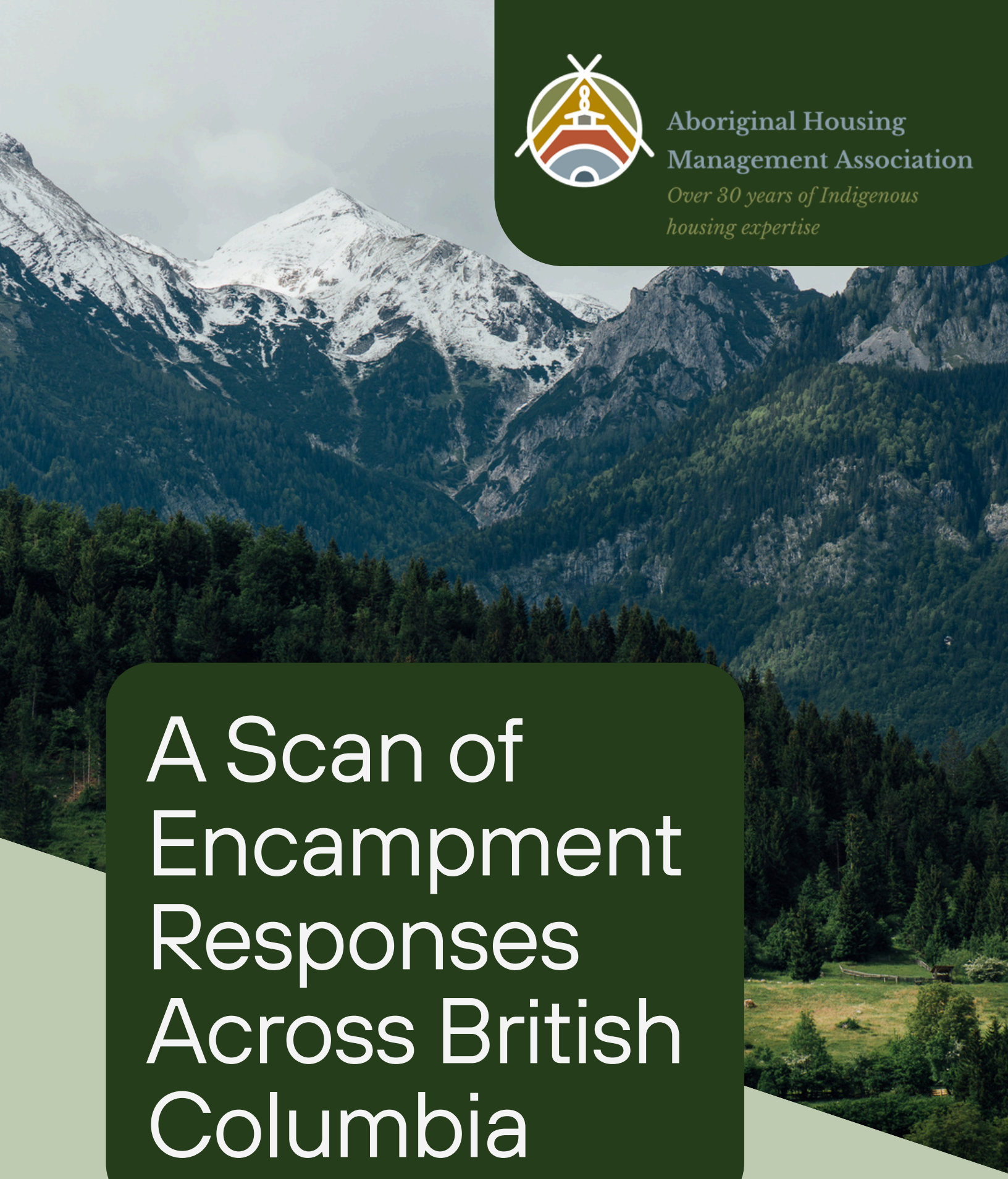

Aboriginal Housing Management Association

Over 30 years of Indigenous housing expertise

A Scan of Encampment Responses Across British Columbia

DECEMBER 2025

Researcher Bio:

SHEILA ERIKA SUREDJA

Sheila is a graduate student at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on housing policy, Indigenous governance, and sustainability, with recent work analyzing eviction processes across Canadian provinces and identifying policy gaps that undermine tenant security. She is committed to advancing fair, inclusive, and rights-based housing policy, and contributes to projects that examine homelessness and encampments to inform evidence-based policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) extends our sincere gratitude to Sheila Suredja, whose dedicated research, analysis, and persistence made completing this work possible. We would also like to acknowledge Melora Koepke and Alexandra Flynn for their early feedback and insight that helped shape the scan's direction. This project was supported and finalized by AHMA staff and leadership, whose collective effort reflects our ongoing commitment to advancing the right to housing for Indigenous peoples across British Columbia.

We recognize that this work takes place in the context of ongoing colonial systems that continue to deny Indigenous peoples jurisdiction over their own lands, governance, and housing systems. The overlapping and often conflicting roles of federal, provincial, and municipal governments continue to create gaps and barriers that directly harm unhoused Indigenous people. We acknowledge and honour the thousands of unhoused people who have endured and continue to endure systemic displacement, criminalization, and marginalization. We are especially grateful to community advocates and encampment residents who continue to share their knowledge, truths, and experiences. Their voices are woven throughout the scan and ground this work in the lived reality of encampments in BC. We also acknowledge and express our deep gratitude for the organizations and communities working tirelessly to support encampment residents while we all push for the necessary housing and systemic change.

We affirm that Indigenous leadership and systems of care must be central to any genuine effort to address homelessness and uphold the human right to housing in British Columbia. AHMA hopes that this scan contributes to meaningful, rights-based action and supports Indigenous governance, self-determination, and community-led housing solutions.

About the Aboriginal Housing Management Association

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) was established in 1996 with a mission to “lead and advance housing rights for all Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia.” AHMA is comprised of 48 Indigenous housing and service providers located across BC. These members manage more than 95% of all Indigenous housing units in urban, rural, and northern areas of the province. AHMA administers funds, in partnership with BC Housing, for over 6,000 units and provides homes for more than 10,000 individuals and families who identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, non-status, and self-identifying as Indigenous. AHMA will also administer funds for an additional 2,244 units that are currently in development. AHMA members manage 95% of all Indigenous housing units located off reserve in BC.

In addition to providing Indigenous peoples, their families, and communities with affordable housing, AHMA's members offer many support services. These include homelessness prevention, parenting support, mental health programs, substance use support, and more. AHMA members provide a culturally safe space for Indigenous peoples to make their home, wherever they settle, by facilitating connections to community and cultural resources.

Executive Summary

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) conducted this encampment scan to support Indigenous communities, advocates, and policy makers in understanding how municipalities across British Columbia are responding to encampments. Drawing from 268 media articles, legal documents, and advocacy reports across 27 communities, the scan identifies gaps and opportunities for Indigenous-led, rights-based approaches.

Key Findings

Encampments in BC have been routinely addressed through rapid evictions, fire orders, policing actions, and enforcement-based policies that displace residents with little consultation, inadequate alternatives, and significant trauma. Indigenous people are consistently overrepresented in encampments yet remain largely excluded from municipal decision-making processes. Their rights under UNDRIP, DRIPA, and recent BC court decisions are violated when encampments are cleared without adequate consultation and culturally safe options in place.

Across communities, authorities justified removals using broad claims of "public safety" or fire risk, while neglecting basic needs such as water, sanitation, storage, warming/cooling, and harm-reduction supports. These actions perpetuate cycles of displacement, mistrust, and loss of community networks, especially for Indigenous residents whose experiences of homelessness are shaped by systemic inequities and oppressions. Data on encampment demographics, service access, and outcomes remains sparse or inconsistent, limiting accountability and masking the disproportionate harms faced by Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, and youth.

Indigenous Involvement and Promising Practices

Indigenous leadership in encampment response is rare, but examples in Chilliwack, Penticton, Prince George, Smithers, and parts of Vancouver highlight the benefits of Indigenous-led outreach, cultural supports, ceremony, coordinated services, and government-to-government partnerships. Promising practices include healing fire gatherings, Friendship Centre-led coordination tables, rights-based advocacy, and Indigenous–municipal co-governance agreements. These models demonstrate that Indigenous-led culturally grounded approaches may produce more rights-based, coordinated outcomes – though they remain underfunded and often not meaningfully integrated into municipal planning.

Calls to Action

The scan outlines an urgent need to shift from punitive, crisis-driven encampment responses to rights-based, culturally respectful, resident-led solutions. This includes ensuring basic needs are available in place; preventing discriminatory bylaw enforcement; embedding Indigenous leadership from the outset; aligning practices with UNDRIP, DRIPA, and court decisions; increasing transparency and accountability in municipal actions; and investing in upstream supports such as adequate income supports, eviction prevention, and Indigenous-led housing.

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Introduction

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) undertook this encampment scan to help support advocates, communities, policy makers, and AHMA's members in understanding the scope, causes, and consequences of encampment responses across British Columbia. The scan seeks to inform culturally safe, rights-based, and Indigenous-led approaches to addressing homelessness and housing precarity, while also documenting the gaps and barriers to such approaches. In compiling this information, researchers drew upon publicly available media and reports, aiming to center the experiences, needs, and rights of unhoused Indigenous people, particularly those living in or affected by encampments. Our work responds to calls from AHMA members, the Federal Housing Advocate, and Indigenous communities across the province for more transparent, accountable, and Indigenous-led housing and homelessness strategies.

ENCAMPMENTS ARE A VISIBLE AND URGENT EXPRESSION OF THE HOUSING CRISIS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Encampments exist not only as a response to the lack of housing, but also as a survival strategy for people excluded from existing systems of shelter and support. The rise and relentless clearance of these encampments reflects systemic failures: a chronic lack of affordable housing, the intergenerational and ongoing impacts of colonialism, the underfunding of culturally safe housing and supports, and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in decisions that impact them. Encampments have become the last refuge for those pushed out of the housing market and shut out of support systems. Yet, far from addressing the root causes, authorities have often responded with rapid evictions, fire orders, and policing actions that move people out of sight while perpetuating trauma.

Across city after city, Indigenous individuals bear the brunt of these displacements. Their rights to shelter, safety, and self-determination under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) are routinely violated when encampments are dismantled without adequate alternatives or consultation. Courts have begun to affirm what encampment residents have long known: forcing people to move on with nowhere to go is no solution at all, and it infringes on basic human rights.

Recent legal analyses and court decisions in British Columbia have clarified the rights of encampment residents and the obligations of municipalities and provincial authorities.

Courts have affirmed that unhoused individuals have the right to shelter, sanitation, and culturally safe services, and that forced evictions without adequate notice or alternatives may violate human rights or, in some cases, Indigenous legal rights (Flynn, Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, Van Wagner, 2024). Municipal practices that prioritize rapid clearance for "public safety" or fire hazard concerns, without consultation or provision of safe alternatives, risk infringing these rights. The legal framework also emphasizes the duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous residents and Nations when encampments are located on traditional territories, a requirement frequently unmet in practice. These rulings underscore that short-term, enforcement-focused approaches perpetuate harm, displacement, and systemic inequities, while providing a basis for advocating Indigenous-led, culturally safe, and rights-based alternatives in encampment management.

IT IS TIME FOR A PROFOUND SHIFT IN HOW WE RESPOND TO ENCAMPMENTS AND ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS' NEEDS.

Responses must centre Indigenous leadership, human rights, and lasting solutions. This means moving from an enforcement-based mindset to a human-centered, and healing-centered approach. Instead of viewing encampments as problems to be removed, governments must recognize the people in them as rights-holders and leaders in developing solutions. Indigenous communities and organizations, in particular, must be at the forefront of co-designing responses. Indigenous people are among those most impacted and have the cultural knowledge to guide what safety and housing should look like.

British Columbia can lead the way by honoring its commitments to reconciliation and the human right to housing. A rights-based, Indigenous-led response would focus on meeting immediate needs (food, water, warmth, sanitation, healthcare) in place, while actively working with encampment residents on pathways to permanent, culturally appropriate housing. It would treat encampment residents with the dignity and respect that all people deserve.

THE FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT MAKE IT CLEAR: APPROACHES THAT UPHOLD INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND PROVIDE REAL ALTERNATIVES ARE NOT OPTIONAL, THEY ARE ESSENTIAL TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA AND DISPLACEMENT.

Goals and Strategic Purpose

This scan is both a documentation tool and a resource. It serves multiple purposes for AHMA, AHMA members, and allied stakeholders:

For AHMA, AHMA Members, and Advocates

- To inform the development of culturally safe shelter and housing alternatives rooted in Indigenous knowledge and self-determination.
- To support members advocating for policy change, service improvement, and local leadership in response to encampments.
- To provide a clear, accessible resource that highlights patterns of enforcement, neglect, or criminalization and any promising practices.
- To uplift resident needs, peer leadership, and community advocacy efforts that have been critical to harm reduction and survival.
- To support the call for non-coercive, rights-based alternatives to encampment evictions and policing.

For Government and Policy Advocacy

- To evaluate municipal and provincial encampment responses against rights-based standards, including those set by the Federal Housing Advocate and UNDRIP.
- To identify opportunities for Indigenous inclusion, consultation, and leadership in all stages of encampment response.
- To track systemic harms, such as policing, forced removal, and jurisdictional conflicts, that deepen housing precarity.

Methodology and Limitations

This environmental scan is limited in scope and represents a specific point in time for encampments in British Columbia. It is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and we encourage others to build upon this work.

Our scope included:

GEOGRAPHIC CONSTRAINTS

A focus on encampments in municipalities where AHMA members are active

TIME LIMITED

A focus on encampments that currently exist or existed within the past ten years

BOTH ONGOING & DISMANTLED ENCAMPMENTS

with attention to local context and history

Researchers scanned available media and reports for each community, using the terms “encampments,” “homeless encampments,” “camps," and “tents." Overall, 268 publications were analyzed for this scan for 27 communities. Articles and reports were used to fill in an environmental scan outline that focused on encampment needs, histories, Indigenous representation and involvement, government responses, consequences and outcomes, and any court cases. For each community, summaries of local Point in Time count information was included for context if this data was available.

LIMITATIONS:

This scan is based on publicly available information, primarily media coverage, legal documents, and advocacy reports. Many encampments in BC are not included in this scan if they did not receive media attention or have legal proceedings. This is not a comprehensive list of all encampments in BC; rather, it is a starting point for deeper analysis and engagement.

Encampment residents' perspectives, particularly those of Indigenous people with lived experience, are underrepresented in available sources. This is a gap this scan highlights and one that should be addressed in future research and reporting.

Significantly, the scan did not find nor report on disaggregated data on gender or sexuality in encampments, but given national trends, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation when displaced. This ties directly into calls from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls for safe housing.

In many cases, encampment-specific data on services, housing offers, or demographics is missing or inconsistently reported. Major cities tended to have more media coverage and information available.

Point in Time count data (PiT) is included throughout the scan to provide community context. The limitations of PiT Count data are well known. PiT counts provide only a partial snapshot of homelessness in BC. They capture people visible during a single night, undercounting those who are hidden, provisionally housed, or staying with family or friends. These gaps disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples, whose experiences of homelessness are shaped by colonial displacement and mistrust of government systems. Methodological differences between regions further limit comparability. From AHMA's perspective, PiT count data represents a minimum estimate and should be considered alongside Indigenous-led data and community knowledge that reflect Indigenous definitions of home, belonging, and housing need. We ask that this be kept in mind while reviewing the findings.

AHMA staff and researchers have not made significant efforts to verify information and fill gaps through outreach to organizations, municipalities, and frontline advocates. We lack the capacity for this level of engagement at this time but would like to include this in future work and welcome people to contact us to engage or provide clarification on any data included in this report. We are hopeful that this work will continue to expand with further research and collaboration.

Calls to Action

This environmental scan reinforces a pressing need to shift from punitive, exclusionary, and emergency-driven interventions to rights-based, culturally respectful, and resident-led solutions that honor human dignity and support lasting housing stability. The following Calls to Action provide a baseline for beginning to meet these needs:

1. Basic needs like water, food, bathrooms, showers, and safe shelter must be prioritized and sustained for those living in encampments. Courts have affirmed the right to shelter and providing basic amenities at encampments is not optional but required.
2. Encampment responses in many municipalities remain punitive and selective; increased transparency and oversight of municipal bylaws is needed to prevent discriminatory or arbitrary evictions.
3. Culturally grounded, Indigenous-led services are essential to truly support Indigenous encampment residents. Onsite access to health, mental health, substance use, and cultural supports must be available.
4. Coordination between services should be improved so residents do not have to navigate fractured systems.
5. Any encampment response should be done in consultation and relationship with encampment residents, ensuring any response builds relationships, builds trust, and meets their needs.
6. Push for Indigenous-led encampment protocols: Municipalities must engage Indigenous governments and service providers from the start in accordance with the principles of meaningful consultation set out by DRIPA and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. Indigenous service providers must receive adequate resources to participate.
7. Address fire safety concerns through harm reduction approaches and resident-led fire mitigation measures rather than through evictions.
8. Outcomes tracking: Municipalities and the Province should report outcomes and key metrics. Intersectional data and Indigenous-led analysis will be essential.
9. Robust housing retention and wrap-around services across the housing continuum are needed to prevent homelessness.
10. All encampment responses must align with Indigenous rights as affirmed by UNDRIP and BC's Declaration Act, a standard which current practices routinely fail to meet.

Overview of Encampment Scan Findings

The findings from this environmental scan highlight consistent themes in how municipalities and the Province of BC have approached encampments, and the consequences of these approaches for unhoused people, particularly Indigenous residents. This section summarizes key patterns that emerged across cases: from the framing of encampments as fire or public safety risks, to the repeated use of forced evictions, to the absence of Indigenous-led solutions. The findings also reveal deep gaps in available data, particularly around the experiences and needs of Indigenous residents.

For advocates, AHMA members, and community allies, these findings confirm what many have long raised: that punitive approaches to encampments are perpetuating displacement and trauma, while failing to address the structural drivers of homelessness. For governments, they demonstrate the urgent need to shift toward Indigenous-led, culturally safe, and rights-based alternatives.

The following themes begin to capture the lessons from communities across BC and are intended to guide both immediate advocacy and long-term systemic change.

1. PUBLIC SAFETY AND FIRE HAZARDS ARE THE MOST COMMON OFFICIAL REASONS FOR ENCAMPMENT REMOVALS

- Across municipalities, fire safety was the most commonly stated reason for encampment removal, often backed by fire department inspections.
- "Public safety" was framed broadly, sometimes linked to alleged violence, sometimes to environmental hazards, creating a seemingly catch-all justification for rapid clearance. This framing leaves little room for residents' perspectives and harm reduction approaches.
- Trespassing/bylaw violations and environmental protection of parkland or waterways were other common reasons.

2. INDIGENOUS RESIDENTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED AND THERE HAS BEEN MINIMAL INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

- Indigenous people are consistently overrepresented in unsheltered homelessness counts.
- AHMA's scan found only a few municipalities where Indigenous organizations or First Nations played a significant role in encampment responses. Their involvement took many forms: outreach & harm reduction, coordination & service leadership, cultural & ceremonial support, and advocacy for rights-based, trauma-informed approaches.
- No evidence of systematic government-to-government consultation with First Nations, Métis, or Inuit governments before removals in most communities.
- Culturally safe housing alternatives were either absent, unsuitable, or offered only in small numbers, leading to repeated displacement.
- Indigenous service providers were almost always reactive, brought in for short-term outreach before or after clearance, not as decision-makers or site managers.
- Services and interventions were often one-size-fits-all, ignoring how Indigenous and other residents experience homelessness differently. The absence of Indigenous-led and culturally safe services reflects a failure to respect cultural identities and needs.
- Indigenous orgs and Nations need to be supported to do this work. Many are underfunded and understaffed, especially for outreach work. Resources need to be available so this leadership and support can happen.

3. DISPLACEMENT AS A HARMFUL CYCLE

- Residents were reported as often moving to another encampment or into street homelessness shortly after encampment removals.
- Alternative shelter options (when offered) were often perceived by encampment residents to be temporary, restrictive, and lacking harm reduction or cultural safety measures. This creates chronic instability and erodes trust between residents and service providers.
- Government officials state that offers of housing or shelter were being made prior to removing many encampments; encampment residents often refute this claim or state that the housing is inadequate to meet their needs.
- For Indigenous individuals, the cycles of displacement can sever critical community networks and connections to services, effectively recreating the cycle of dislocation many Indigenous families have historically faced.

4. VIOLATION OF RIGHTS

- Basic rights to shelter, sanitation, and culturally safe services were not fully upheld in most encampments.
- Current practices lean toward control and removal rather than support and empowerment.
- Encampment residents report facing evictions and clearances without adequate notice, consultation, or alternatives.
- Many actions taken by authorities or property owners were experienced as forced removals that disregard residents' rights to housing, privacy, and personal security. Such removals caused trauma, loss of belongings, and heightened vulnerability.

5. NEED FOR MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

- Residents, especially Indigenous peoples, were frequently excluded from decision-making processes impacting their living spaces.
- This absence of consultation undermines respect for self-determination and community leadership, particularly violating Indigenous rights.

6. SELECTIVE & POLITICALLY INFLUENCED ENFORCEMENT

- Some encampments remained for months or years; others were cleared within days, often correlating with visibility, complaints, or political pressure.
- Encampments in prominent public areas or near redevelopment zones faced quicker removal.

7. MEDIA & PUBLIC PERCEPTION

- Official clearance announcements emphasized hazards, crime, and disorder, reinforcing stigma against residents.
- In many encampments, there was limited media coverage of residents' lived experiences, the role of poverty and systemic racism, or Indigenous perspectives.

8. THEMES AROUND SERVICES OFFERED OR NEEDED FOR ENCAMPMENTS

Lack of consistent, culturally safe supports or services onsite

- Across most locations, there was no indication of culturally appropriate supports offered at the encampment sites. This includes access to Elders, space for ceremony or healing, recognition of traditional territories, and services delivered by Indigenous organizations.
- Indigenous cultural safety and trauma-informed care were rarely mentioned or integrated.
- Many services were only offered off-site, requiring people to leave their community or camp, which often resulted in refusal or abandonment of services, or loss of belongings.

Insufficient mental health & substance use supports

- Persistent gaps in mental health and substance use services were highlighted.
- Encampments often have residents with complex needs, but services either were not offered or were inaccessible due to eligibility or capacity issues.
- Temporary shelter programs rarely included on-site supports for these needs.

Basic needs – Sanitation, water, shelter, storage

- Critical basic services like safe drinking water, sanitation, hygiene facilities, and weather-appropriate shelter were often missing or inadequately provided.
- Some jurisdictions provided temporary shelter or hotel rooms, but these were often limited in time, capacity, or culturally inappropriate.
- Lack of these basic services exacerbates health risks and pushes people into crisis.

Coordination and navigation services

- Few reports showed effective coordination between outreach workers, health services, and housing providers.
- Encampment residents may need help navigating complex and disparate systems, but this did not seem to be available consistently.

Housing retention supports & eviction prevention

- Supports that allow people to access and maintain market housing, such as rent supplements, eviction prevention, and culturally safe tenancy support, were largely absent.
- Offers provided to encampment residents were often shelter, or supportive or temporary housing.

Emergency response vs. long-term supports

- Many clearances appeared driven by emergency or political pressure, focusing on short-term outcomes rather than long-term, holistic support or service provision.
- Temporary solutions (hotel rooms, shelter) did not appear to include long-term pathways to housing.

9. UNDERLYING SYSTEMIC ISSUES - LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND INADEQUATE INCOME SUPPORTS - ARE DRIVING THE NEED FOR ENCAMPMENTS.

- The top reported reason for loss of housing in the Point in Time counts was not enough income. Preventing encampments in the first place requires upstream investments and reforms, such as increased income assistance and disability assistance rates, rent supplements, preserving existing low-cost rentals, expanding Indigenous-led affordable housing, and crisis stabilization and eviction prevention supports.

GAPS ACROSS ALL CASES

- **Missing or inconsistent data on the percentage of Indigenous residents, and no assessment on the impacts to Indigenous residents before or after encampment displacement.** Without tracking, there is no way to assess whether Indigenous encampment residents experience improved housing outcomes or simply further displacement and harm.

- **The scan did not find disaggregated data on gender, sexuality or age breakdowns of encampment residents, which is a notable gap.** Given national trends, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, and specifically youth and young adults, are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation when displaced. This ties directly into calls from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls for safe housing.

- **No tracking of post-encampment displacement housing outcomes for encampment residents.**

- **Lack of evidence of early engagement with Indigenous governments or organizations before encampment removal.**

- **Lack of public accountability for whether offered alternatives met residents' needs.**

- **Few positive deviations were found beyond some municipalities providing basic services on site, but even these did not fully resolve encampment needs.** These rare examples suggest that where Indigenous leadership or basic needs provision were attempted, outcomes might have been better, but they were short-lived or not replicated.

Indigenous Involvement in Encampment Responses: Examples and Promising Practices

Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in homeless encampments across British Columbia. Despite this, most BC municipalities have not formally involved local First Nations or Indigenous-led organizations in planning or decision-making around encampment responses. Courts have affirmed that municipalities must consult and accommodate Indigenous residents and Nations when encampments are on traditional territories, yet this duty is frequently unmet in practice.

AHMA's scan documented only a few municipalities where Indigenous organizations or First Nations played a notable role. Below, we identify those municipalities, describe what services or support Indigenous groups provided, summarize critiques they raised about encampment responses, and highlight potentially promising models or examples. Because our scan draws primarily on public sources and includes limited resident input, these examples of promising practices are provisional and should be validated with people with lived and living experience.

Chilliwack

Indigenous Involvement: In Chilliwack, local First Nations directly led parts of the encampment response. The Soowahlie First Nation took the lead in coordinating the encampment removal of a Chilliwack River encampment in April 2025. On another encampment site (Island 22), Shxwha:y Village worked with outreach teams and BC Housing to find shelter options for camp residents and donated to a local social support agency to assist people displaced by the camp closure. These actions provided tangible support, relocation assistance, basic needs, and funding in Chilliwack.

Kelowna

Indigenous Involvement: Kelowna's encampment responses included some Indigenous-led outreach efforts, but these were ad hoc and often constrained by the city's restrictive policies. The AHMA scan found no formal role for local Okanagan First Nations or the Métis Nation in Kelowna's encampment management. However, there were instances of Indigenous organizations providing support on the ground. Media reports from 2025 indicate that Indigenous cultural support workers and elders attempted to assist at OS4 by offering ceremonies and counselling. During an encampment operation in March 2025, members of an Indigenous wellness group were present to help residents pack and to perform smudging or prayers, but they were barred by authorities from entering the fenced area once the enforcement began.

The exclusion of Indigenous support workers drew criticism and exemplified the lack of Indigenous integration into Kelowna's response. It's likely that organizations such as the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society or Westbank First Nation outreach teams have been involved peripherally (e.g., visiting camps to connect Indigenous clients with services), but such involvement is not well documented in media or official plans.

Indigenous voices, alongside other advocates in Kelowna, have been sharply critical of the city's new encampment rules and encampment removal tactics. The forced displacement in spring 2025 where bylaw officers fenced off the camp, confiscated belongings, and imposed strict rules, was denounced by community groups for undermining the autonomy, health, and safety of unhoused people. Going forward, Kelowna would need to actively invite Indigenous leadership into the process to create a humane, rights based, and culturally safe model.

Penticton

The City of Penticton and the Penticton Indian Band announced a coordinated response to the Ellis Creek encampment in May 2025, marking one of the few formal partnerships between a municipality, a local First Nation, and the province in B.C. on homelessness response. The joint release emphasized collaboration and committed to ensuring that outreach and transition supports for unhoused residents reflect Syilx values and cultural safety principles. Through the agreement, the City and PIB pledged to coordinate outreach and relocation efforts with service providers, including ASK Wellness Society, Ooknakane Friendship Centre, and provincial housing teams. The City acknowledged PIB's role as a government partner, not merely a stakeholder, and committed to ongoing collaboration in planning long-term housing and homelessness initiatives. PIB representatives framed this cooperation as an assertion of jurisdictional responsibility and Indigenous leadership within their traditional territory.

The Penticton example is a potential promising practice in early Indigenous-municipal collaboration. It demonstrates how formal recognition of Indigenous government authority can shift encampment responses toward reconciliation and shared responsibility. The model could serve as a foundation for other municipalities to establish co-developed encampment and housing strategies with local First Nations, ensuring that responses on Indigenous lands are Indigenous-led, adequately resourced, and culturally safe.

Prince George

Indigenous Involvement: Prince George's encampments have seen extensive Indigenous involvement in both support services and advocacy. Indigenous health agencies like the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and leadership bodies like the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) also engaged by supporting harm reduction efforts and advocating for residents' rights. Notably, a coalition of Indigenous and peer organizations organized regular "Healing Fire" gatherings at Moccasin Flats, offering cultural support, food, and services to unhoused people. One such Healing Fire event in June 2023 was hosted by the Saik'uz First Nation alongside Carrier Sekani Family Services, Tl'azt'en Nation, and others, drawing hundreds of participants for drumming, meals, and wellness support. These efforts provided opportunities for culturally safe outreach and basic needs that the municipality itself was not providing.

Indigenous leaders in Prince George have been highly critical of the city's enforcement-heavy approach to encampments. The FNLC condemned the city's actions, such as forced camp evictions and denial of services, as breaches of Indigenous rights and bad-faith negotiation. The BC Assembly of First Nations (BC AFN) emphasized that a majority of encampment residents were Indigenous, with many survivors or intergenerational survivors of residential schools, and argued that treating the camp purely as a "public safety" problem was trauma-inducing and inappropriate. Indigenous advocates consistently pressed the city to provide basic infrastructure (heat, water, sanitation) and to follow the National Protocol for Homeless Encampments (a rights-based framework), rather than resorting to injunctions and police-led clearances. In response to these critiques, some short-term improvements occurred. A court temporarily barred evictions until shelter was offered, but ultimately the city obtained a court order in 2025 to close Moccasin Flats after offering limited shelter spaces. The Prince George case illustrates both the crucial support Indigenous groups provided and their advocacy for rights-based, culturally safe approaches, even as they condemned the harms of forcible evictions.

Smithers

Indigenous Involvement: In the town of Smithers, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre took on a leadership and coordination role, effectively filling a gap in municipal capacity. Dze L K'ant staff convened weekly "community tables" with various service providers. This regular meeting allowed agencies (housing, health, bylaw, etc.) to communicate and plan supports for unhoused people. The Friendship Centre also leads outreach efforts: their staff provides basic needs like food, appropriate warm weather gear, wellness checks, and storage for belongings, and they ensure culturally appropriate support is available. In practice, Smithers' encampment response has been Indigenous-led at the service level, with Dze L K'ant coordinating the response to individuals sheltering in public spaces.

Smithers had tried enforcing bylaws to restrict camping, but the Friendship Centre has emphasized non-punitive approaches. Dze L K'ant advocated for "alternatives to restrictive bylaw enforcement to prevent forced decampment" and for clearer communication among agencies and the municipality. The weekly coordination meetings led by the Friendship Centre are a model of proactive, community-based management that could be replicated elsewhere. A data gap noted in the scan is that beyond Dze L K'ant's efforts, there was no formal role for Wet'suwet'en First Nation or Métis Nation in policy decisions. While Indigenous service delivery is strong in Smithers, true shared decision-making power remains limited, and collaboration and support from the municipality is unclear.

Quesnel

Indigenous Involvement: In Quesnel, there was modest involvement by the Quesnel Native Friendship Society in providing services to encampment residents and advocating on their behalf. While details were sparse, the Friendship Society likely offered outreach to Indigenous individuals in the camp and liaised with local authorities about their needs. Importantly, no formal involvement by the local First Nations or Métis Nation BC was reported in Quesnel's encampment strategy.

Quesnel's encampment response saw minor Indigenous input and underscored the gap between what was provided and what Indigenous organizations say is needed (holistic, culturally informed care). Quesnel did partner with BC Housing to offer some shelter spaces, but those were limited, and many unhoused people were reported to have declined them.

Vancouver

Indigenous Involvement: The City of Vancouver's major encampments had relatively limited formal Indigenous participation according to the scan. Lu'ma Native Housing Society, an urban Indigenous housing organization, was involved primarily in outreach support at CRAB Park. Their outreach workers engaged with Indigenous residents to connect them to services, and they provided access to Elders, ceremony and cultural activities. There were also anecdotal reports of local First Nations members conducting ceremonial support at Oppenheimer Park, indicating some cultural presence on-site.

However, Indigenous groups were not included in the city's decision-making on encampment policy and response. Instead, much of the Indigenous involvement came in the form of public advocacy. The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), which represents First Nations leadership in BC, took a strong stance against Vancouver's encampment evictions. By late 2022, the UBCIC Chiefs passed Resolution 2022-63, calling on the City of Vancouver to work with local First Nations, frontline advocates, and Downtown Eastside residents to prioritize de-escalation and trauma-informed, culturally safe services rather than forced evictions. UBCIC and other Indigenous leaders repeatedly condemned forced encampment removal as oppressive and harmful, urging a co-developed, holistic approach to the homelessness crisis.

Indigenous leadership and organizations in Vancouver critiqued the city's heavy-handed enforcement and failure to include Indigenous perspectives. UBCIC described the 2023 Hastings encampment clearance as a continuation of oppression and dispossession of Indigenous people. They highlighted that many unhoused residents are First Nations and called the evictions "inhumane," violating the standard of free, prior, and informed consent (UBCIC, 2024). The lack of consultation with the three local Nations (Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh) was noted as a gap.

Overall, Vancouver's experience shows that Indigenous organizations provided some outreach and cultural support, while Indigenous leadership offered sharp critiques of the city's methods and put forward a vision for Indigenous-led, rights-based solutions. This advocacy itself could be the basis of a future model where the city co-develops encampment responses with First Nations, as called for by UBCIC.

Promising Practices

Across these cases, several promising approaches emerge where Indigenous involvement improved encampment responses or offered innovative solutions:

"Healing Fire" Gatherings, Peer Leadership and Infrastructure
Prince George

The monthly Healing Fires at Moccasin Flats, organized by Saik'uz First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, and others, illustrates a grassroots model of encampment support. These events provided food, warmth, cultural ceremony, and a sense of community to encampment residents, many of whom are Indigenous. Such Indigenous-led, peer-supported gatherings can build trust and connection to supports. Uniting Northern Drug Users Undoing Stigma (UNDU), an Indigenous-led, peer-run, grassroots drug user group, was also able to purchase an Atco office trailer with funds from FNHA to provide services to those living at Moccasin Flats. While not an official government program, these are promising practices that could be encouraged elsewhere.

Friendship Centre Coordination
Smithers

In Smithers, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre's role in convening service provider meetings has emerged as a potential model of coordinated response. By proactively bringing together all stakeholders under Indigenous leadership, the town can respond quickly to encampment issues and ensure culturally informed strategies are considered. This kind of "community table" approach led by an Indigenous organization could be replicated in other municipalities to improve communication and prevent crises. It exemplifies how empowering Indigenous organizations in leadership roles can strengthen overall outcomes.

Advocacy and Rights-Based Frameworks

The advocacy by Indigenous leadership councils (UBCIC, FNLC) provides a blueprint for municipalities. They called for trauma-informed, rights-based protocols,such as aligning with the Federal Housing Advocate's protocol on encampments and respecting UNDRIP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). The UBCIC resolution demanding a "co-developed, whole-of-government approach" with First Nations is essentially a model for governance: it means Indigenous peoples must be at the table from the start. The model here is one of meaningful consultation and shared decision-making as a best practice going forward.

First Nation Partnership
Penticton

The joint response between the City of Penticton and the Penticton Indian Band (PIB) emphasized cultural safety, respect for Indigenous rights, and coordinated outreach with ASK Wellness Society, Ooknakane Friendship Centre, and BC Housing. By recognizing PIB as a government partner rather than a stakeholder, Penticton modeled how municipalities can move beyond consultation toward co-governance and reconciliation-based encampment responses.

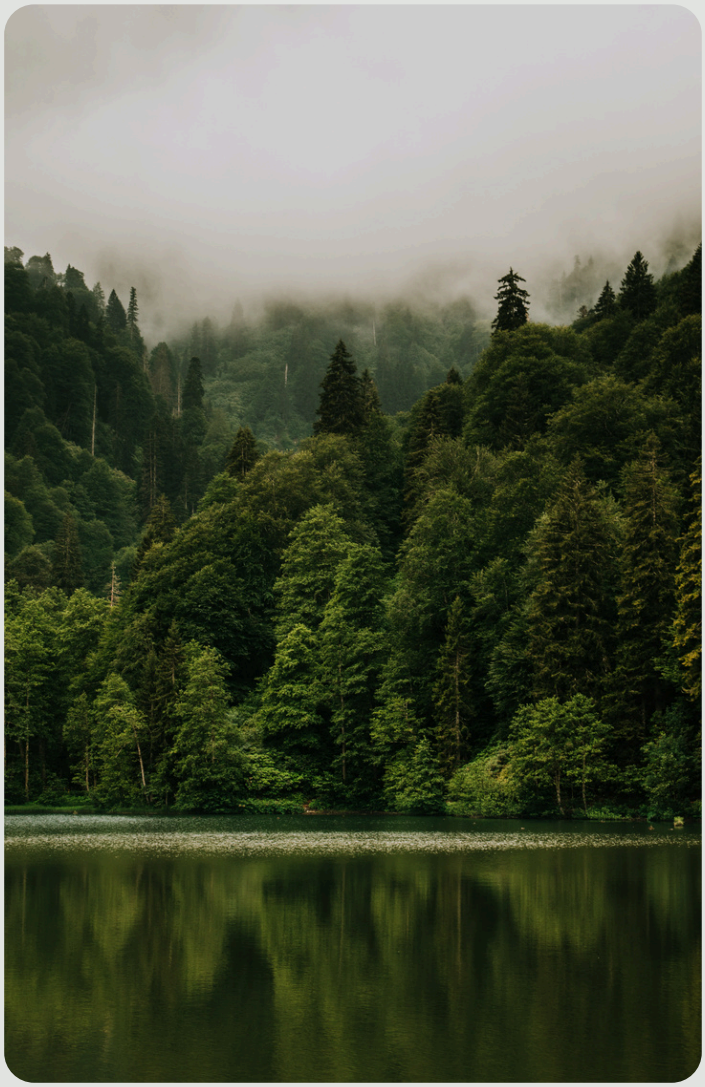
The above examples show that involving Indigenous organizations and First Nations can lead to more compassionate, effective encampment responses, whether by providing on-site services, guiding people into housing, or reframing the response around human rights. However, the AHMA scan makes clear that such involvement in B.C. has been inconsistent and often tokenistic. Most municipalities had no documented Indigenous input at all. Even where Indigenous groups stepped in, it was frequently reactive and informal, not as part of a structured, resourced, plan.

Based on AHMA's scan, only a handful of B.C. municipalities have actively involved Indigenous organizations or First Nations in their encampment responses. Those that did received crucial services from Indigenous groups, from basic needs provision to cultural supports, and heard pointed critiques urging more holistic, rights-based approaches. The promising models arising from these cases emphasize partnership, cultural safety, and Indigenous leadership.

The key moving forward is to learn from these examples and ensure Indigenous people are not just participants but partners in designing encampment solutions, and well-resourced and supported to do so.

Data & Encampment Scan Results by Municipality

The following municipalities are included in the Encampment Scan. To view the full details of each municipality, read the data and results through the link at the bottom of this page.



- Abbotsford
- Campbell River
- Chilliwack
- Cranbrook
- Dawson Creek
- Duncan
- Fort St. John
- Gibsons/Sechelt
- Kamloops
- Kelowna
- Langford
- Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows
- Merritt
- Nanaimo
- Penticton
- Port Alberni
- Prince George
- Quesnel
- Richmond
- Saanich/Saanichton
- Salmon Arm
- Smithers
- Surrey
- Terrace
- Vancouver
- Vernon
- Victoria

View and read the comprehensive list of results by municipality here.

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