



NEWS RELEASE

City creates mobile app to help outreach workers better serve people experiencing homelessness

ABBOTSFORD – March 20, 2024 – To assist local community outreach workers in providing timely and effective services to those experiencing homelessness, the City of Abbotsford has created a new app, the Community Homelessness Information Application (CHIA).

CHIA allows frontline workers to track service delivery in encampments, access real-time bed inventory updates at shelters, and develop historical data to advocate for more resources. This new mobile, web and desktop application supports the City's drive towards a robust Coordinated Access system of care for Abbotsford, and allows better coordination between service agencies and organizations, ultimately leading to improved support and access to housing.

CHIA was developed by the City as a component of the Reaching Home, Designated Community federal grant program in response to the need for service providers to better understand and serve people experiencing homelessness in Abbotsford, specifically those staying in encampments or shelters, or sleeping outside. Service organizations and outreach workers can use CHIA to view, input and update data related to encampments, day sites, sleeping sites, and shelters to improve coordination of services and help create long term data which will aid advocacy efforts for additional supports and resources.

"CHIA is a truly innovative and invaluable tool that will support the work of our City team to develop a robust Coordinated Access System, and improve the way our local service providers respond to and support the most vulnerable in our community," said Ross Siemens, Mayor of Abbotsford. "By accessing real time data, front line workers can collaborate and work together to assure those who need help aren't missed and that resources are being distributed in the most efficient way. The development of this app will undoubtedly have a positive impact for service providers and those they are helping, and will provide us with valuable data to more effectively advocate for more supports in our community."

Through the mobile app, different icons can be placed by users on identified encampments, day sites and sleeping sites to display services, like waste removal as well as water and harm-reduction supplies, as they are delivered to these locations so other users can easily identify where the current needs are across the city. Outreach workers will also be able to indicate the number of people staying at each site, and shelter workers will be able to update the occupancy status of their shelter and show how many beds remain available. The app dashboard also provides real-time information, statistics and historical data summaries that can be used to identify trends related to encampments, day sites and sleeping sites, shows the inflow and outflow of people experiencing homelessness and will provide an approximate count for the total number of people living unhoused in Abbotsford at any given time. All these functions provided through this digital solution will elevate how those experiencing homelessness are supported and will contribute to the goal of creating a better and more livable city.

Since it was launched in mid-February, the app has been used to log nearly 300 site visits by outreach workers, including 141 check-ins and service deliveries at encampments, and 228 individual visits to day sites around the city.

CHIA supports Council's strategic goal of addressing social issues that impact our community, as part of the City's Homelessness Action Plan. CHIA also aligns with the City's digital strategy, which aims at delivering better services for the residents of Abbotsford by aligning people, data and technology by using the city's GIS, data and analytics tools for to enhance public and internal services.

Quotes:

Josh Burton, Program Manager, CEDAR Outreach

"CHIA allows us to access and share real-time data on services provided to local encampments. Our outreach team uses this information to prioritize their site visits, improving the efficiency of our service delivery and ensuring there is thorough access to supports across the community."

Jami Hall, Mobile Harm Reduction Worker, Lookout Housing and Health Society

"CHIA is a useful tool that has provided great insight as to where our supports and services are needed the most. CHIA is bridging the gap of communication between organizations that support the same demographic. As we no longer need to duplicate services due to the real time notifications, we have the ability to see more people in a day."

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