

MEETING
IN THE
MIDDLE
SEVENTH
ANNUAL
GATHERING
SUMMARY REPORT

2025

Land Acknowledgement for Toronto



We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.



Introduction

The following report summarizes key themes, reflections, and feedback shared at the Meeting in the Middle (MITM) 7th Annual Gathering, held on January 29, 2025, at the TASSC Gathering Place (660 Dundas Street East, Units 2 & 3).

The annual gathering is a central accountability mechanism within the ongoing partnership between the Toronto Community Advisory Board (TICAB) and Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS). It provides a structured forum to reaffirm commitments, assess progress across the seven commitments outlined in the [Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan](#), and identify priority areas requiring continued or enhanced action to address Indigenous homelessness in Toronto. This year's meeting was also joined by the Housing Secretariat representing shared commitments with TICABs.

The Engagement Strategy and Action Plan remain a living framework that evolves in response to community input, system pressures, and emerging priorities. The annual gathering ensures that progress is reviewed transparently and that future actions remain grounded in Indigenous leadership, partnership, and shared responsibility.

We acknowledge the late Frances Sanderson and recognize her many contributions to the City and to advancing this work. Her leadership and commitment continue to influence the alignment and partnership between TICAB and TSSS.



Culture and Ceremony

Since the inaugural Meeting in the Middle (MITM) gathering in 2018, creating a space that is respectful of and grounded in Indigenous ceremonial and cultural protocols has remained central to the annual gathering. The MITM gathering provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships between the Toronto Community Advisory Board (TICAB) and Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS), while reaffirming the shared commitment to addressing Indigenous homelessness in Toronto through partnership and accountability.

The 7th Annual Gathering opened in a good way with an opening prayer and smudge led by Elder and Knowledge Keeper Larry Frost. The ceremony grounded the discussion in unity, respect, and shared understanding. The opening also included an acknowledgment of Frances Sanderson.

Opening remarks were delivered by Steve Teekens, Chair of TICAB, and Gord Tanner, General Manager of TSSS, the gathering was facilitated by Lindsay (Swooping Hawk) Kretschmer, who welcomed participants to the TASSC Gathering Place and guided the group through reflective dialogue and forward-looking discussion.

The gathering concluded with closing remarks by Grandfather Larry Frost and a drumming led by Steve Teekens.



This year's the bundle exchange Between Gord Tanner, TSSS and Steve Teekens Native Men's Residence occurred during a visit to Sagatay in April 2026

Impact of *Meeting in the Middle*

Through facilitated discussion and interactive Mentimeter engagement, participants reflected on progress made over the past year in advancing the MITM commitments. The “Year in Reflection” session captured collective insights on what is working well, where challenges persist, and where additional action is required to better meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness.

Mentimeter responses identified partnership, respect, collaboration, transparency, and accountability as core principles that continue to define Meeting in the Middle. When asked whether commitments to the city are being upheld, most respondents indicated “Yes,” with others selecting “Somewhat” or “Unsure,” and no respondents selecting “No.” When rating overall progress across the seven commitments, most participants identified Good Progress, with some indicating Moderate Progress and one identifying Strong Progress.

Participants also highlighted tangible advancements influencing their assessment of progress, including the 20% funding commitment toward Indigenous-led initiatives, progress on new Indigenous shelter developments, and strengthened engagement processes. At the same time, Mentimeter responses identified ongoing gaps and systemic pressures, including funding constraints, resource limitations, and administrative processes that impact pace and implementation.

The group collectively acknowledged the continued growth of the partnership between TSSS and TICAB over the past decade. Participants emphasized that Indigenous communities must remain meaningfully engaged in problem-solving processes and that Indigenous homelessness must be addressed through Indigenous-informed and Indigenous-led approaches.

There was a shared recognition that each annual gathering builds on prior years of learning and relationship-building. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to convene in a structured forum to engage in transparent dialogue, assess progress openly and identify clear priorities for the year ahead.

Reflecting on the Previous Year

Below is a summary of the reflections from the previous year summarized under the 7 *MITM* commitments.

Commitment 1: Learning & Development (Cultural Knowledge)

Participants emphasized that cultural knowledge remains foundational to Meeting in the Middle. Mentimeter responses highlighted themes of education and culture, knowledge sharing, and ongoing learning, alongside calls for dedicated time and strengthened training approaches.

Progress in 2025 included the delivery of Land Back training, contributions to public education materials, and the launch of standardized BRASS training to support system-wide consistency.

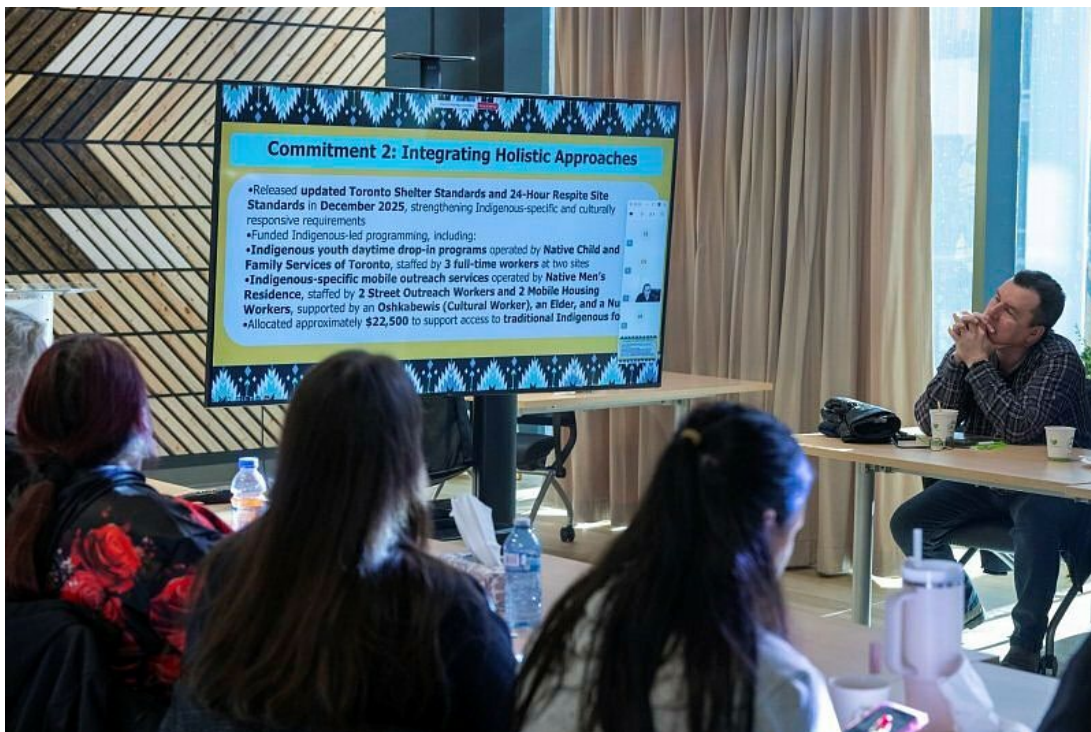
While progress was acknowledged, participants noted that cultural competency remains uneven across the system. Feedback reinforced the need for mandatory, continuous training and improved onboarding processes to ensure all staff have a shared baseline understanding. Sustaining institutional knowledge and embedding cultural learning into everyday practice were identified as ongoing priorities.

Commitment 2: Integrating Holistic Approaches

Participants identified holistic approaches as an area of meaningful progress. Mentimeter responses emphasized relationship building, education and culture, honouring ceremony, and embedding cultural practices into service delivery.

In 2025, this was reflected through updated Toronto Shelter Standards, investments in Indigenous-led programming, mobile outreach, and access to traditional foods.

Participants noted that these efforts represent a shift toward integrating Indigenous-informed practices within policy and operations. At the same time, feedback indicated the importance of ensuring these approaches are applied consistently across the system and continue to be guided by Indigenous partners.



Commitment 3: Supporting Capacity Building

Capacity building was strongly associated with tangible progress. Mentimeter responses highlighted funding changes, co-development, Indigenous-led shelter programs, and infrastructure development as key indicators of success.

2025 advancements included the continued implementation of the 20% Indigenous infrastructure commitment, progress on Indigenous shelter development, and the selection of Indigenous operators through the Expression of Interest process.

Participants identified these as significant milestones demonstrating movement toward Indigenous-led service delivery and long-term system capacity. At the same time, broader system pressures such as housing supply and development timelines were noted as ongoing constraints affecting the pace of progress.

Commitment 4: Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful engagement was consistently identified as one of the most impactful areas in 2025. Mentimeter responses emphasized regular engagement, listening, relationship-building, and Indigenous-led approaches as core strengths.

In 2025, this included Indigenous-led engagement in shelter development, ongoing consultation with TICAB, and contributions to strategic planning and data processes.

Participants acknowledged improvements in engagement practices and collaboration. However, feedback also identified opportunities to strengthen:

- Clarity of roles across divisions
- Frequency of engagement beyond annual gatherings
- Communication on how input informs decisions

These findings reinforce the importance of structured, ongoing engagement processes supported by clear feedback loops.

Commitment 5: Employment Practices

Participants recognized the importance of Indigenous representation within the system. Mentimeter responses highlighted lived experience, Indigenous staff supports, and workforce development as key themes.

Progress in 2025 included continued participation in the Indigenous Youth Research Associate Program, sustained Indigenous positions, and nearly \$1M in investments supporting Indigenous employment pathways.

Participants emphasized that Indigenous staff contribute to credibility, accountability, and culturally responsive service delivery. Continued focus on recruitment, retention, and leadership development was identified as necessary to support long-term workforce sustainability.

Commitment 6: Opportunities for Collaboration

Collaboration across Indigenous organizations, City divisions, and allied sectors was identified as an ongoing strength. Mentimeter responses highlighted partnerships, co-development, advocacy, and cross-sector coordination as key elements of progress.

In 2025, this included coordinated outreach initiatives, enhanced Indigenous-led outreach teams, and collaboration across health, violence-against-women, and corrections sectors.

At the same time, participants noted that administrative and funding processes can create barriers to effective collaboration. Streamlining processes and improving accessibility for Indigenous partners were identified as areas for continued improvement.

Commitment 7: Action & Accountability

Participants reflected positively on progress related to action and accountability. Mentimeter responses highlighted themes of transparency, reporting, and ongoing review, alongside an emphasis on ensuring that progress is clearly communicated and accessible.

In 2025, accountability was advanced using the Meeting in the Middle Framework to support consultation, including quarterly updates shared with TICAB and the tracking of implementation actions across commitments. Progress also included efforts to strengthen data governance and transparency practices, supporting clearer oversight of system performance and outcomes.

Participants noted that accountability is strengthened when progress is visible, measurable, and regularly reviewed. At the same time, feedback identified the need to continue improving consistency in reporting and ensuring that updates are clearly aligned with community priorities and shared in a timely manner.

Overall Reflection

Mentimeter results indicate that 2025 was characterized by “progress,” “positive,” “commitment,” and “momentum,” reflecting a shift from planning toward implementation.

Across all seven commitments, participants identified:

- Tangible progress in funding, infrastructure, and programming
- Strong relationships and collaboration as a foundation for success
- Ongoing structural and operational challenges that require continued attention

Overall, 2025 was viewed as a year of measurable implementation and system alignment, with continued focus required on sustaining momentum, strengthening coordination, and advancing Indigenous-led approaches across the system.



Goals Moving into the Year Ahead

Using mentimeter participants were asked to identify collective goals and priorities they felt were necessary to address for 2025.

Cultural Knowledge

- Support frontline City staff to take part in Indigenous cultural competency and safety training, reflecting Mentimeter feedback on the need to increase awareness and understanding.
- Offer educational opportunities on urban Indigenous history and the role of Indigenous housing and service providers, aligning with calls for continued learning and knowledge-sharing.

Holistic Practices

- Continue improving how TSSS collaborates with Indigenous partners to strengthen coordination of shelter, housing and support services, reflecting Mentimeter themes of engagement, collaboration, and connection.
- Use an intersectional lens to address the complex and overlapping factors impacting Indigenous community members, aligning with feedback emphasizing holistic and person-centered supports.

- As new Indigenous shelters are built, ensure collaboration with Indigenous providers in the design of programs, services, and system management, supporting Indigenous-led approaches.

Capacity Building

- Continue to expand Indigenous shelter capacity by developing new shelters, reflecting Mentimeter priorities related to affordable housing and increased resources.
- Identify priority service gaps, including Indigenous harm reduction-focused spaces, aligning with feedback on targeted and responsive supports. Support ongoing discussions on Indigenous-led governance and autonomy in shelter operations, reflecting themes of self-determination and Indigenous leadership.
- Explore Land Back approaches to housing and service delivery, aligning with Mentimeter emphasis on land, ownership, and long-term sustainability. Continue to work alongside Indigenous providers to ensure Indigenous housing remains a priority.

Employment Opportunities

- Improve experiences of Indigenous staff within the City of Toronto, including mentorship opportunities and access to resources that support professional growth and development.
- Strengthen Indigenous representation and workforce support, reflecting Mentimeter themes of supportive environments and capacity building.

Opportunities for Collaboration

- Collaborate on new and existing programs and services to better align with the needs of Indigenous clients, reflecting Mentimeter themes of partnership, collaboration, and coordinated action.
- Ensure investments focused on encampments support Indigenous clients experiencing unsheltered homelessness, aligning with feedback emphasizing advocacy and targeted supports.
- Support Indigenous partners in the implementation of federal encampment funding and broader advocacy efforts.
- Create more Indigenous housing opportunities that are deeply affordable for clients exiting homelessness, reflecting Mentimeter priorities around affordability and housing access.

- Increase participation of Indigenous providers in shelter development opportunities, including the Expression of Interest process.
- Collaborate to streamline administrative processes for applications and reporting, aligning with Mentimeter feedback on simplified processes and improved accessibility.



Appendix A: Participants and Contributors

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Larry Frost, Elder & Knowledge Keeper

Annual Gathering Facilitator:

Lindsay Kretschmer, Executive Director, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council

Participants:

Members from the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB), Toronto Indigenous Community Entity (ALFDC), and Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) and Housing Secretariat were in attendance.