

City of Lethbridge Encampment Strategy

**Social Disorder and Urban
Crime Conference**

September 23-25, 2024



Background

- June – October 2022, Encampments and homelessness dominate news and social media headlines
- September 2022, the Point-in-Time (PiT) Count indicated at least 454 people experiencing homelessness, of which 235 were unsheltered homelessness.
 - In 2018, 223 individuals were counted, of which 7 were unsheltered homelessness. **An increase of unsheltered homelessness of 188% over 4 years.**
- Without a coordinated, consistent and properly resourced encampment response there was increased:
 - Risk of larger-scale, entrenched encampments on public lands;
 - challenges to individual and public health and safety with increased incidents of overdoses, illegal activity, aggressive behaviors, territoriality, waste, debris, and biohazards;
 - Expenses due to reactionary approaches.



A New Coordinated Approach

- May 16, 2023 – City Council Approves an Encampment Strategy
- Developed in collaboration with LPS and key community partners.
- Considers research and approaches from other municipalities (failed and successful) while also recognizing the **unique context and needs** in Lethbridge.
- Recognizes homelessness is a complex social issue and reconfirms the City's commitment to addressing underlying social issues.
- **Balances the needs and protection of the dignity of the most vulnerable while maintaining public safety, health, order, and safe and enjoyable public spaces.**



Strategic Goals

Parks and public spaces within the community are enjoyable for everyone.

Vulnerable people are connected to wellness, housing and social supports.

Encampments do not become entrenched.

Residents are informed on how to report encampments identified within the community.

Community and City Council remain informed.

Keys to the Response

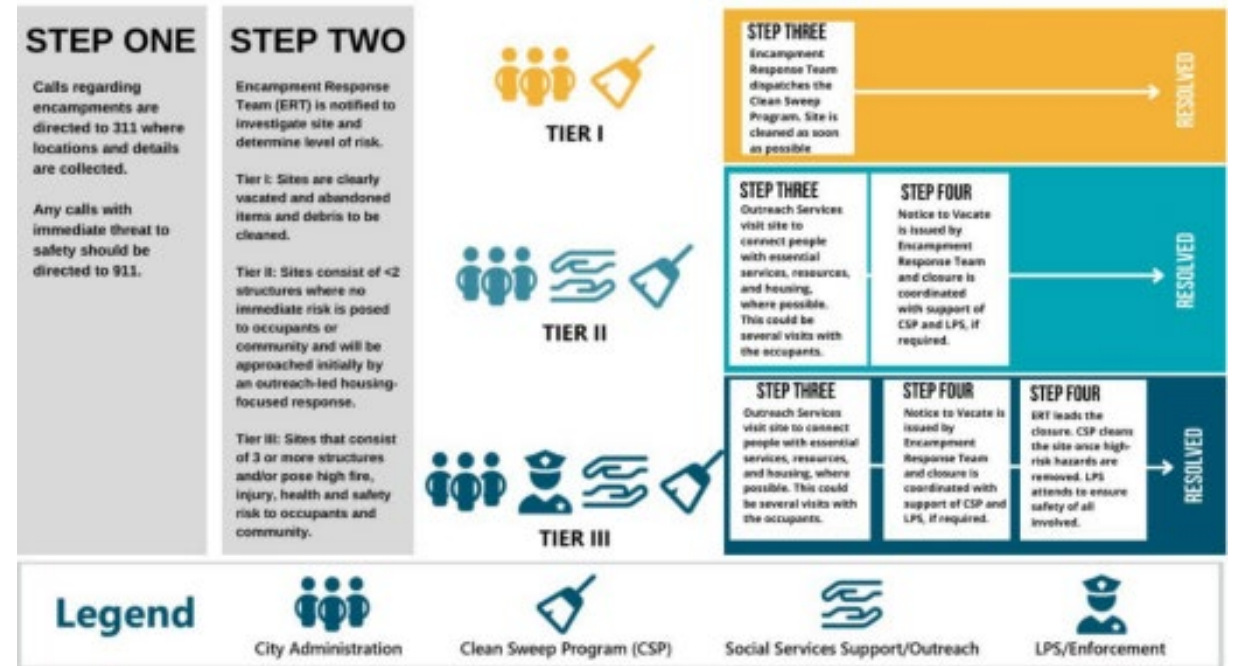
- **Adequately resourced**, year-round encampment response that is coordinated with LPS.
- Approach that **balances** the needs and dignity of the most vulnerable in the community while maintaining public safety, health, order, and safe and enjoyable parks and public spaces for all residents.
- Dedicated outreach services team that will engage with and **prioritize the needs of those living in encampments** with a focus on wellness and appropriate shelter/housing, prior to the clearing of encampments.
- Detailed operational plan shared by those involved in the operational response that details, in a **clear and consistent** manner aspects of the response including but not limited to: appropriate notification, approach to outreach services, how property is seized and if deemed necessary disposed of, hazardous materials, data management, etc.

Keys to the Response

- Use of consistent data points to identify trends, make informed decisions on resource deployment and evaluate and **continuously improve** the response.
- **Clear and consistent communications** and reporting structure will be established for managing operational response, coordinating inter-departmental understanding, and responding to questions, concerns, and feedback of Council and community.
- Dedicated housing position tasked with working on implementing initiatives connected to **creating systemic improvements** that will benefit shelter and housing capacities across the continuum in the short and long-term.

Keys to the Response

- A **risk assessment tool** used to help triage the closure and cleanup of encampments.
 - Risk factors consider length of time structure(s) have been in place, proximity to locations or events where the safety of public and encampment occupants could be jeopardized, occupant injury or death due to fire, disease, extreme weather, drug use, violence, observed or investigated presence of weapons, or criminal activity.
 - A risk level is assigned to a site through inspection and one of three response streams determines lead responder, support needs and closure timelines.





Tier 1



Tier 2



Tier 3

2023 Year in Review

Operational Year: June 19 – December 31, 2023

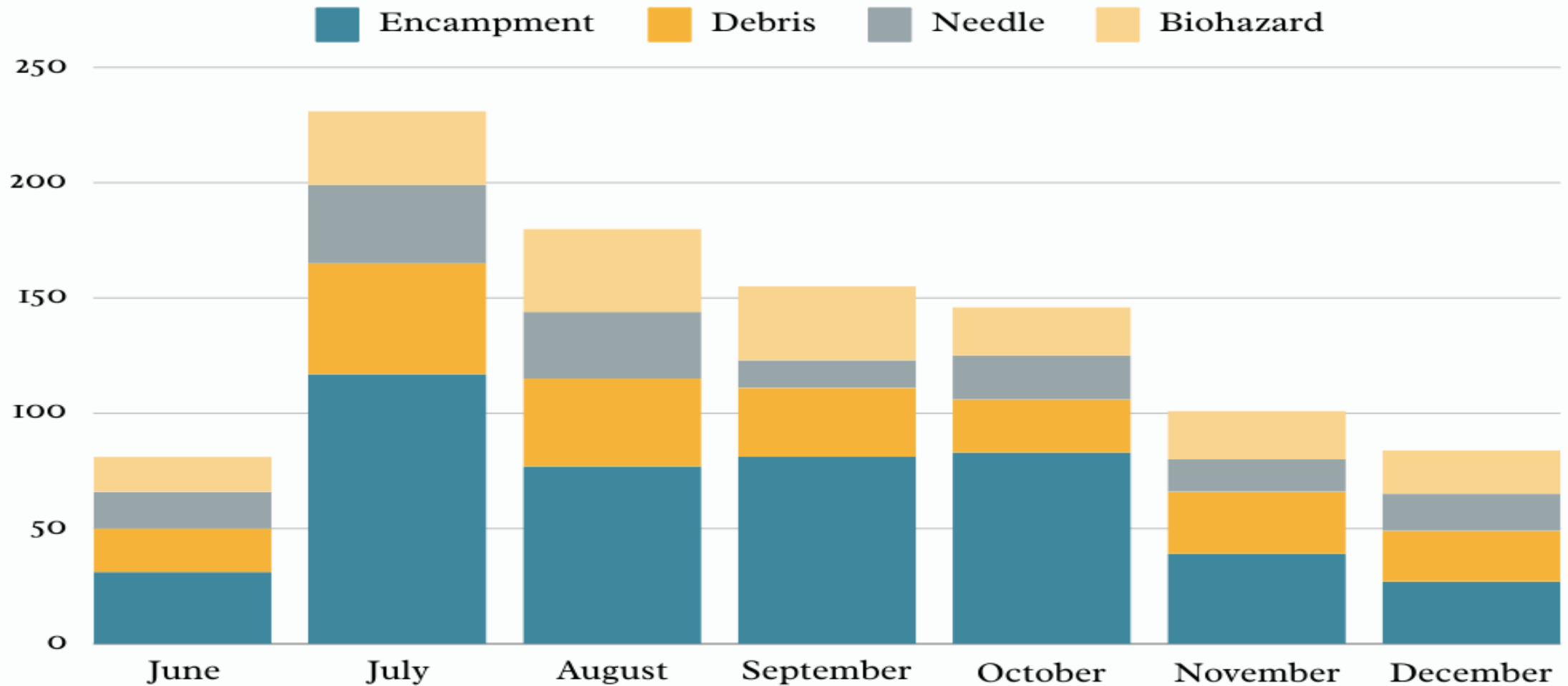
2023 – Key Dates

- **April 18th** – Council approved funding for Encampment Response
- **May 16th** - Encampment Strategy approved
- **June 19th** – Encampment Response Team (ERT) and the 3 full-time funded positions began operation
 - 311 launched an online report form to support public reporting of encampments, debris, biohazard and needle debris by online form, chat, and/or phone
- **July-October** – Monthly Updates to Council and Media
- **October 31** – Transition to winter response including a shift from contracted outreach services to internal resources

311 Reports Received by the Encampment Response Team from 2023

	Encampment	Debris	Needle	Biohazard
June	31	19	16	15
July	117	48	34	32
August	77	38	29	36
September	81	30	12	32
October	83	23	19	21
November	39	27	14	21
December	27	22	16	19
Total	455	207	140	176

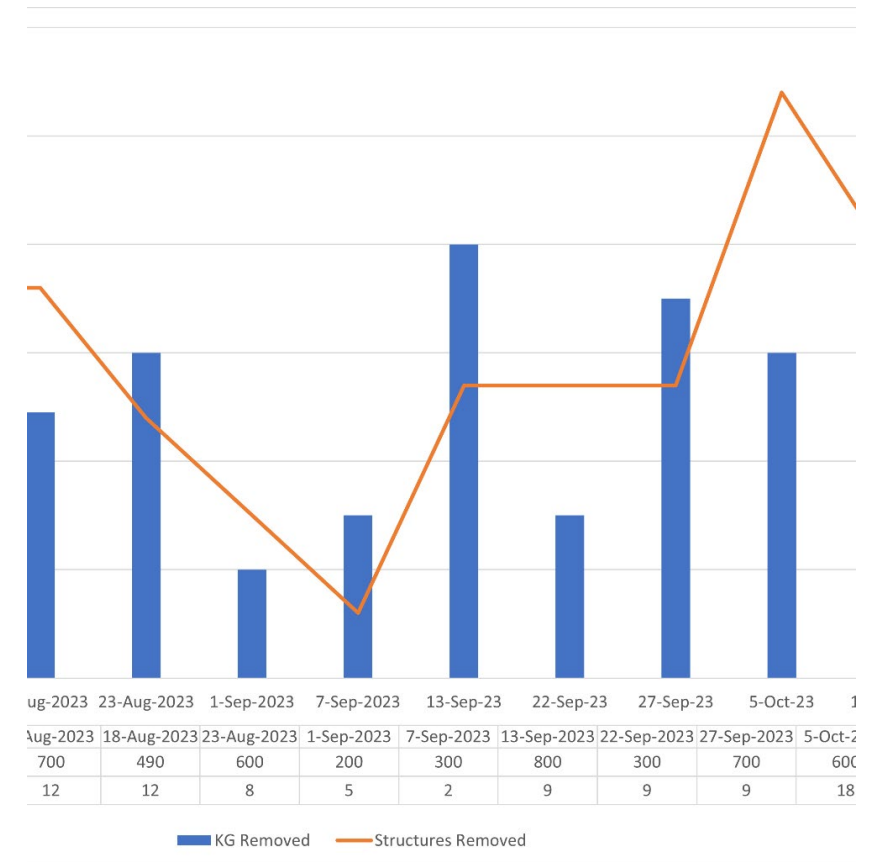
311 reports from 2023



Data is from June 19, 2023 - December 31, 2023

2023 Coordinated Responses

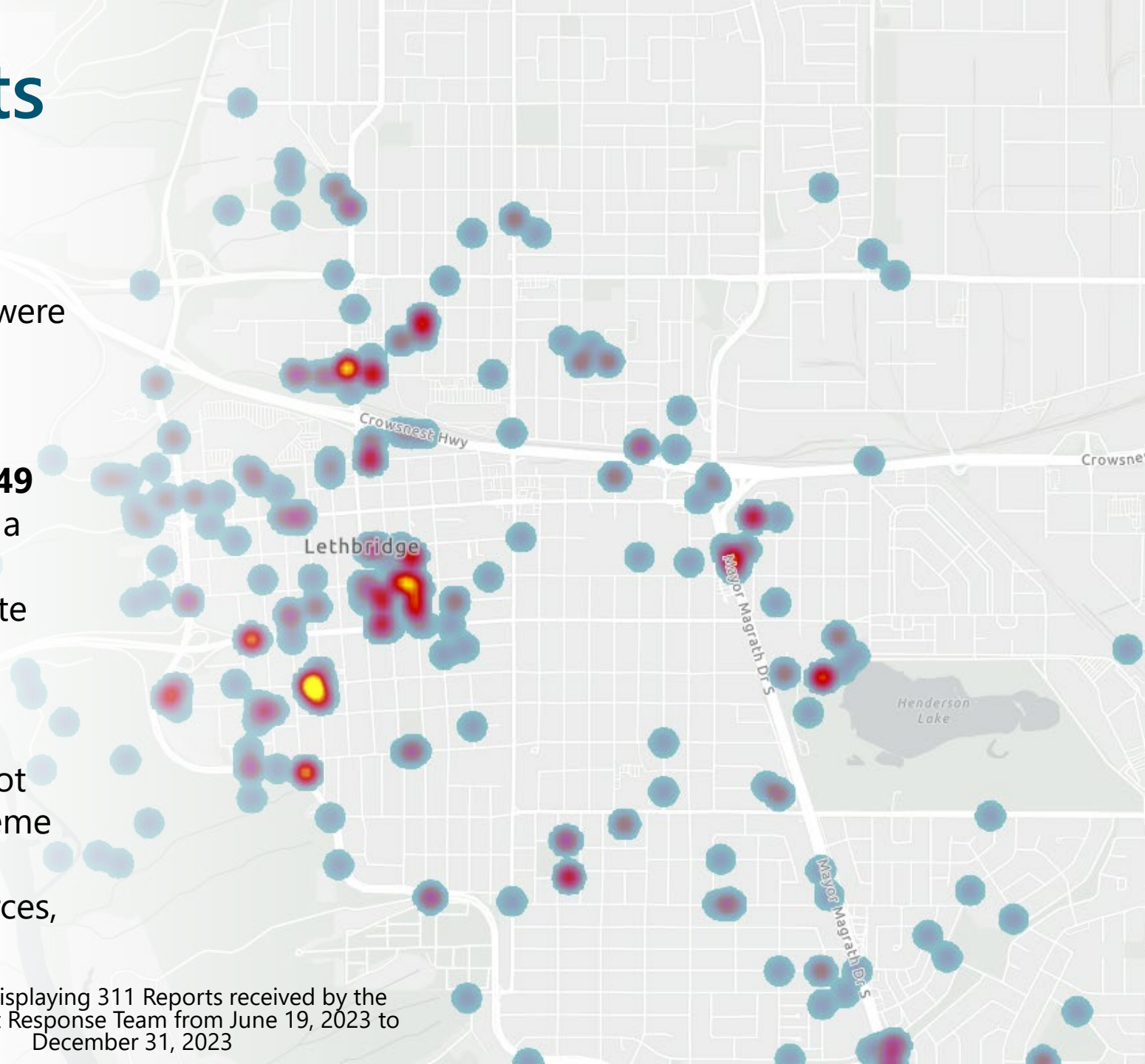
- A Coordinated Response, led by the Encampment Response Team, collaboratively addresses encampments with an outreach approach. The Clean Sweep Program removes unwanted items, while Lethbridge Police Service ensures safety on-site.
- Conducted 19 coordinated responses with LPS and the Clean Sweep Program
 - 11,100 kilograms of debris and 158 structures were removed
 - The removal of dozens of weapons, consisting of bladed weapons (machetes, knives, daggers, hatchets, etc.) and a compound bow

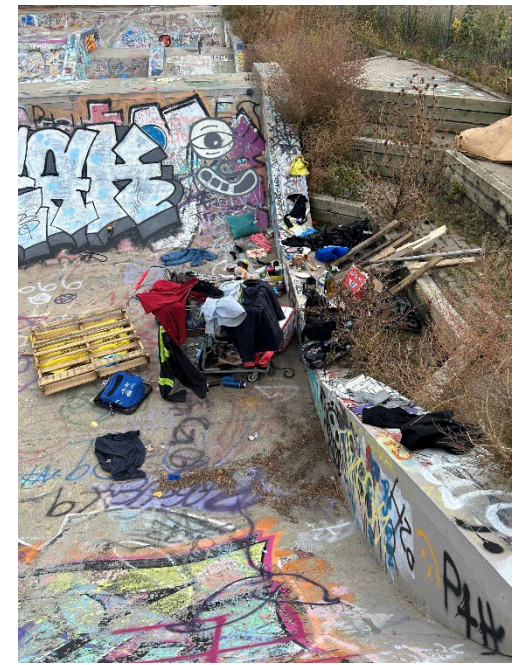


Encampment Reports

- A total of **455** Encampment Reports were received
 - Of those, **256** were encampments requiring varying levels of service and were categorized accordingly:
 - **Tier 1** (Abandoned sites): **76**
 - **Tier 2** (<2 structures, with no immediate health or safety risk): **149**
 - **Tier 3** (3+ structures, and/or pose a health and safety risk): **31**
- Encampment Response was able to complete triage and initiate response steps within 2 business days, and some within minutes of being reported
 - Weather conditions considered as to not place occupants at increased risk (extreme heat and cold).
 - As Tier 3 sites require additional resources, more time is required for Outreach services, LPS, etc.

Heat map displaying 311 Reports received by the Encampment Response Team from June 19, 2023 to December 31, 2023





Highlights

- 978 total public safety (encampment, debris, needle debris, and biohazards) reported through 311 platforms
 - 455 (46%) were encampments
 - 256 were unique encampments requiring varying levels of support based on initial triage
- A youth was found in an encampment and returned to placement following collaboration with Child Family Services and Lethbridge Police Service
- At least 7 instances where ERT requested EMS for overdose care
- Proactive measures taken during the cold snap that saw temperatures fall to -50 with the wind chill factor
 - Transportation was coordinated to the Lethbridge Shelter with the assistance of DOT
 - Welfare checks were conducted regularly on the unhoused
 - Lethbridge Fire Department expressed their willingness to provide their assistance as needed



Highlights



University of
Lethbridge

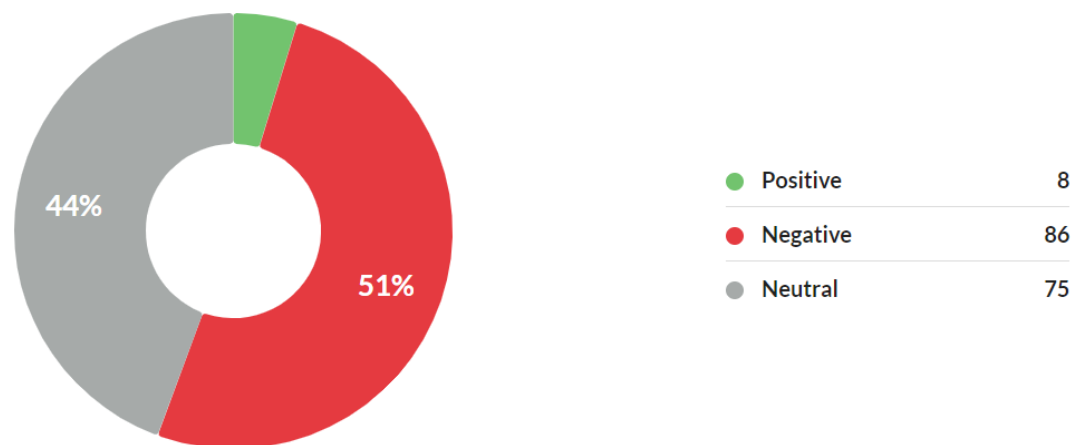


- Partnerships have been strengthened with internal and external stakeholders, such as the Downtown BRZ Clean Sweep Program, Lethbridge Police Service, CP Rail Police, and Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services
- Ongoing dialogue and site visits with various municipalities
 - Red Deer, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina
- An evaluation and suggested modifications to previously funded outreach services were identified to better support encampment strategic goals
- As a result of community engagement, partnerships have been created with the University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge College and KOA Campground.
 - This includes education about encampment activity and reporting
- A partnership with CP Rail was formed to prevent and address encampments on CP Rail managed property
- Strengthening of relations with the Lethbridge Public Library
 - Resulting in decreased encampment activity



Communications Report

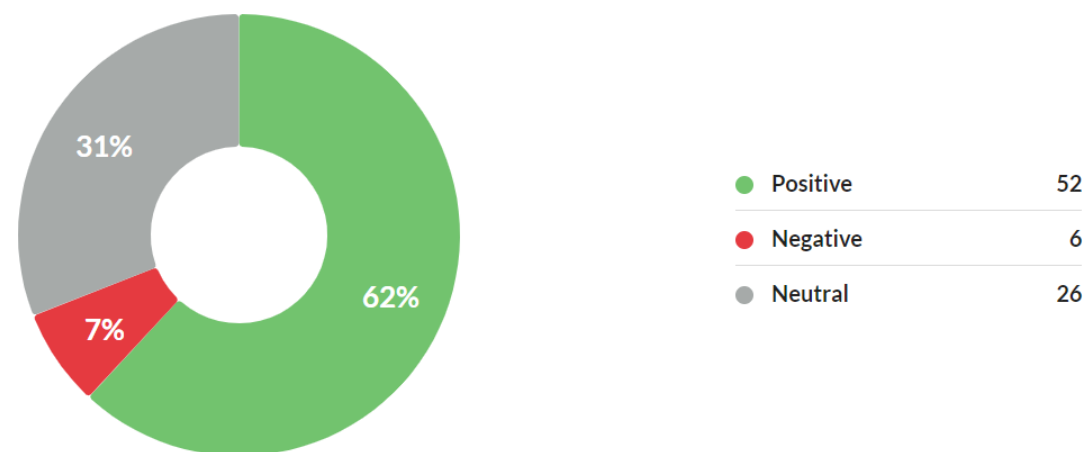
News Sentiment 2022



Apr 28, 2022 - Nov 23, 2022

The Sentiment widget provides insight into how media coverage is broken down by positive and negative sentiment over time.

News Sentiment 2023

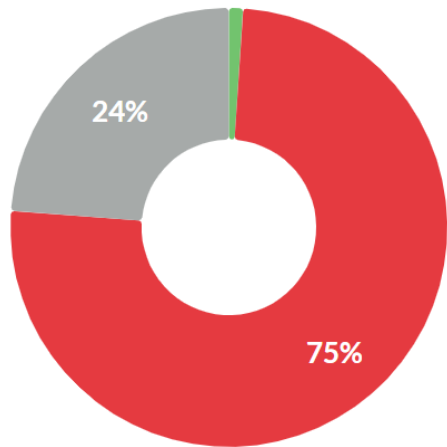


Apr 28, 2023 - Nov 22, 2023

The Sentiment widget provides insight into how media coverage is broken down by positive and negative sentiment over time.

Communications Report

Social Sentiment 2022

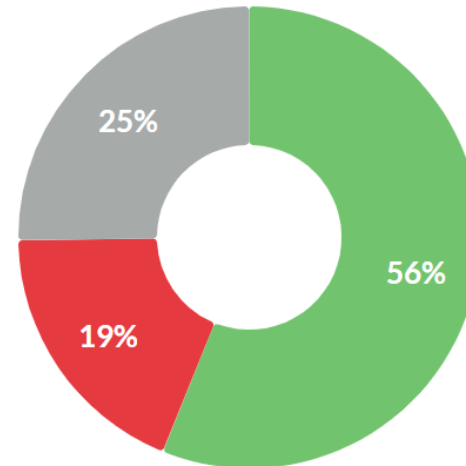


Positive	3
Negative	215
Neutral	68

Apr 28, 2022 - Nov 29, 2022

The Sentiment widget provides insight into how media coverage is broken down by positive and negative sentiment over time.

Social Sentiment 2023



Positive	78
Negative	26
Neutral	35

Apr 28, 2023 - Nov 23, 2023

The Sentiment widget provides insight into how media coverage is broken down by positive and negative sentiment over time.

Funding Year-End Overview

- Encampment Strategy and the associated response is currently funded by the following:
 - \$153,460 (2023)/\$260,000 (2024-2026) in annual on-going from the 2023-2026 Operating Budget (C-11.2 - Outreach Programs)
 - \$250,000 in one-time from the Municipal Stabilization Reserve (MRSR);
 - \$500,000 in annual on-going from the Municipal Stabilization Reserve (MRSR)

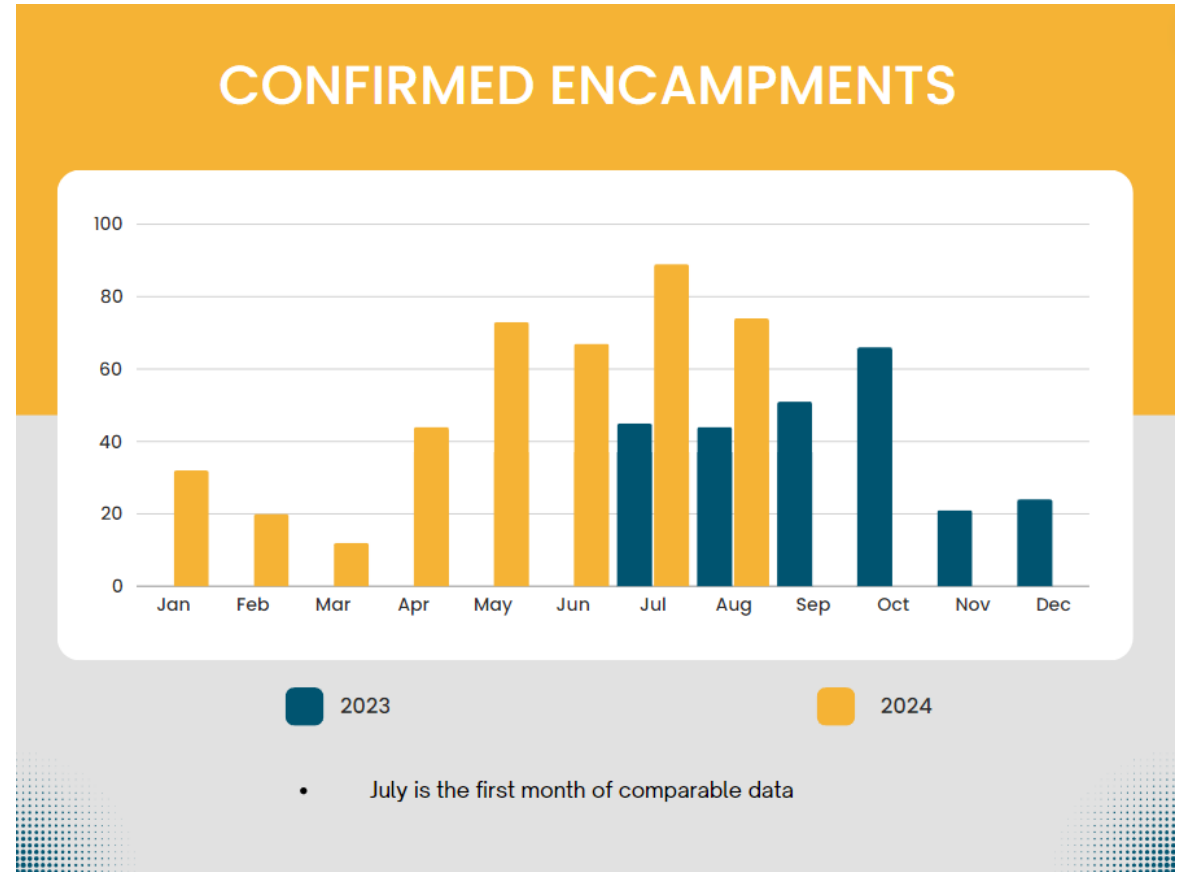
	2023		2024	2025	2026
	Budget	Actuals	Budget	Budget	Budget
C-11.2	\$ 153,460	\$ 153,460	\$ 260,000	\$ 260,000	\$ 260,000
MRSR (ongoing)	\$ 500,000	\$ 246,859	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 500,000
MRSR (one-time)	\$ 250,000	\$ 212,345	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Carryover	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 350,312		
Totals	\$ 903,460	\$ 612,664	\$ 1,110,312	\$ 760,000	\$ 760,000
Surplus/(Deficit)		\$ 290,796			
Subsidy		\$ 59,516			
Total Carryover		\$ 350,312			

2024 Highlights

Operational Year To Date: January 1 – August 26, 2024

2024 Highlights

- June 14th to August 26th reporting period represents the high season for the encampment response, which experienced a 27% increase in reported encampments over the same period in 2023.
- Along with the increase came new trends and challenges related to ever changing dynamics of encampments.



2024 Highlights

Current reporting period June 14
– August 26, 2024

¹2023 Reporting Period represents June 15th to August 23rd, 2023

²Year to Date (YTD) represents January 1st to August 23rd, 2024

³For Reporting Period: With 336 calls triaged, 134 were identified to be an encampment in alignment with the Tier 1-3 parameters. The remaining 202 calls were for a variety of other debris, mess in lane, duplicate reports, or issues that moved on before triage could occur

ENCAMPMENT RELATED REPORTS	Current Reporting Period	2023 Reporting Period ¹	2024 Year to Date ²
Total Encampment Calls:	254	200	606
Calls Triaged (includes Debris calls):	336	293	799
Total Encampments Identified ³ :	134	86	395
Tier 1:	12	29	130
Tier 2:	114	50	458
Tier 3:	7	7	53
Encampments involving minors	1	0	8
Total Triaged Encampments Resolved:	134	86	395

OTHER RELATED REPORTS	Current Reporting Period	2023 Reporting Period	2024 Year to Date
Needle Debris:	40	72	81
Biohazard:	71	75	152
Debris:	82	93	193

COORDINATED CLEANUPS	Current Reporting Period	2023 Reporting Period	2024 Year to Date
Coordinated Cleanups:	15	8	30
Structures Removed:	160	74	257
Total KG of Debris Removed:	10650 KG	4300 KG	19400 KG

311 REPORTS RECEIVED	2024 Reporting Period	2023 Reporting Period	2024 Year to Date
	447	440	1032

Internal Outreach Services Partnership with The Watch

- In Spring 2024, Council approved to shift outreach services from external provider(s) to an internal model -- City CSD & The Watch
- Outreach services provide support for unhoused individuals in community and encampments who are facing navigation challenges, such as substance use, mental health issues and other barriers to housing.
- Outreach services are provided once an encampment with occupants is identified through the encampment reporting process to ensure access to services is provided prior to a clean up or LPS involvement unless there is a substantial risk identified.



Internal Outreach Services Partnership with The Watch

- Outreach staff complete intakes with individuals wanting to engage in services. Once consent is obtained, Outreach staff work with individual to develop a case plan which focuses on housing needs and housing readiness. Common referrals could be detox, treatment, housing supports, mental health and addiction supports, etc.
- The charts outline efforts and outcomes completed through the outreach team during the month of August .
- 6 of 7 referrals completed in August were successful.
- Attended eight encampment locations with the Watch program to build rapport with individuals residing in the Encampments. Outreach staff also supported community agencies in locating participants in the community, and getting them reconnected with supports.

Intakes	August 2024
Total Number of Intakes	18
New to the BNL	7
Inactive on the BNL	5
Active on the BNL	6
Intakes that Occurred at Coordinated Encampment Clean up	11
Intakes at an Encampment site	16
Intakes in Community	2

Referral Type	August 2024
Medical Supports	2
Addiction Supports	1
Housing Applications	1
Case Management – Housing	2
Other Housing Readiness Referrals (ex: ID supports)	1

By-Names-List (BNL) is a list of every known individual experiencing homelessness in our community.

Thank You