

# Dignity and Agency

*Identifying Unmet Goods and Services in Vancouver's Hastings Corridor*

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# About the Author

**Nathanel Eguale** is a Master of Public Policy student at Simon Fraser University, and a graduate of the University of British Columbia with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Commerce. As an Ethiopian-Canadian, he brings a unique perspective to his work. His research in the Hastings Corridor focuses on identifying unmet needs in goods and services through direct engagement with community members.

Nathanel expresses gratitude to SFU CERi, Community Impact Real Estate, Exchange Inner City, Matt Hessey, Landon Hoyt, and all the research participants for their invaluable support and contributions.

***We respectfully acknowledge that this work takes place on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Coast Salish peoples.***



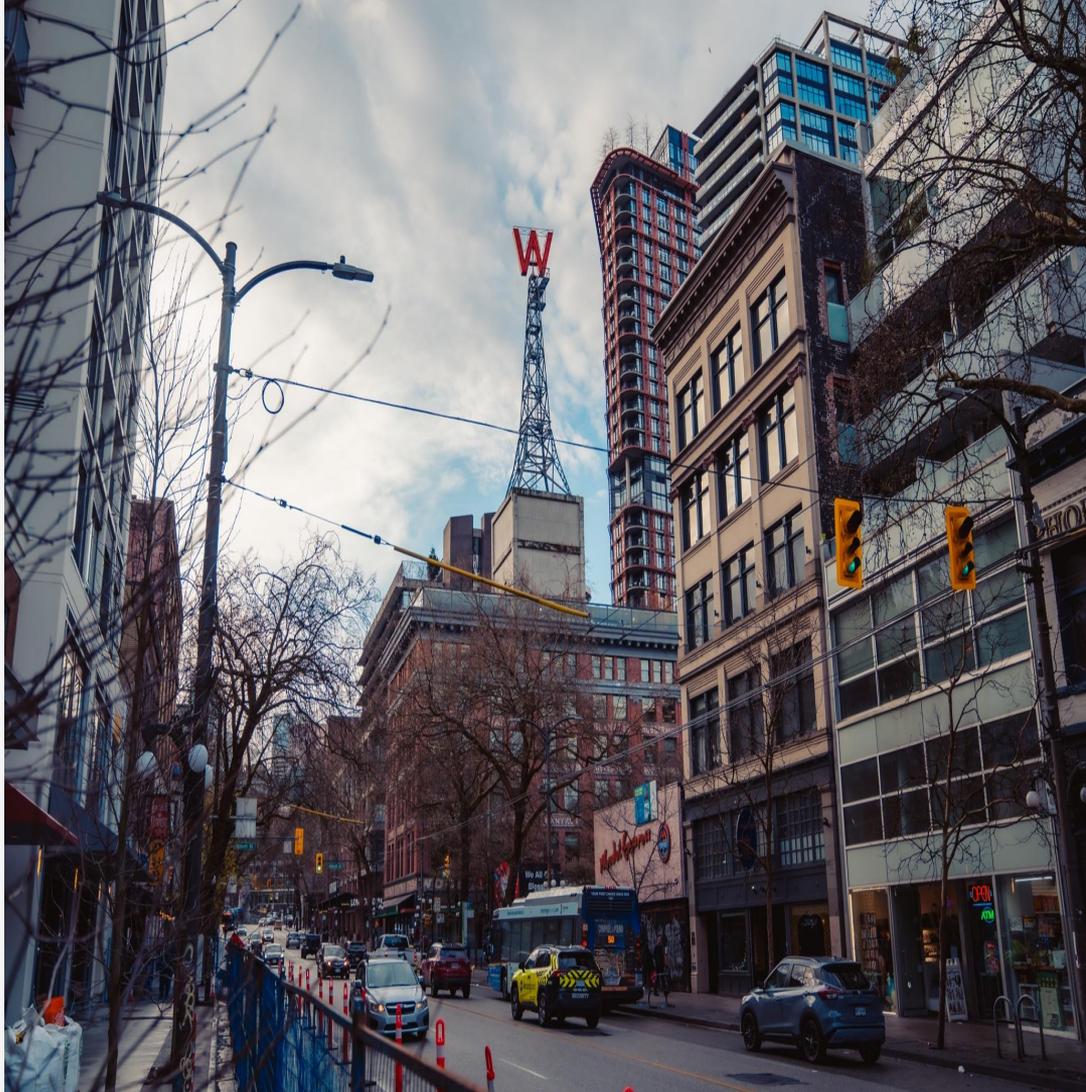
# Executive Summary

This **community-based research** highlights key gaps in goods and services identified through interviews, surveys, and focus groups with civil servants, local businesses, local property owners and real estate groups, non-profit executives, and residents.

Participants pointed to a need for:

- **Nutritious Food**
- **Social Spaces**
- **Health and Fitness**
- **Household Goods**
- **Casual Clothing**
- **Employment Opportunities**

**These gaps reflect critical areas for economic and social development to improve overall community well-being.**



# The Objectives and Community-Engaged Research

**The primary objectives of this research is to identify gaps in goods and services,** while also anticipating future needs that support sustainable community development.

## **Community-Engaged Research:**

This research places a strong emphasis on **community engagement**, across the Downtown Eastside. We consulted:

- Civil servants
- Local businesses
- Local property owners and real estate groups
- Non-profit executives
- Residents

## **Partner Organizations:**

- City of Vancouver
- Community Impact Real Estate
- Exchange Inner City
- Hessey Consulting + Architecture
- HxBIA (Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association)
- SFU Community-Engaged Research Initiative



# Methodology

This research utilizes:

- **Semi-structured interviews**

27 Interviews consulted experts, including civil servants, local business owners, local property owners and real estate groups, and non-profit executives focusing on gaps in affordable goods and services.

- **Focus groups**

A focus group with 13 residents from the Exchange Inner City – Resident Advisory Council (RAC), explored lived experiences and systemic barriers.

- **Surveys**

The survey engaged 60 Binnery Project members, asking which goods and services they sought outside their neighborhood.



# Community Engaged

## Foundations and Organizations

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- **Vancity Community Foundation**
- **A Better Life Foundation**
- **Vancouver Chinatown Foundation**
- **Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House**
- **Carnegie Community Centre**
- **City of Vancouver (City Council, and Planning Department)**

## Community members of the Downtown Eastside

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- **Binners' Project (Survey Study)**
- **Exchange Inner City – Resident Advisory Council (Focus group study)**

## Mission and Support Services

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- **Union Gospel Mission**
- **Mission Possible**
- **Embers**
- **First United**
- **PHS Community Services**
- **Heart and Tattoo Society**
- **Downtown Eastside Women's Centre**
- **Binners' Project**
- **PACE society**

## Restaurants

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- **Calabash**
- **Pidgin**

## Property and Real Estate

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- **Community Impact Real Estate**
- **Lowtide Properties**
- **Local independent property owners**

## Business Improvement Associations (BIA)

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- **Hastings Crossing BIA**
- **Chinatown BIA**
- **Strathcona BIA**
- **Gastown BIA**

## Methodology

# Map of Engagement



-  Mission and Support Services
-  Foundations and Organizations
-  Property and Real Estate
-  Restaurants
-  Business Improvement Associations
-  Community members of the Downtown Eastside

**Methodology**

# Summary

## Themes

Overarching neighbourhood themes found in this research include:

- **Dignity and Agency**
- The **Root Issues** of the Downtown Eastside
- Establishing a **Social Return** through local businesses and services for the Hastings Corridor

## Findings

We interviewed businesses, non-profits, and others:

- *What do you see as missing in the Downtown Eastside from the categories of businesses and services?*  
**59% said nutritious food, 46% said social life, 41% said health and fitness.**
- *What goods and/or services do people travel outside of the neighbourhood for?*  
**47% said affordable one-stop shops, 18% said groceries, 13% said household goods.**
- *How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?*  
**Local business investment (supports and incentives), addiction and mental health, and community spaces were referenced the most as future gaps in discussions.**



# Summary: Findings Continued

## We surveyed residents from the Binnars' Project:

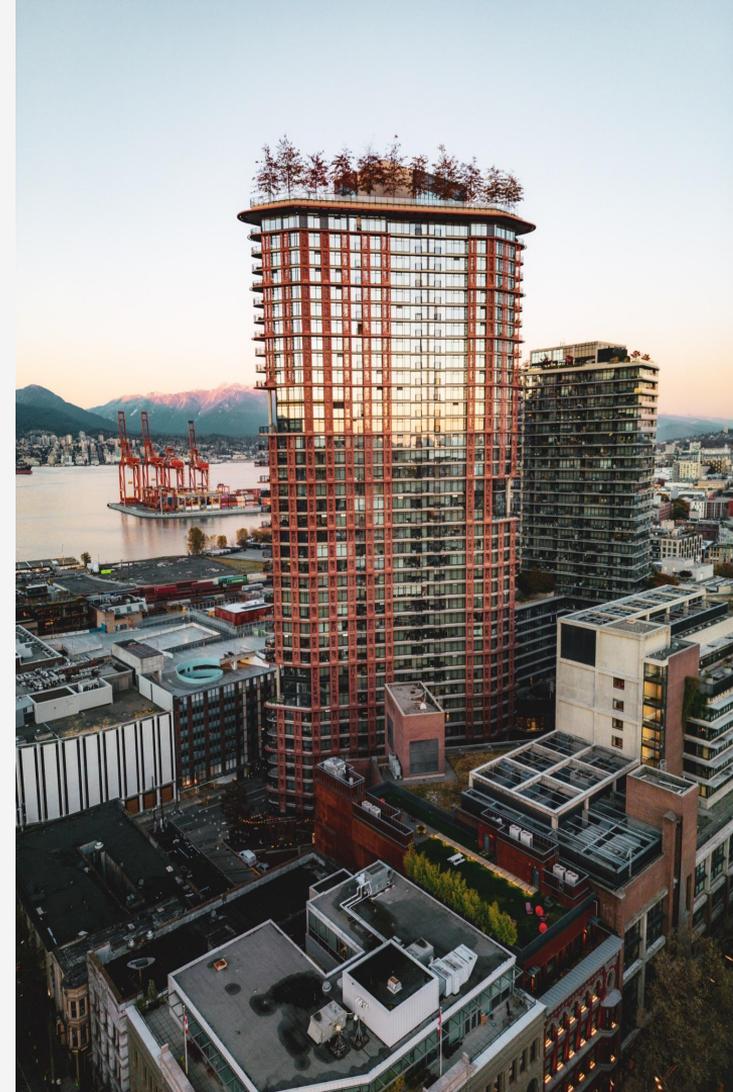
*What goods and/or services do you travel outside of the neighbourhood for?*

- **21%** of respondents said affordable groceries
- **19%** said clothes
- **18%** said healthcare

## We conducted a focus group with Exchange Inner City's Resident Advisory Council:

### Findings include:

- Noticeable store and service closures such as **laundromats, affordable cafes, pet services, and Army and Navy.**
- Residents travel outside the Hastings Corridor for **groceries (emphasis on fish and meat products), food banks, massage and acupuncture services.**
- In the future, residents want **community gardens, employment centres, and storage facilities to store belongings, a need exacerbated by housing insecurity.**



# Neighbourhood Themes

1. **Dignity and Agency**
2. **Root Issues**
3. **Social Return**



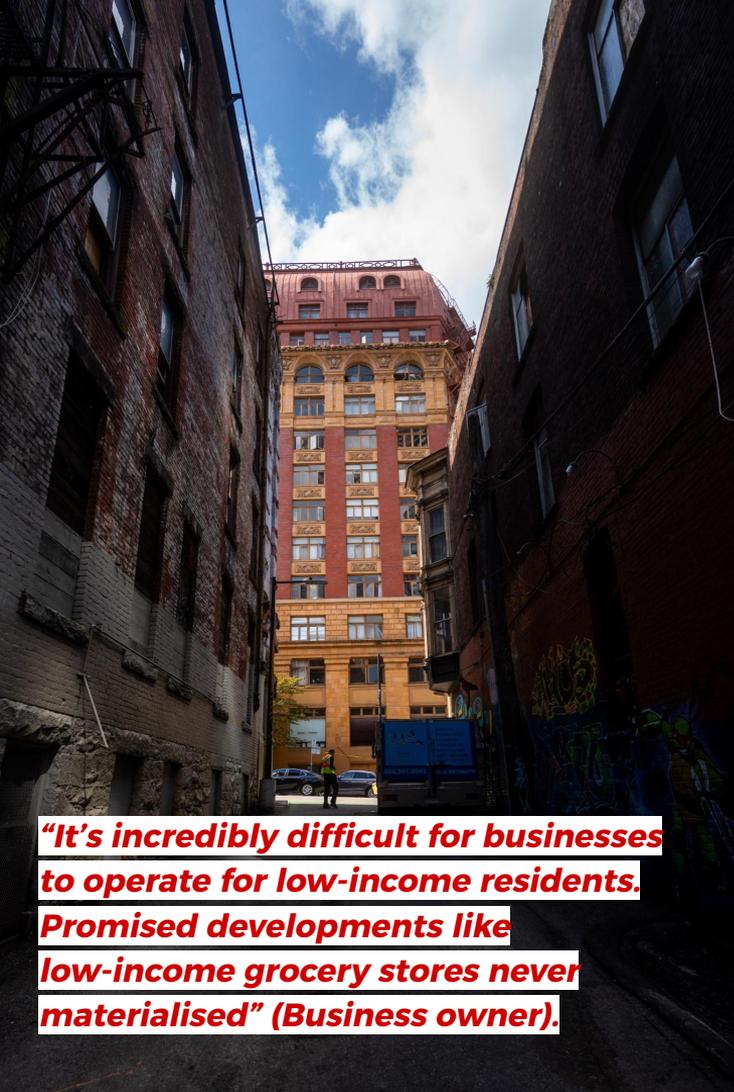


***“People in the community want some sense of dignity in their lives. It really comes down to choice in the kinds of goods and services they desire” (Non-profit executive).***

# 1. Dignity and Agency

**A recurring theme in this research is the importance of businesses and services that respect individuals’ dignity and agency, particularly regarding food, clothing, and hygiene.**

- For example, residents want food they can pay for, and express the need for programs and services that gives them more autonomy and choice in local food options.
- Overall, participants express a desire for resources that foster a sense of independence over charity-based options.



***“It’s incredibly difficult for businesses to operate for low-income residents. Promised developments like low-income grocery stores never materialised” (Business owner).***

## 2. Root Issues

**A sustainable future for the Hastings Corridor requires addressing systemic challenges that hinder both businesses and residents.**

### Barriers for Businesses

- Participants highlight that serving low-income residents has become increasingly unsustainable due to limited purchasing power among local customers, and high operating costs amidst the unique community challenges (e.g. storefront cleanliness, and security). This financial strain limits businesses’ ability to effectively cater to a low-income demographic.

### Systemic Issues

- Participants, particularly long standing small businesses and non-profits, emphasised the community’s noticeable increases in addiction and mental health challenges post-pandemic, stating, ***“trauma counseling for addiction and mental health is one of the most critical missing services in the neighborhood” (Business owner).***

### 3. Social Return

Participants emphasised the importance of creating social value that provides tangible benefits for residents. **Discussion points include:**

- **Non-Market Commercial Rent:** Highlighted as crucial for incentivising entrepreneurs to start and sustain businesses in the Downtown Eastside. Participants also noted the need for more BIA support to manage higher security and cleanliness costs.
- **Peer Work Programs:** Identified as an effective way to support workforce re-entry while fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.
- **Living Wage Jobs:** Emphasised by participants as essential for ensuring stability, dignity, and long-term economic engagement.

**Social enterprises such as Community Impact Real Estate can balance economic growth with meaningful support for vulnerable residents, creating opportunities for long-term stability and systemic change.**



***“There needs to be a strategy of recruitment for the gaps in services and the businesses that will serve residents. It’s important to consider businesses that provide social value alongside economic growth” (Non-profit executive).***

# Findings

## 1. **Community Interview:**

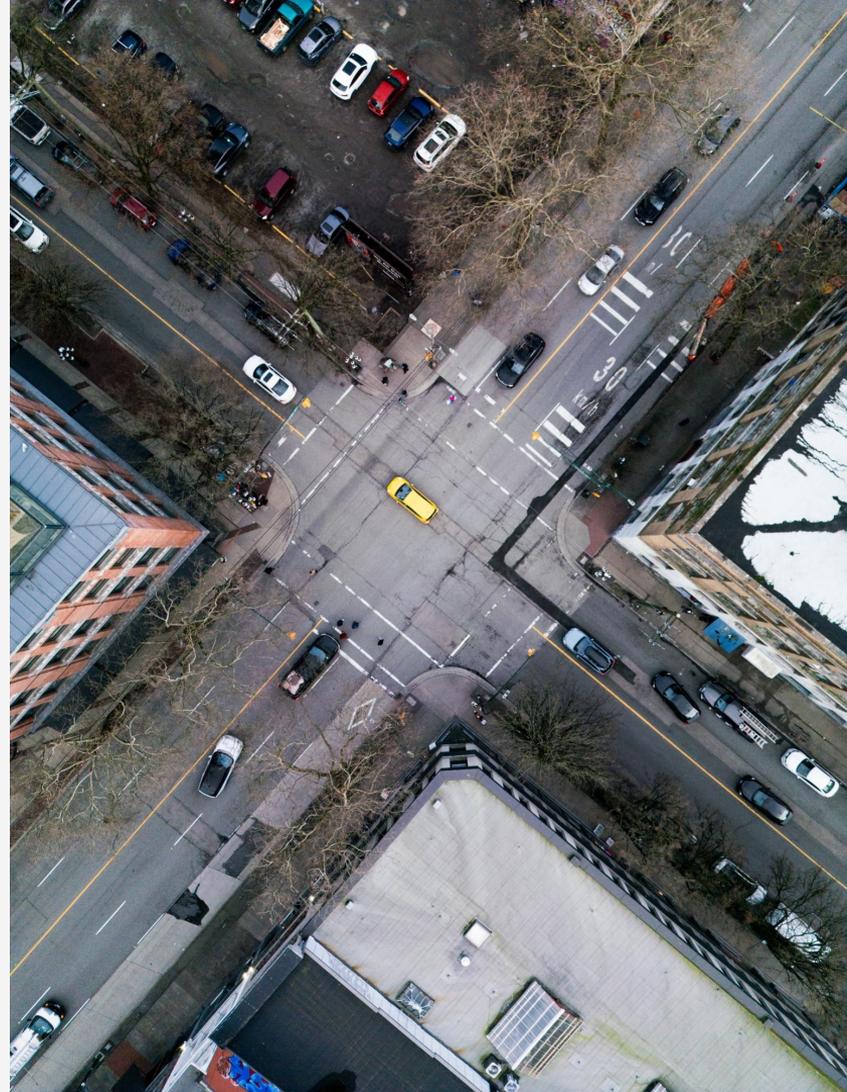
- **Q1.** What do you see as missing in the Downtown Eastside from the categories of businesses and services?
- **Q2.** What goods and/or services do people travel outside of the neighbourhood for?
- **Q3.** How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?

## 2. **Focus Group:**

Exchange Inner City – Resident Advisory Council (RAC)

## 3. **Survey Study:**

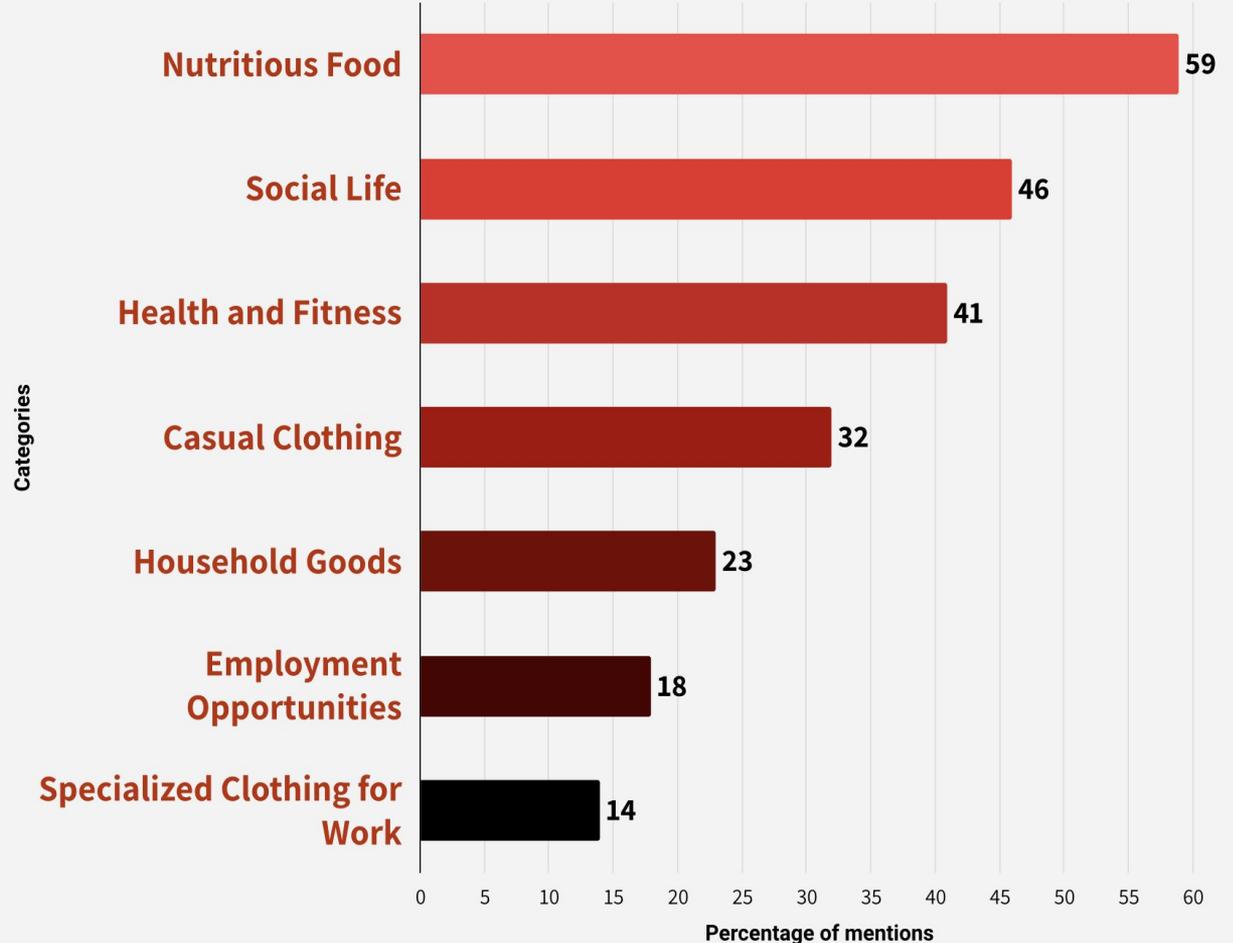
Binners' Project Study



## Community Interview:

**Q1.** What do you see as missing in the Downtown Eastside from the categories of businesses and services?

We engaged with community leaders such as civil servants, local businesses, local property owners and real estate groups, and non-profit executives in the Downtown Eastside about the Hastings Corridor to identify missing goods and services. — These were our selected categories.



*Percentages represent the proportion of participants who mentioned each category. Since participants could mention multiple categories, totals can exceed 100%. This applies to all charts displayed.*



## 59% of participants mentioned nutritious food as missing

Participants highlighted the need for businesses and services that prioritise food security, affordability, and accessibility. **Key discussion points include:**

- **Fresh Food Grocers:** A lack of access to grocers offering fresh, high-quality produce and other nutritious items was consistently highlighted.
- **Affordable Dine-In Options:** Participants emphasised the absence of affordable restaurants that provide balanced meals for those who prefer or **need** dine-in options. Housing insecurity and a lack of kitchen appliances in living spaces exacerbate this need. Dine-in options that had \$4-6 meals in menus are emphasised as missed in the community.
- **Moving Beyond Charity:** A recurring theme was the desire for food options that transition away from a charity-based model. Residents expressed a need for dignity in food access.

***“Affordable dining options would make such a difference, somewhere people can eat without feeling judged. We need more places where people can buy fresh fruits and vegetables without having to leave the neighborhood”***  
***(Non-profit executive).***



***“We need places where everyone feels welcome—somewhere to relax, talk, and just be part of the community. A community garden would be great where people can get hands on with the community and really feel like they are apart of something.” (Non-profit executive).***

## 46% of participants mentioned social life as missing

Addressing this gap can improve mental well-being, and enhance the overall sense of belonging for residents. **Key discussion points include:**

- **Affordable Diners, Bars, and Cafes:** Residents emphasise the need for affordable indoor spaces where they can gather, share meals, or have casual conversations.
- **Community Centres:** Non-profit executives and residents highlighted the absences of an accessible community centre, recreational activities/events, and informal meetup locations that promote inclusivity. While the Carnegie Community Centre exists, understaffing and capacity issues, according to those who manage the centre, limit its effectiveness.
- **Cultural and Recreational Spaces:** Participants noted the potential for spaces to celebrate local art, Indigenous culture, and diversity.



***“We need more places where people can take care of themselves, whether it’s a shower, doing laundry to have clean clothing for work and leisure, or just staying active in a gym”***  
***(Non-profit executive).***

## **41% of participants mentioned health and fitness as missing**

**Addressing this gap would empower residents to take better care of their health and hygiene. Key discussion points include:**

- **Hygiene Facilities:** Public access to clean and safe bathrooms, showers, laundromats, and pet care services are highlighted as a critical need.
- **Fitness and Wellness Options:** Participants emphasised the importance of gyms, yoga classes, and other affordable fitness centres and programs.
- **Healthcare Access:** Gaps in walk-in clinic services, mental health support, and urgent care facilities were frequently cited as barriers.

**The absence of these facilities undermines efforts to foster dignity and well-being in the community.**



***“There are some clothing options, but I do think the community would benefit from variety and choice, clothing that works for work, for daily life, and for staying active” (Non-profit executive).***

## **32% of participants mentioned casual clothing as missing**

**Addressing this gap would empower residents to meet clothing needs with dignity, whether for work or recreation. Key discussion points include:**

- **Affordable Over Free:** Participants expressed a preference for affordable clothing that allows them to make their own purchasing decisions, fostering a sense of autonomy and empowerment.
- **Diverse Clothing Options:** A recurring request was for a wider range of clothing styles to meet various needs, including business casual attire, everyday wear, and athletic apparel.



## Further Results: Household Goods, Employment Opportunities, and Specialized Clothing for Work

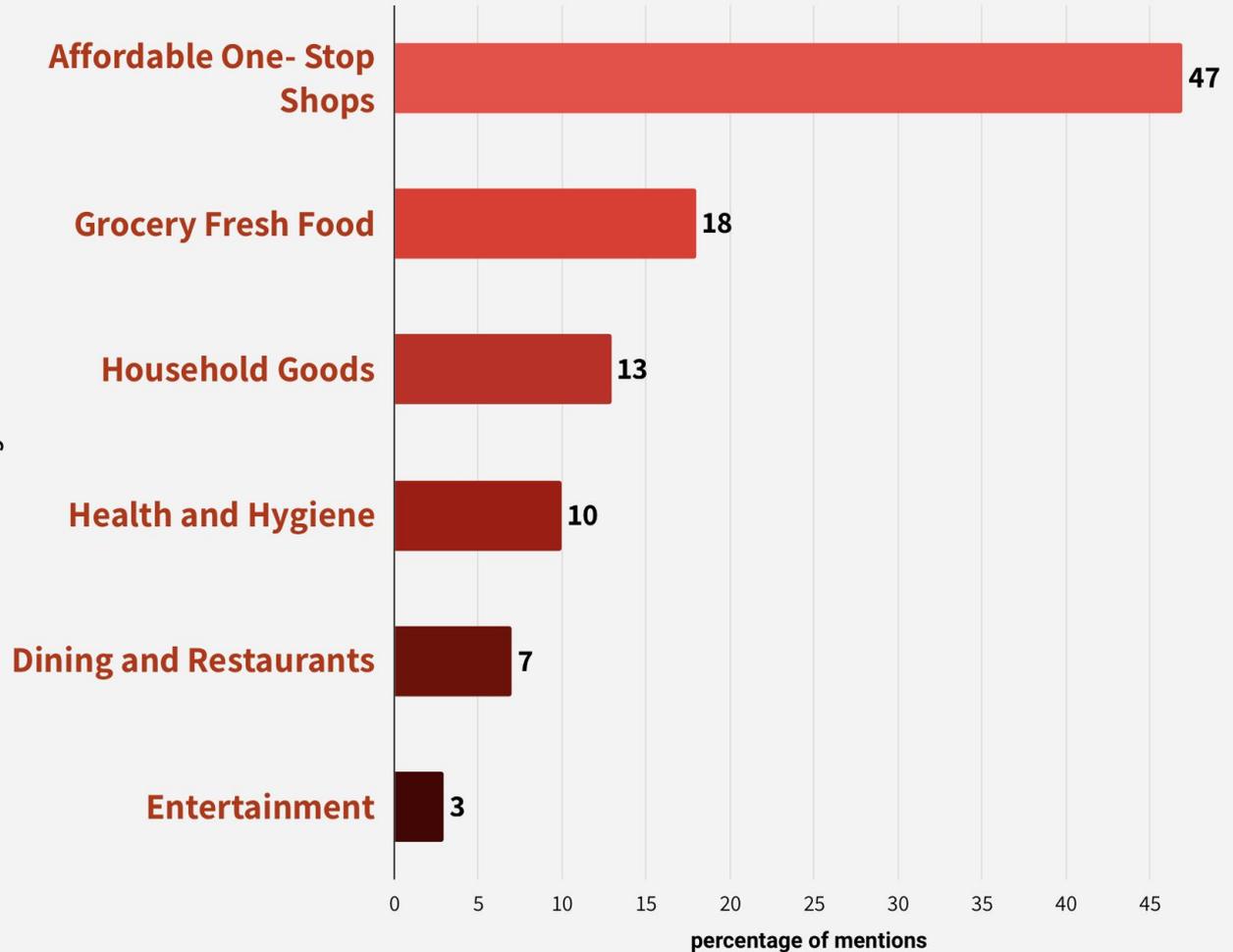
- **23% of participants mentioned household goods as missing:** Residents struggle to find items like cleaning supplies, kitchenware, and personal care products locally at accessible prices.
- **18% of participants mentioned employment opportunities as missing:** Residents in the Hastings Corridor expressed the value of organizations that assist in connecting them with short-term work, and voice a need for more sustained employment opportunities.
- **14% of participants mentioned specialized clothing for work as missing:** This includes items like safety shoes, work boots, and other attire suited for work.

## Community Interview:

Q2. What goods and/or services do people travel outside of the neighbourhood for?

This reflects the **community's concerns** from civil servants, local businesses, local property owners and real estate groups, and non-profit executives about accessing a range of essential goods in the neighborhood. Anchor stores such as Walmart or Army and Navy typically provide multiple categories of items under one roof. — These were emerging categories from interview discussions.

categories





***“There’s no future for the area without local business investment, it’s one of the only ways things will improve”  
(Business owner).***

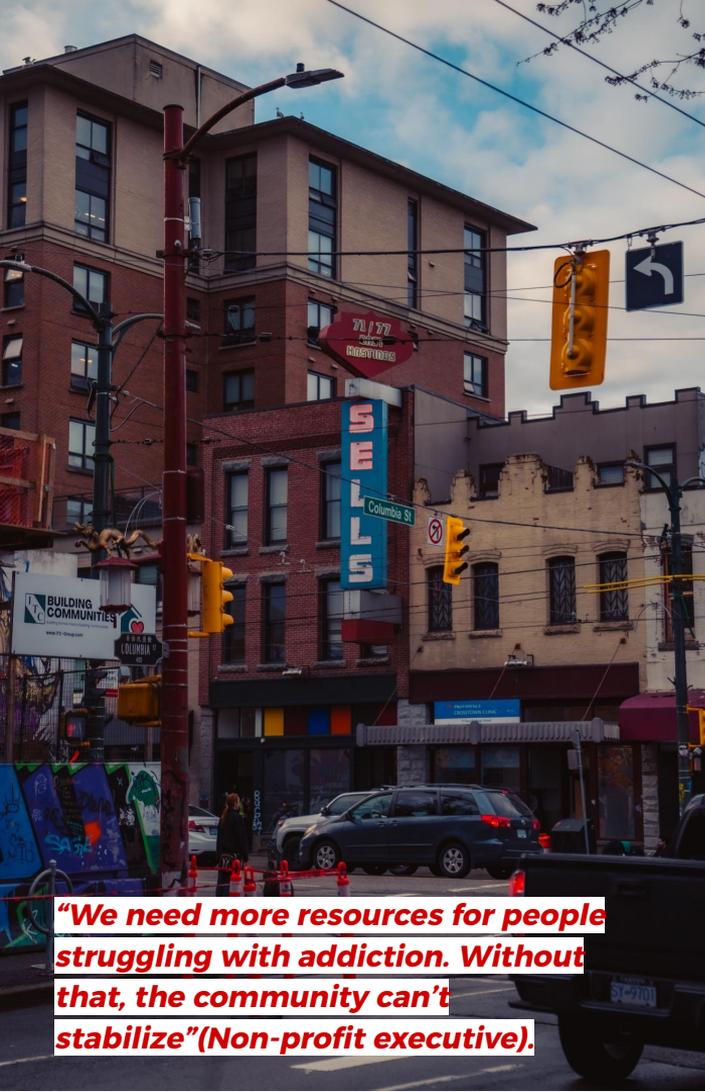
## **Community Interview Q3:**

How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?

### **Local Business Investment**

**Sustainable community growth hinges on fostering a supportive environment for local businesses by addressing barriers such as safety.**

- According to participants, the perception of safety is a strong concern. Participants stressed that positive change in the street activity of the Downtown Eastside is needed to attract future local business investment.
- Discussion had also emphasised growing pressures that local businesses face because of safety concerns. More local businesses are needing to invest in security to deal with theft and storefront cleanliness in the Hastings Corridor.



***“We need more resources for people struggling with addiction. Without that, the community can’t stabilize”(Non-profit executive).***

## **Community Interview Q3:**

How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?

### **Healing Services (Addiction, Mental Health Services, Urgent Care Services)**

**Participants call for additional addiction recovery and mental health support services to help address immediate community well-being needs.**

- Among participants, there is a strong emphasis on community healing. Adding services that approach mental health and recovery from a community lens through encouraging group dialogue, is valued.
- Participants say future gaps in urgent care facilities, and drop-in support centers will exacerbate the instability in the community.



***“The neighborhood would benefit from experiential spaces—like museums or community-based art installations. There should be spaces for arts and culture where people can connect and feel like they belong”(Non-profit executive).***

## **Community Interview Q3:**

How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?

### **Community Development**

**Investing in community-centered development can bridge social divides and enhance the neighborhood’s cultural identity.**

- Participants identified a need for more community-centered development in the future, particularly with spaces that celebrate art, culture, and inclusivity.
- Experiential spaces, such as community gardens, museums, or indigenous art installations, were seen as opportunities to foster connection and belonging.

# Exchange Inner City Focus Group

The Exchange Inner City focus group consists of 13 participants from the Resident Advisory Council. The focus group is concentrated on the perspective of those who have lived experience in the community.

Participants expressed needs in various areas:

Noticeable store and service closures:

- Laundromats
- Affordable cafes: Residents noted Lost + Found Cafe as an example of a cafe that offered a community space for art, book launch events, and a variety of food options. – This is tied with the needs for social spaces in the community.
- **Army and Navy**
- Pet Services: Supplies, food, and Veterinarians

What residents are traveling outside the community for:

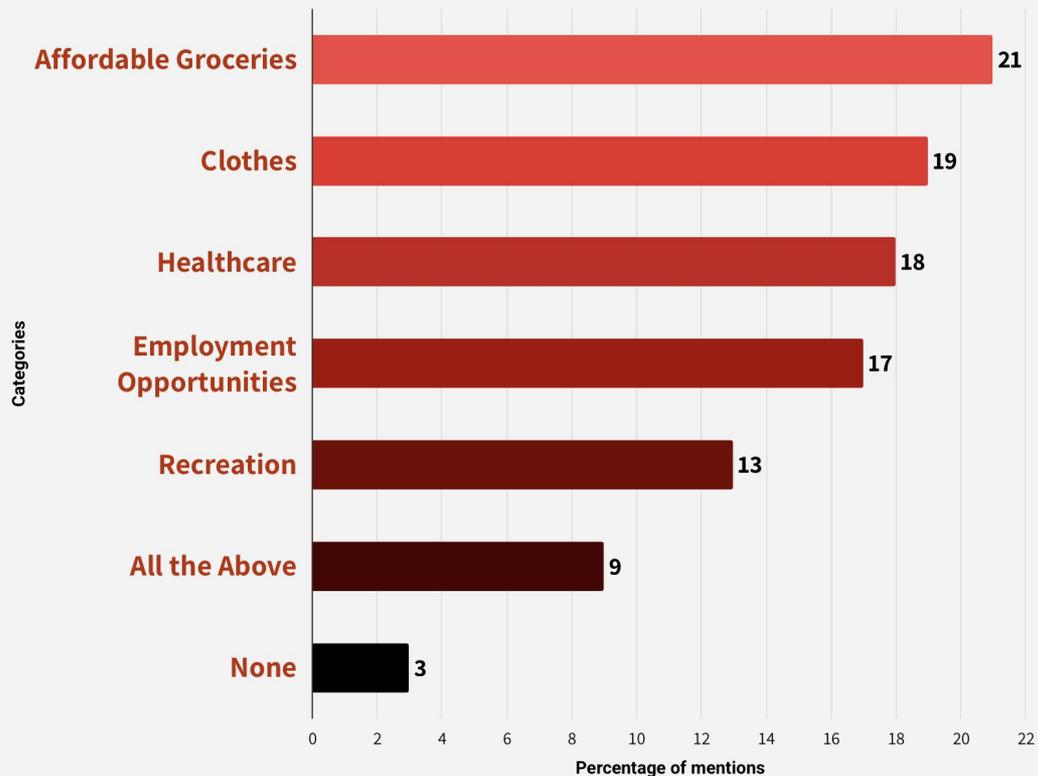
- Clothing
- Groceries: In particular fish and meat products. – There is Chinatown, but residents voice the cultural differences make it hard to shop there. Residents also say offerings at local markets, such as Sunrise Market, are limited in options.
- Food banks
- Massage and acupuncture services

Most valuable future services in the opinion of community residents:

- Community gardens
- Community centre with amenities
- Storage centres for residents. – Residents expressed that they have limited room in living spaces such as SROs (Single Room Occupancies).
- Employment centres

**Survey Study:** What goods and/or services do you travel outside of the neighbourhood for from the categories provided?

**Binners' Project Response:**



# Key Takeaways

The Hastings Corridor in Vancouver faces a shortage of accessible and affordable goods and services that meet residents' basic needs. Key contributing factors include the closure of anchor stores and essential services, high cost of living and rent, and safety.

**This has reduced local options for necessities such as:**

- **Nutritious Food**
- **Social Spaces**
- **Health and Fitness**
- **Household Goods**
- **Casual Clothing**
- **Employment Opportunities**

Many residents rely on low incomes or social assistance, making it challenging to afford goods that are available outside the neighborhood. As a result, the lack of affordable businesses nearby forces residents to travel outside the community to meet their needs, further straining their financial resources and access to everyday essentials.



# Interview Questions

*What is the community group that your organisation/business/group serves or represents?*

*Could you share some examples of valuable DTES-serving services and businesses that have closed down in the past? (you can mention services or businesses in your recent memory, whether it is from a year ago or ten years ago)*

- o What value did they provide?*
- o Are local residents getting their needs met in their absence, if so, how?*

*What goods and services are local residents needing to travel outside of the DTES to find?*

- o Who is meeting these needs?*

*I'd like to talk to you about gaps in the DTES related to affordable goods and services in a number of categories. Those categories include nutritious food, casual clothing, specialized clothing for work, employment opportunities, health & fitness, social life, and household goods.*

- o What do you see as missing in the DTES from the categories of businesses and services?*
- o Are there areas where these gaps are really obvious? (Street names are helpful)*

*How do you see the neighbourhood as changing, and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?*

*What other storefront services and businesses do you believe would help reduce the systemic barriers community members in the Hastings Corridor face?*

*Is there anything I've missed with my questions that you would like to comment on?*

# Focus Group Questions

*Intro question: how are you doing today, do you live in the area? have you travelled to be here today? (one or two sentences)*

*Could you share some examples of services and businesses that you saw as valuable in the DTES, that have closed down in the past? (you can mention services or businesses in your recent memory, whether it is from a year ago or ten years ago)*

- o What value did they provided to you?*

*In the absence of the missing goods and services, what are you doing to get your needs met?*

*In your experience, what goods and services are you currently needing to travel outside the DTES for?*

*Who is meeting these needs? (please share some examples of the services and business you go to outside the DTES)*

*I'd like to talk to you about gaps in the DTES related to affordable goods and services in a number of categories. Those categories include nutritious food, casual clothing, specialized clothing for work, employment opportunities, health & fitness, social life, and household goods.*

- o What do you see as missing in the DTES from the categories of businesses and services?*

- o Are there areas where these gaps are really obvious? (Street names are helpful)*

*How do you see the neighbourhood as changing and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?*

*In your view, what are the three most valuable businesses and services you would like to see in the DTES? (I would like you to answer in terms of what could immediately impact your ability to meet your needs).*

*Could you explain your reasoning behind these recommendations? (if you have specific examples with services and business in the DTES please include them)*

*Is there anything I've missed with my questions that you would like to comment on?*

# Survey Question

What goods and/or services do you travel outside of the neighbourhood for from the categories provided?

Select all that apply:

**Affordable groceries**

**Clothes**

**Healthcare**

**Employment opportunities**

**Recreation**

**All the Above**

**None**

**Other:**

*The short survey was designed to capture the attention and opinion of residents who attend the weekly Bidders' Project meeting. These meetings are 20 minutes in length. We were allocated seven minutes to brief residents on the project while paper copies of the survey were distributed. Surveys were filled out by residents and then collected at the end of the meeting.*