

# HOMELESSNESS AND SOCIAL COHABITATION IN MONTRÉAL

THE REPORT AT A GLANCE



## The iceberg of homelessness



## Mandate

In recent years, the homelessness crisis has emerged as one of the major social challenges facing Montréal. The considerable increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness is now at the heart of public and media debates. Their presence deeply concerns the public, which feels powerless, upset and sometimes unsafe. Also, the implementation of additional resources to support the influx of people experiencing homelessness can unsettle nearby residents (housed people, institutions and businesses).

It is in this context that the City of Montréal mandated the OCPM to conduct a public consultation on the “conditions for success aimed at ensuring the cohesive integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in Montréal neighborhoods.”

“ During street interviews conducted around the city, 92% of those questioned said they found the consultation necessary. ”

## General Reception

The consultation on homelessness in Montréal was generally well received, although many people—professionals, academics, people experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, and housed people—found that the consultation’s mandate was too narrow. Because of its limited authority over the issue of homelessness, the City has had to focus solely on social cohabitation and the implementation of resources. However, for many participants, this has the drawback of giving the impression that access to essential services must be subject to approval by housed citizens. Those participants stressed that cohabitation could not be addressed without assessing the homelessness crisis, and demanded actions to help people find a way out of homelessness. Finally, they reiterated that cohabitation and the prevention and reduction of homelessness are a collective responsibility that everyone must share.

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## Leadership Regarding Social Cohabitation and the Implementation of Resources

The commission determined that there is a major governance deficit regarding the prevention and reduction of homelessness. These governance shortcomings have important consequences: they limit the capacity for intervention, result in inefficient resource management, and lead to disengagement and exhaustion among front-line workers.

The commission believes that neither the problem of homelessness nor the issues of cohabitation that it entails can be resolved unless the three levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—establish a governance framework that is both clear in terms of the attribution of roles and responsibilities, and simple in terms of its implementation.

With respect to homelessness prevention and reduction policy, the commission calls on the Gouvernement du Québec to assume a strong leadership role. As for the City of Montréal, the commission recommends that it provides **“clear leadership in matters of social cohabitation pertaining to homelessness”** (Recommendation 2).

The City’s leadership role should also apply to the process of implementing new resources. Indeed, the commission found that the implementation of resources gives rise to both fears of inequity and misunderstandings caused by the lack of transparency regarding the implementation criteria. In addition, several organizations reported a lack of support during the implementation phase. Finally, it is essential to take into account the legitimate concerns of local residents during on-the-ground interventions and within procedural frameworks.

For these reasons, the commission recommends that the City, in its role as leader in matters of social cohabitation, uses **“all the tools at its disposal to facilitate and support the implementation of additional resources for homelessness”** (Recommendation 6) and establishes **“for each new resource, an implementation strategy based on a rigorous process”** (Recommendation 21).

## People Experiencing Homelessness as Citizens of Montréal

Many participants pointed out that cohabitation is, above all, about living together in a given space. Living in Montréal is not just about owning property or holding a lease; it is about feeling part of a community, building one’s own places of significance, and making use of the City’s public services and spaces. Even without stable housing, people experiencing homelessness use the parks, streets and libraries, access neighbourhood services, and forge social ties within their communities. As such, they are citizens of Montréal on an equal footing with housed residents and should enjoy the same rights.

Yet, both official discourse and media coverage symbolically exclude these Montrealers from the civic community. This exclusion fuels their stigmatization, calls into question their collective belonging, weakens their local networks, and obstructs their participation in civic life. In order to enable “conditions for success aimed at ensuring the seamless integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in Montréal neighbourhoods,” the commission recommends that the City of Montréal **“formally declare—for example, through a city council resolution — that people experiencing homelessness are citizens of Montréal,”** that the City **“undertake all intervention concerning people experiencing homelessness with explicit recognition of their citizenship,”** and that it **“minimize practical and administrative barriers to the exercise of their rights, including the right to vote”** (Recommendation 1).

**The report contains  
22 recommendations**

# PORTRAIT OF HOMELESSNESS IN MONTRÉAL



## A rising issue

Approximately 3149 visible people in 2018; approximately 4690 visible people in 2022

In 2022 :

- 59% say they suffer from mental health problems
- 45% say they suffer from a medical condition or physical illness
- Aboriginals: 0.6% of the Montreal population — 13% of the visible homeless population
- gender minorities: 0.3% of the Montreal population — 5% of the visible homeless population
- sexual minorities: 4% of the Montreal population — 13% of the visible homeless population

Source : *Dénombrement 2018-2019, doc. 4.17. Dénombrement 2022-2023, doc. 4.18.*

## Some Key Issues

### 1 Hidden Homelessness

Hidden homelessness includes people who do not have the right to stay in a place, whose accommodation is temporary and who live, for example, with family and friends, in their car or in a long-term public institution. It is difficult to obtain representative data on hidden homelessness, but it is thought to be more widespread than visible homelessness, particularly among women, who are particularly vulnerable in public spaces.

### 2 Dangerousness and Disturbance

The issue of safety, which is at the heart of public concerns, reveals a tension between dangerousness and disturbance. If the visible presence of people experiencing homelessness gives rise to a feeling of insecurity, it is often less because of genuinely threatening behaviour (dangerousness) than because of situations that disrupt the usual order of public space (disturbance). Incivilities, gatherings or visible crises disturb daily life without always representing a danger. So, we must ask ourselves: do people experiencing homelessness represent a real danger, or is it simply their visibility that disturbs? In reality, they are far more often vulnerable than threatening. It is essential to distinguish between what is a real threat and what expresses our own discomfort in the face of exposed poverty. Only then will we be able to avoid purely repressive responses and prioritise solutions that restore tranquillity while respecting the rights of the most vulnerable.

### 3 Territorial Equity

The historical concentration of services in certain neighbourhoods no longer corresponds to the reality of homelessness, which now affects the whole area. This uneven distribution fuels the saturation of resources in central areas, creates local tensions and leaves many people without appropriate support elsewhere in the city.

Territorial equity means rethinking the location of resources according to the real needs of people on the move: where they live, where they have been, where they are rooted. It is not enough to scatter services randomly. They must be accessible, integrated and relevant to the communities concerned. The city must be seen as a shared space in which each sector takes its share of responsibility.

### 4 Communication and Social Acceptability

The implementation of resources cannot succeed without open, transparent and continuous communication. All too often, tensions arise less from the projects themselves than from a lack of information, dialogue and preparation with the communities concerned. Communicating means more than simply announcing: it means creating spaces where the needs of people experiencing homelessness are explained and understood, and where the concerns of local residents are heard. In this way, harmonious implementation is based on genuine relationships that foster trust and support, in the service of urban solidarity.



# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

## A rigorous and inclusive approach

The OCPM followed a structured, transparent and inclusive approach in carrying out its mandate on homelessness and social cohabitation. The objective was to ensure a faithful representation of the realities experienced by gathering the opinions of both housed people and people experiencing homelessness.

To achieve this, the OCPM innovated and increased the number of ways to consult and engage with the population in order to reduce barriers that could prevent people from participating. These included:

- public sessions
- mobile hearings
- street interviews
- written and digital contributions

This diversity has made it possible to gather the views of a wide range of people: local residents, small business owners, community organisations, experts, institutions and citizens.

In addition, the OCPM went out to meet people experiencing homelessness - in neighbourhoods, encampments, rest areas and other places where they live - to hear their stories directly, give them a chance to express themselves and ensure that their experiences were at the heart of the process.

[ocpm.qc.ca/itinerance](https://ocpm.qc.ca/itinerance)

## ACTIVITIES

### 52 PRECONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

reaching 170 people

### 3 CITIZEN CONVERSATIONS

reaching 101 people

### 1 PRESENTATION of an excerpt from a play

reaching 405 people, both in-person and online

### 15 STREET INTERVIEW LOCATIONS

reaching nearly 300 people

### 67 OPINION PRESENTATIONS

during 7 hearings for roughly 1320 minutes of exchange with the commissioners

### 65 OPINION PRESENTATIONS FROM PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

during 5 mobile hearing sessions (encampments and resources)

### 114 WRITTEN OPINIONS totalling roughly 1,320 pages

### 19 TESTIMONIES audio, video and drawings

### 71 THEMATIC OPINIONS

## STATISTICS



**173** in-person attendees



**2,820**  
online attendees



**204**  
online opinions



**3,900**  
people reached



**910** citizen contributions