie for a follow-up conversation, and met with subject expert Dr. Naomi Nichols. While I had considered research ideas before our site visit, my research philosophy is aligned with community-based research methodologies. That is, I believe that communities have a situated knowledge of the problem and also understand the place-based solutions needed to fix it. My hope is that this white paper provides context and tangible ways to achieve these goals.

What happened during the evacuation?

In Yellowknife's 2023 wildfire evacuation, several problems emerged in how people experiencing homelessness were evacuated. We heard from service providers, city staff, and

from the news media about how issues emerged in the emergency planning, the exit from Yellowknife, during the stay in the host community, and in reintroduction. In this section, I will briefly outline how the system largely did not work for people experiencing homelessness.

Even before the mounting threat of wildfires to Yellowknife, the city was grappling with a hazy and smoky summer (Williams, 2023b), which is harmful to human health (Liu et al., 2015). Clean-air shelters that opened in June only operated during the day (Williams, 2023b), leaving unsheltered Yellowknife residents exposed to smoke-filled air in the evenings. As the fires approached Yellowknife, service providers began to worry and did not know if they should be preparing to evacuate. With the City's Homelessness Specialist role vacant[2], agencies were left to hear about the evacuation through public channels like social media, news media, and informal conversations. We heard from service providers that they called for a coordinated evacuation to the same place, but this did not materialize. Instead, the service providers began to individually plan and manage evacuations for their clients which included securing a place to stay and coordinating transportation to the location[3]. A host of evacuation strategies were employed: Home Base sent their youth to Zama City, Yellowknife Women's Society evacuated their high-acuity service users to Fort MacMurray, and the Salvation Army used their network in Calgary to secure shelter space for high-acuity clients. The rest took evacuation flights with the general population to Alberta.

The evacuations that kept service users together with staff saw some success. When reflecting post-evacuation, Tammy Roberts explained that "a lot of youth actually want to go back" due to the comprehensive wraparound care, relationship building, and activities in Zama City. This was echoed by other service providers who were able to stay with their clients. However, clients who evacuated with the general population experienced the evacuation differently, described by Tony Brushett as a disaster. People experiencing homelessness arrived to host communities with little supports. Service users were sometimes hard to track down, lacked online banking and identification, experienced withdrawal, and were often kicked out of evacuation hotels due to drug use and violence. Additionally, the drug supply in the south

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[2] This role was vacant in the six months leading up to the evacuation. In September 2023, Dan Ritchie filled the position.

[3] We heard from service providers that they were asked to charter airplanes for their clients.

differs significantly from Yellowknife, leading to both fatal and nonfatal drug overdoses during the evacuation.

After three weeks, the evacuation was lifted, and the residents were allowed to re-enter the community. However, we heard from service providers that tracking down service users was challenging, causing some individuals to fall through the cracks, with some not returning to Yellowknife for months. Others returned with new drug addictions and trauma from their evacuation experience. Due to a shortage of mental health and addictions practitioners and a general lack of trust in the system, many could not get the support they needed. Service providers also reported that their clients now fear wildfire smoke and future evacuations.

From what we learned in our interviews, there were clearly failures in the system in all phases of the evacuation. Service providers were asked to complete a monumental task with little supports, training, or communication. While there were some successes in each organization, the challenges that they faced led to their service users falling through the cracks and not receiving the care that they need and deserve. The next section will explore how this problem occurred and will focus on the siloing of service organizations as a potential challenge that can be addressed, in part, by the municipality.

What led to challenges in the evacuation?

Several problems were identified with the evacuation of people experiencing homelessness. The next question that emerges is why: why was there no plan? Why weren't service providers receiving advanced communications? Why were service providers working on their own? The problem can be attributed to a host of issues at various scales.
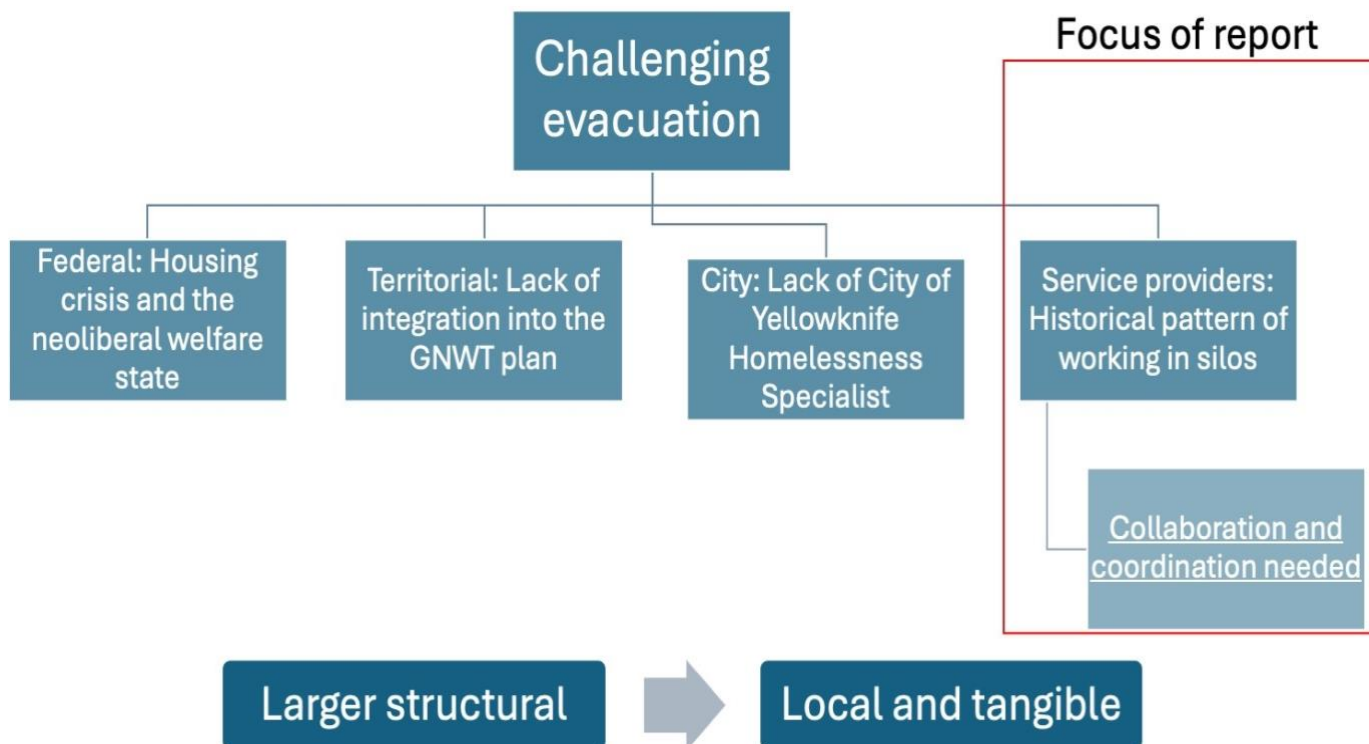

Figure 1. Representation of the factors that led to a challenging evacuation.

The housing crisis and the neoliberal welfare state

As outlined, Canada is currently experiencing a housing and homelessness crisis due to government policies that favour the reduction of public services and the privatization of public goods. A number of failures in public policy have constructed this housing crisis and have downloaded the responsibility of taking care of vulnerable populations to local government and non-governmental organizations. For example, the commodification of housing has allowed for the shift from meeting the basic housing needs of individuals to maximizing financial gain for the wealthiest class leading to a system that allows for chronic homelessness. Simultaneously,

those with the least amount of power are left to take care of vulnerable populations with the limited resources that higher levels of government have allocated to the problem. This leads to tensions as "the government forces us to compete for dollars" (Tony Brushett). It is clear that the system is designed in a way that hinders effective outcomes for vulnerable people, resulting in inadequate care for those who need it.

Lack of integration into the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) plan

We heard from service providers that they did not feel like there was a concrete plan for people experiencing homelessness. As the responsibility for evacuation planning fell on the GNWT, service providers were frustrated as they felt that they had little support from the government. This frustration is well-documented. Yellowknife Women's Society highlighted that they only heard from their Housing GNWT 5 days after they left Yellowknife, asking for support for service users who were evacuated to Calgary (Yellowknife Women's Society, 2023). Similarly, Tony Brushett recounted asking GNWT about the fate of service users upon their arrival to Calgary, to which they responded 'that is not my concern at the moment' (Rosenfield, 2023). Evidently, there was a lack of foresight or consideration in the evacuation of people experiencing homelessness. This led to service providers having to coordinate their own evacuation, including transportation and the evacuation location. However, the lack of a plan meant that many ended up in unfamiliar cities with little support.

Lack of City of Yellowknife Homelessness Specialist

In the six months leading up to the evacuation, the Homelessness Specialist role at the City of Yellowknife was vacant. The role includes distributing and managing the Reaching Home funding, acting as a point person to service providers, and running city programs like street outreach. Current Homelessness Specialist Dan Ritchie highlighted that the absence of someone in this position meant:

1. Operations like the implementation of Coordinated Access and Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) were pushed to the side.

2. There was no one who had significant capacity to advocate to other levels of government to better the housing response.

3. There was no one to liaise with service providers and coordinate their evacuation response.

Historical pattern of working in silos

The issue I will be predominantly addressing is the ways in which service organizations are working independently, and how this might be hindering more comprehensive services. At the Roundtable on Homelessness, we heard statements like "Everyone works in silos", "We work in parallel", and "Lack of collaboration", indicating the emergence of a clear theme. The service providers we spoke to also identified this problem. For Tammy Roberts, the lack of collaboration was actually helpful during the evacuation because she was able to make quick decisions on what was best for her clients. However, the fact that collaboration poses a challenge to operating during an evacuation suggests that there are flaws in the collaborative process. She also highlighted that silos are created because of different population focuses, like gender or age. Renee Sanderson underscored the historical pattern of working in silos and explained that service providers "…do not typically share what [they] are working on with other organizations", and Tony Brushett told us that the problem is grounded in the fact that funding is extremely competitive and that organizations tend to lack trust in others.

At the local scale, the lack of collaboration and coordination appears to be one of the greatest challenges to coordinated service delivery. The solutions emphasize how the City of Yellowknife can better support the city's service providers. While the root of the problem is situated in larger system failures, there are local solutions that will lead to better services and therefore better care for the city's most vulnerable during emergencies.

Solutions

Collaboration and the coordination of services

The non-profit sector is "… notorious for its fragmentation (e.g., lack of coordination between different relevant policies and service systems) and constant resource scarcity, both of which have led to the persistence of ineffective policy solutions and service interventions" (Mosley, 2021, p. 246). Indeed, we heard from service providers in Yellowknife that the system is built in a way that is not conducive with the coordination of services due to funding competition, lack of trust, and different focus areas. However, when faced with the mounting and intersecting housing and climate crises, the silos that have been built between organizations must be re-evaluated.

During the 2023 wildfire evacuation, Yellowknife's service providers faced a difficult task with little support. Post-evacuation evaluations highlight the need for better government planning for vulnerable populations, and service providers have voiced the desire for improved coordination among their organizations. Disappointed with the GNWT's response, service providers expressed a preference for relying on their local networks in a future evacuation. Tammy Roberts told us that she valued the independent work but stressed the importance of maintaining connections with other service providers. Renee Sanderson emphasized the fundamental unity of those in the sector, despite collaboration challenges. Finally, Tony Brushett noted that despite the historical pattern of siloing, "during the evacuation, we became each other's best friend", noting that some of the NGOs disengaged after. This ad hoc collaboration during crisis underscores its potential as a viable solution. From our interviews, it was clear that the service providers have already carved out a community-based solution to one of the challenges that implicated the 2023 evacuation.

Collaboration is a well-established and supported policy trend to improve services for vulnerable people (Mosley, 2021). It promotes more comprehensive solutions, creative responses, and coordinated services (Page et al., 2015), and leads to increased service user satisfaction (Cooper et al., 2016). Collaboration allows organizations to better use the scarce financial resources well and leads to fewer replications in services (Snavely & Tracy, 2000), is

more cost effective (Cooper et al., 2016) and increases sectoral communication and information sharing (Mosley, 2021). Furthermore, collaboration has been shown to lead to increases in government funding to organizations (Gazley & Guo, 2020). It is clear that collaboration is empirically supported and desired by service providers in Yellowknife. The following solutions aim to provide recommendations for the City of Yellowknife to better facilitate collaboration and support service providers in coordinating services, especially in the context of the increased wildfire risk and intensifying housing crisis.

How should the City of Yellowknife address this issue?

Figure 2. City support of service provider collaboration and coordination.

Recommendation 1: Collaborative grant applications

The City of Yellowknife is encouraged to explore collaborative grant applications when managing Reaching Home funding or creating requests for proposals (RFPs) for future grant applications. Collaborative grants aim to support two or more organizations who work together

to design programs that uniquely utilize the expertise of all parties involved (United Way Hastings & Prince Edward, 2019). They can focus on areas like shared service/program collaboration, merging organizations/programs, shared operations (United Way Hastings & Prince Edward, 2019), and building capacity to establish the social infrastructure for collaboratives and partnerships (City of Edmonton, n.d.b; see the City of Calgary's Collaborative Grant Program in *Example 1*.). Collaborative grants are well established in the service sector to address the challenges of fragmentation, and range from one-time investments (for example, a specific prioritization of a yearly grant or a top-up of funding that is allocated to this purpose[4]), or specific granting cycles that are focused on building collaborative capacity and have regular RFPs[5]. Collaborative grant applications are also common in academia with major funding agencies awarding grants to new or existing partnerships that further collaborative research and knowledge mobilization[6].

> ### Example 1. Community Safety and Well-being (CWSB) Collaborative Grant Program (Edmonton, Alberta)
> In 2022, the City of Edmonton approved the CWSB strategy which focuses on issues like homelessness, safety, racism, and social exclusion. In 2023, $1.495 million was allocated to a one-time collaborative grant program which "… aims to enhance existing or establish new collaboratives or partnerships to advance CSWB Strategy goals and outcomes and strengthen the capacity of organizations to work together to improve safety and wellbeing…" (City of Edmonton, n.d.b). The City outlined eligible expenses like staffing, facilitation, training, all of which focused on collaboration and partnerships. Among the recipients, the Youth Emergency Shelter Society of Edmonton (Y.E.S.S) received funding to strategize with five other youth-focused non-profits and implement their co-developed Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness (City of Edmonton, n.d.a).

We heard from service providers that one challenge to collaboration is that grants are competitive, meaning that one organization receiving funding would take away from another. By encouraging collaborative grant applications, service providers could begin dialogues with one another about how to best address the housing crisis more holistically and could work to build

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[4] See City of Edmonton's CWSB Collaborative Grant Program
[5] See United Way Hastings & Prince Edward Collaborative Grant. See also, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) program, a required government program and governance structure that mandates collaborative grant applications (Mosley, 2021).
[6] See SSHRC Partnership Grants.

trust between agencies. Furthermore, it could be protective against service redundancies or duplications. The City of Yellowknife has options on how to execute the collaborative grant application:

1. The Community Advisory Board (CAB) could prioritize the 2025 Reaching Home RFP to collaboration (see recommendation 5 for more information on this).
2. The CAB could introduce a system that *does not require* but rewards agencies that submit collaborative grant applications.
3. The city council could introduce a motion to fund a one-time grant application for collaborative efforts.

Recommendation 2: Intentional networking

Although 'networking' is typically lingo used in the corporate world, intentional structured and unstructured time in dialogue would be helpful for service providers in this context. For example, political networking, that is - interacting with politicians, is beneficial to service agencies for increasing advocacy effectiveness; and community networking, that is - interacting with other organizations, businesses, or faith groups, is effective for organizational effectiveness (Johasen & LeRoux, 2013). It does this by facilitating knowledge sharing and building trust among organizations (Johasen & LeRoux, 2013), two key elements that we heard would be helpful from service providers. In addition, engaging in dialogue about sectoral loneliness, collective grief, and burnout is important in processing the difficult parts of their jobs (see the efforts of the Peterborough Drug Strategy (PDS) and Research for Social Change Lab (RSCL) in *Example 2)*. In the context of emergency preparedness, networking would be helpful for service providers to discuss and share evacuation strategies and in working together to advocate to all levels of government for policies that better support vulnerable people.

> **Example 2. Peterborough Drug Strategy (PDS) & Research for Social Change's (RSCL)**
> **Cross-Sectoral Roadmap for Change (Peterborough, ON)**
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> Over the last 1.5 years, PDS and RSCL have been working together on community-based service planning in Peterborough, ON. Through academic grants and Reaching Home funding, they were able to plan a half-day forum and a two-day symposium for homelessness planning. The events were open to the public, and service providers, municipal staff, academics, members of the public, and people with lived experience (PWLE) attended. At the events, PDS and RSCL planned intentional networking time where attendees were encouraged to meet others. The events were enormously successful and feedback from attendees emphasized the desire for more time to meet others in the sector due to the connections, validation, and sharing of information (Dart et al., 2024). PDS also has organized more informal networking events where they bring partners and allies together at a coffee shop on a Friday with no agenda but echo the fruitful conversations and connections that emerge.

The networking, however, should be organized as a part of the Homelessness Specialist's role (or another municipal staff) or should be facilitated through a grant or external collaborative body. It is very important to note that we heard that service providers are often over capacity in their role due to the increasing housing crisis and lack of resources to hire more staff. In order for this networking to be effective, it cannot be planned 'off the side of a service provider's desk' and should use resources external to that organization.

Recommendation 3: Coalition for policy advocacy

The service organizations and municipal government are encouraged to build an advocacy coalition, that is – "… groups of people, and usually their organizational affiliation who form informal alliances on policy issues" (Weible & Ingold, 2021, p. 175). Nonprofit service organizations have an important role to play in advocacy as they are the closest institutional body to issues like the housing crisis. Renee Sanderson explained this highlighting that she and other service providers "know the policies that are creating barriers". Indeed, service providers in Yellowknife underscored the importance of advocating together and explained the necessity of a collective voice. Similarly, the municipal government understands the bigger picture and innerworkings of policies and politics. We heard from interviewees that the municipal government does not hold significant power but does have a huge voice. A coalition for policy advocacy could work to influence policies on homelessness more broadly (see the Colorado Nonprofit Association (CNO) in *Example 3*) like for addictions and mental health support, a

healing centre, regulations that mandate the building of affordable housing in new construction, and increasing tenant rights, but also on emergency preparedness and planning.

> **Example 3. Colorado Nonprofit Association (CNA) (Colorado, US)**
> The CNA was founded in 1986 and now has over 1100 nonprofit members (CNA, 2023). This largescale organization advocates on behalf of the nonprofit sector, connects organizations, and educates organizational leaders. Its advocacy has been incredibly strong with shaping legislation through its opposition of the removal of property tax exemptions for nonprofit organizations and did this through:
> 1. Drafting language and amendments
> 2. Directly lobbying legislators
> 3. Giving testimonies
> 4. Distributing fact sheets and information (Balassiano & Chandler, 2010)
> Although this a very large and powerful organization, it is important to consider the proportionality of populated state versus a small city.

The City of Yellowknife already advocates to the territorial and federal government and could leverage its connection with service organizations to strengthen its voice. Dan Ritchie told us that the city relies on relationships to service providers to help the city understand the needs of the vulnerable, so leveraging this for advocacy would help present an authentic and compelling narrative in discussions. Further, Dan Ritchie told us that the city's upcoming Point-in-Time count will be useful for advocacy as it will better capture up-to-date data on the nature and extent of homelessness.

Recommendation 4: Utilizing HIFIS in emergencies

The City of Yellowknife is close to fully utilizing the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). Implementing HIFIS is a requirement of the Reaching Home agreement, and the five agencies funded by the City are estimated by Dan Ritchie to be 80% of the way to full system integration. HIFIS "… is a data collection and case management system that allows multiple service providers in the same community to access real-time data and to increase the coordination of services" (Government of Canada, 2022). It is a standardized collaborative case management system, which is the most common typology of collaboration among homeless-serving organizations (Snavley & Tracy, 2000). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a city staff strike, and Homelessness Specialist job vacancy, the HIFIS system lagged in integration into city-funded services. During the 2023 evacuations, we heard from service

providers that some of their organizations still used paper-based management of client information. As many service users were difficult to track down and 'lost in the system' it is worth wondering if a system like HIFIS could allow for better tracking of clients.

Full integration of HIFIS into city-funded organization should be an immediate priority for the City. Service providers must be unified in their understanding of the importance of HIFIS for keeping track of service users, and for keeping client information and emergency contacts up to date for the sake of emergency preparedness. The City's HIFIS administrator could work with a HIFIS representative from the Reaching Home program to understand how they could utilize the system for an emergency response and should advocate to this representative for the integration of features for emergency preparedness and planning.

> **HIFIS Emergency Planning – questions to consider**
> 1. How could HIFIS be used to determine which agency is responsible for which service user during an emergency?
> 2. How could host communities that use HIFIS coordinate with Yellowknife's HIFIS to keep track of service users during an emergency?
> 3. How can agencies keep the most up-to-date information on their clients?

Recommendation 5: Strategic Community Advisory Board (CAB) prioritization

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) should consider how its processes can better support service sector collaboration in general, and specifically support emergency preparedness. The CAB in Yellowknife is responsible for developing a plan that identifies priorities for the homeless-serving sector and makes decisions on Reaching Home funding that adheres with guidelines and the Community Plan (City of Yellowknife, n.d.). The CAB is the epitome of collaboration: it is a collaborative body in and of itself and has an important role in supporting collaborative efforts to address homelessness in the community. Many of the recommendations listed in this report could be supported by the CAB, including:

1. Identifying *Community Funding Priorities*[7] like collaboration and emergency preparedness to enable agencies to put resources towards important planning.

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[7] See United Way Peterborough & District's Reaching Home RFP where they identified two community funding priorities, *Collaborative Partnerships* and *Priority Populations* (single adult men, chronic homelessness, and Indigenous People)

2. Funding an emergency preparedness table.

3. Funding an advocacy coalition.

4. Advocating to Reaching Home on behalf of, or with, service providers to widen limitations of funding, for northern Canada priorities, and for context-specific increases in funding.

Conclusions

The 2023 wildfire revealed blind spots in evacuation planning, leading to service providers independently managing the evacuation of their service users with little support. This disjointed approach resulted in significant hardships for people experiencing homelessness, and the implications are long-lasting. At its core, these issues are symptomatic of deeper systemic problems. However, on the local level, service providers underscored how the lack of collaboration and coordination added to challenges during the evacuation. The City of Yellowknife has a role to play in supporting service providers. In this report, I have outlined a multifaceted approach that the City could adapt into existing programs and roles, including: collaborative grant applications, supporting networking, building an advocacy coalition, utilizing HIFIS in emergencies, and prioritizing collaboration and emergency planning in Community Advisory Board (CAB) decision making. Ultimately, while systemic policy changes are needed at higher levels of government, local efforts to improve coordination and collaboration can ensure that Yellowknife's most vulnerable receive the care and support they need, important for a justice-informed approach to emergency preparedness.

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