

Safety

Winnipeg, like many cities in North America, has relied heavily on police agencies to provide public safety through methods of punishment, enforcement, and deterrence. At the same time, investments in services that address systemic inequalities, such as housing, transit, health, and recreation have not kept pace with a growing need, and in many cases have been pared back over the last three decades. This failure to address systemic inequities while relying heavily on punishment and enforcement does not create public safety, but instead can intensify trauma and damage the relationships that are the essential foundation of long-term transformation. By increasing resources for alternative community-based crisis supports and non-police emergency responses, as well as investing in addressing the roots of systemic inequality, we can build a model of public safety in Winnipeg that is trauma-informed, holistic, and focused on promoting health and human rights.

Diverting funds and re-defining safety

This budget begins by diverting 10 per cent of the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) budget (\$34 million) and reinvesting it in a holistic model of public safety that includes outreach, poverty reduction, housing, and harm reduction, among other areas. This is an overall small reduction for the WPS, leaving them with 23 per cent of the municipal budget, down from 28 per cent, but still well above the average of 15 per cent in comparable Canadian municipalities.¹



People hanging out in Central park / Alanna Yuen

Evidence continues to demonstrate that increases to police budgets have little effect on crime rates² and that “crime reduction as a goal does not necessarily have clear benefits to health and well-being.”³ Instead, public safety, crime reduction, and well-being are achieved by improving housing, education, employment, and reducing poverty,⁴ and by ensuring public space and public transportation are accessible.⁵ This involves investing in social housing and the preservation of low-income rental units, affordable transportation, strong recreation services for all Winnipeggers, meaningful harm reduction options, and mobile crisis medical response teams.

Furthermore, we can look beyond crime for other ways in which the City can ensure safety and well-being for residents. Systematic injustices continue to leave Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people targeted by violence and abandoned by the state.⁶ Both provincial and municipal environmental regulations are under-enforced leaving neighbourhoods contaminated with lead and other dangerous pollutants.⁷ Uneven enforcement of building codes leaves vacant buildings burning instead of providing critical housing.⁸ Pedestrians and cyclists are put in lethal situations which police intervention consistently makes worse.⁹

The existing system must start adopting decades of evidence-based recommendations that would directly prevent harm, violence, and death across the city.

Emergency response

A robust emergency response system is central to public safety, but police are not always the most appropriate responders. For example, wellbeing checks continue to be the most common event to which police are asked to respond,¹⁰ despite this consistently leading to criminalization, escalation, and even death for those in distress.¹¹ Police-led solutions like the WPS' Alternative Response to Citizens in Crisis (ARCC) program are insufficient because they still keep police, and police priorities, at the center of emergency response.¹² Instead, we can leverage the decades of community expertise in de-escalation, outreach, social work, and healthcare to implement a well funded civilian-first mobile crisis medical response team. Evidence from initiatives like San Francisco's Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT) show that these teams have had "widespread success in diverting individuals away from the criminal justice system ... [and providing] marginalized communities with access to culturally appropriate resources."¹³

Fund community-based outreach as a component of emergency services

As a June 2026 report to Mayor Gillingham's Office on 'Winnipeg's Community Crisis Response Model' notes, close to 10,000 annual calls to emergency services are related to "mental health challenges, substance use concerns, emotional distress, wellness related issues, and other non-emergent crises."¹⁴ Over the last decade, the number of emergency medical calls related to opioid overdose has increased thirteen-fold.¹⁵ Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service staff have repeatedly sounded the alarm over unsustainable workloads due to the volume of opioid related calls.¹⁶ These findings underline the need to fund a 'fourth pathway' of emergency response that directs calls to a robust, community-based set of outreach services.¹⁷

Outreach also serves as a critical bridge to housing and health care. Workers can help people obtain identification, apply for income assistance, access medical and mental health services, connect with addiction treatment, connect with culture and ceremony, and secure shelter or permanent housing.

Currently, the City of Winnipeg minimally funds Main Street Project's mobile outreach program to conduct wellness checks on people experiencing homelessness, distribute essentials, and connect people to health and social services. The Downtown Community Safety Partnership is funded by the City to connect with homeless people downtown, and this funding was expanded by the Province of Manitoba with a one-time grant for summer 2026.

Community experts estimate that a six-fold expansion of outreach is required to meet the demand for services across Winnipeg's neighbourhoods and to create outreach teams with specializations in mental health, housing, harm reduction, and other areas. This would allow outreach to meet those in need, build relationships, and prepare people who are interested in moving into housing to do so. Although the Province can play a role in funding the expansion of outreach services, the urgent need for outreach means the City cannot afford long delays to get this program started.

Given that 80 per cent of the homeless population in Winnipeg is Indigenous, the expansion in outreach services should be done in close partnership with Indigenous-led organizations. Outreach services to connect individuals with Indigenous-led healing programs are an essential component of holistic support.

A human rights approach to encampments

The City of Winnipeg's current encampment protocol treats visible homelessness as a problem to be moved rather than a human rights crisis to be solved. Restricting where people can shelter, issuing fines, or dismantling encampments without providing adequate housing does not end homelessness — it simply pushes people from one location to another, often making people less safe and harder for outreach workers to find. These actions can also result in the loss of personal belongings, medications, identification, and community connections, making it even more difficult for people to access housing and services. Research from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Office of the Federal

Housing Advocate emphasizes that encampments are a symptom of the failure to provide adequate, affordable housing, not the cause of homelessness.¹⁸

A human rights approach begins with recognizing housing as a fundamental human right. It prioritizes meaningful engagement with people living in encampments, respects their dignity and autonomy, and ensures that any actions taken are guided by the goal of securing safe, adequate, permanent housing. The City of Winnipeg must work closely with the Province of Manitoba on permanent solutions: increasing the supply of social and supportive housing, strengthening eviction prevention programs, raising income assistance to adequate levels, expanding mental health and addictions supports, and ensuring Indigenous-led housing solutions that recognize the disproportionate impact of homelessness on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Actions

- **The AMB will** reduce the WPS budget by 10 per cent to \$305 million. This would free \$34 million for a variety of evidence-informed measures preventing, reducing, and intervening in harm and violence, including the AMB's Five Point Action Plan on Winnipeg's Toxic Drugs and Homelessness Crisis.
- **The AMB will** invest \$16.3 million in housing, transportation, recreation, libraries, harm reduction, public spaces, and grassroots safety initiatives. Some investments will include:
 - Expand Winnipeg Transit's low-income bus pass system increasing the depth of subsidies from 50 per cent to 80 per cent (\$4.24 million)
 - Provide operational funding for Sunshine House's Mobile Overdose Prevention Site (\$300,000).
 - Provide operational funding for Amoowigamig to operate 24/7 or otherwise expand services (\$650,000).
 - Provide operational funding for community safety groups such as Mama Bear Clan (\$175,000).

- **The AMB will** implement a municipal mobile crisis medical response team independent of the police. This involves revising the ARCC program to align itself with models such as the San Francisco Street Crisis Response Team. This team will prioritize community leadership, Indigenous worldviews, and relational healthcare-based interventions (\$8 million).
- **The AMB will** fund a six-fold expansion of community-based outreach (from \$1.6 million to \$9.6 million) to unhoused people to meet the demand for services across Winnipeg's neighbourhoods. Outreach services will be considered and funded as a component of Emergency Services at the City of Winnipeg in partnership with non-profit organizations. (\$8 million).
- **The AMB will** fund 2 FTE to provide research and analysis on public safety initiatives in Winnipeg with a focus on understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the multitude of private, public, and volunteer sector organizations and co-create a public safety action plan with community. (\$210,000).
- **The AMB will fund** education workshops for City staff on a human rights approach to encampments and revised bylaw (\$10,000).

Notes

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- 2 Lee, YongJei et al. (2016). "Conclusions from the History of Research into the Effects of Police Force Size on Crime—1968 through 2013: A Historical Systematic Review." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 12, no. 3. Page 431–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9269-8>; Seabrook et al. (2023). "Police Funding and Crime Rates in 20 of Canada's Largest Municipalities."
- 3 Lorenc, Theo et al. (2014). "Crime, Fear of Crime and Mental Health: Synthesis of Theory and Systematic Reviews of Interventions and Qualitative Evidence." *Public Health Research* 2, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.3310/phr02020>
- 4 Graif, Corina et al. (2014). "Urban Poverty and Neighborhood Effects on Crime: Incorporating Spatial and Network Perspectives." *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 9. Page 1140–55. <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soc4.12199>; Imran, Mohammed et al. (2018). "Does Poverty Lead to Crime? Evidence from the United States of America." *International Journal of Social Economics* 45, no. 10. Page 1424–38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-04-2017-0167>; Lorenc et al. (2014). "Crime, Fear of Crime and Mental Health."
- 5 Lorenc et al. (2014). "Crime, Fear of Crime and Mental Health."; Vania Ceccato Nalla Mahesh, ed. (2020). "Crime and Fear in Public Places: Towards Safe, Inclusive and Sustainable Cities." Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429352775>
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- 8 Gerwing, Michelle. "'Same problems over and over': 2024 the worst year for vacant house fires in Winnipeg, expected to get worse." CTV News. December 11, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg/article/same-problems-over-and-over-2024-the-worst-year-for-vacant-house-fires-in-winnipeg-expected-to-get-worse/>
- 9 Winnipeg Police Cause Harm. (2025). "Safer Streets without Police." June 21, 2025. <https://winnipegpolicecauseharm.org/blog/safer-streets-without-police/>
- 10 Winnipeg Police Board. (2025). "The Environment for Policing in Winnipeg 2025." City of Winnipeg. Page 13. <https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/clerks/boards/WpgPoliceBoard/pdfs/boardpublications/2025/2025-environment-for-policing-in-winnipeg.pdf>

- 11** Harney, Niall. (2022). "Winnipeg at a Crossroads Alternative Municipal Budget." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2022/05/AMB%202022%20sm.pdf>
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