



Building Inclusive
Communities:
A Common Vision

2024

Community Actions - Reflections and the Way forward



INSIGHTS FROM AHC'S 3RD ANNUAL BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES FORUM

JANUARY 14, 2025

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNIT
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OVERVIEW

On October 9, 2024, Action for Healthy Communities (AHC) hosted its 3rd Annual Building Inclusive Communities Forum- Community Actions, Reflections, and the Way Forward bringing together nearly 120 attendees, including leaders from 25 grassroots organizations, community developers, and officials from and cross-sector officials. Participants delved into the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach as a strategy for fostering community resilience. This report underscores key insights from the event, emphasizing opportunities for future learning and actionable strategies to dismantle systemic barriers, promote inclusivity, and empower equity-deserving grassroots groups and organizations in the Greater Edmonton Area. The forum served as a dynamic platform for dialogue and collaboration, striving toward a more inclusive and cohesive society.



With a strong focus on building community resilience using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, the forum became a vital space for networking, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. Attendees explored strategies to empower Edmonton's most vulnerable communities, highlighting the strengths within these communities and mobilizing resources to address systemic barriers.

A highlight of the morning was the "Voices from the Communities" segment, which featured a video presentation showcasing the vital work of grassroots groups. A community showcase followed, where 15 organizations presented their initiatives, offering attendees opportunities to connect, share experiences, and spark new collaborations. This session provided an invaluable networking opportunity, enabling participants to share initiatives, exchange knowledge, and explore collaborative possibilities.



OPENING REMARKS

Prayers, Opening Remarks, and Land Acknowledgment

The day began with a land acknowledgment and an opening prayer, honoring the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. Aftab Khan, Executive Director of AHC, delivered the opening remarks, setting the stage for a day filled with meaningful dialogue.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Building Resilience with Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)



Dr. Jonathan Massimi delivered the keynote address, focusing on the principles of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which emphasizes building on community strengths rather than addressing deficits. He introduced key concepts:

- Citizen-led initiatives.
- Asset-based strategies.
- Place-based focus.
- Relationship-driven development.
- A welcoming attitude.

Dr. Massimi highlighted the importance of curiosity over helpfulness and identified six types of community gifts: individuals, associations, institutions, local economies, spaces, and stories. His address set the tone for the day's discussions, encouraging participants to recognize the latent potential within their communities.

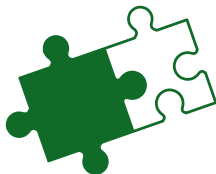
INTERACTIVE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Participants engaged in breakout sessions facilitated by community leaders, exploring topics such as systemic racism, asset mapping, resource mobilization, and sustainability. These interactive discussions incorporated hands-on exercises:



ASSET INVENTORY ANALYSIS

Participants mapped and analyzed community assets to identify strengths and areas of opportunity.



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Groups shared community initiatives and identified ways to enhance them using ABCD principles.



REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Attendees explored how to apply ABCD concepts to expand community-building efforts.



Facilitated by community leaders from equity-deserving groups, the sessions encouraged rich dialogue and collaboration. Facilitators included Eureka Isemede (Congo Canadian Youth Association), Naz Aitkulova (Kyrgyz Association of Canada), Cathy Shi (Edmonton Chinese Writing Club), Lal Jan Afridi (Circle International), Tabitha Biel Lauk (The Young Learners Africa Foundation), Houda Trabelsi (Tunisian Women Society of Alberta), Manita Thapa (WMEN: Women - Mindful, Empowered, and Nurturing), and Hussein Abdu (Eritrean Canadian Multicultural Association of Canada).

These interactive discussions allowed participants to engage deeply with the ABCD framework, generating innovative ideas on how to use community assets to address vulnerabilities

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Driving Change



A plenary session, Empowering Youth Leaders through Community Action, showcased the pivotal role of youth in community development. The session celebrated the contributions of young people in Edmonton's anti-racism efforts. The session spotlighted the power of youth leadership and the importance of investing in young changemakers. Highlights included:

- Encouraging youth-led initiatives that amplify their voices.
- Bridging intergenerational gaps by connecting youth with elder wisdom.
- Addressing the holistic well-being of youth through economic, social, and cultural support.

The session emphasized investing in youth as changemakers for a more inclusive future.

PANEL GROUP DISCUSSION

How Do Current Socio-cultural and Economic Conditions Impact the Determinants of Well-being for Residents of Edmonton?

A dynamic panel discussion, moderated by Alphonse Ahola, Executive Director of FRAP, explored the question, "How do current socio-cultural and economic conditions impact the determinants of well-being for residents of Edmonton?"

Panelists for the forum included:



DR. LEANNE HEDBERG
DIRECTOR, SOCIAL INNOVATION
INSTITUTE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
MACEWAN UNIVERSITY



JOANNE CURRIE
DIRECTOR, GRANTS
& COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
ECF



BARHET WOLDEMARIAM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CFRAC



ALPHONSE NDEM AHOLA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FRAP



VANESSA ZEMBAL
INTERIM EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, ESPC



The panelists explored the complex relationship between socioeconomic conditions—such as income inequality, employment status, housing, and access to education and healthcare—and their impact on overall community well-being. Panelists from diverse fields (economics, social work, and community advocacy) share insights and strategies to foster resilient communities.

PANEL GROUP DISCUSSION

How Do Current Socio-cultural and Economic Conditions Impact the Determinants of Well-being for Residents of Edmonton?

Panelists emphasized the need for collaboration, equitable resource distribution, and the recognition of community assets. They also highlighted the importance of cultural spaces for newcomers and diverse populations

The panelists provided valuable insights into the current challenges and potential solutions for community well-being in Edmonton:



Homelessness Concentration: The downtown core was identified as an epicenter of homelessness, highlighting the need for targeted support in urban areas. Affordable housing policies and social housing support systems are lacking as vital to fostering a sense of security and improving the well-being of low-income families.

Indigenous Disparities: Panelists noted a disproportionate distribution of challenges among Indigenous populations, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

Resource Distribution: There was a call for more equitable distribution of resources to address growing community needs as the city expands (employment, housing, education, and access to other relevant services).

Collaboration Emphasis: Multiple panelists stressed the importance of partnerships and collaboration among community organizations and the institutions to maximize impact and resources, where cumulative strengths are amplified. A synergistic approach of both grassroots and top-down approaches to community development must be adopted.

Asset-Based Approach to Newcomers: A significant insight emerged regarding the approach to newcomers. The panel emphasized that newcomers should not be viewed solely as recipients of help. Instead, the focus should be on how they can contribute to improving the city. The key question posed was, "What assets do you bring to the table?" This perspective aligns with the asset-based community development approach, recognizing newcomers as valuable contributors to community growth and development.

Community and Social Support Networks: What role do social support systems play in fostering resilience in communities facing economic hardship? How can communities leverage cultural and social capital to improve well-being?

Role of Cultural Spaces: Cultural spaces were highlighted as significant assets in strengthening communities, particularly for newcomers and diverse populations as they play a multifaceted and invaluable role in community development, particularly in fostering resilient and inclusive communities.

These spaces serve as:

- Centers for cultural preservation and expression.
- Hubs for community gathering and support.
- Platforms for showcasing community strengths and assets.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Synthesis



This event demonstrated ABCD approach to community development, blending theoretical concepts with practical application and diverse perspectives from various stakeholders. It provided participants with valuable insights and tools to foster more inclusive and resilient communities in Edmonton. By combining community Development model frameworks with on-the-ground experiences, participants were offered a holistic view of community well-being and effective strategies to foster inclusive and resilient communities in Edmonton.



The discussions provided participants with valuable insights and practical tools for immediate implementation, equipping them with ways to address socioeconomic disparities, improve social support systems, and foster collaborative approaches within their respective communities. The forum's culmination reinforced the shared commitment to long-term development efforts in Edmonton, setting a foundation for sustained growth and empowerment across diverse populations. As Edmonton continues to evolve, some key considerations for future learning and action have emerged

SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

The emphasis on asset-based approaches, rather than focusing solely on deficits, signals a potential paradigm shift in how community needs are identified and addressed. This approach advocates for recognizing and building upon the inherent strengths and resources within communities, encouraging practitioners to see challenges as opportunities for leveraging existing capabilities. Over time, this shift could lead to more innovative and adaptive as fosters a sense of ownership and agency that can drive long-term improvements. This empowerment could lead to communities that are more resourceful, interconnected, and able to address their unique challenges independently.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

Synthesis

INCLUSIVE POLICY MAKING



The insights gained from diverse community voices may influence more inclusive policymaking at the municipal level, with community organizations and institutions working together.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



The focus on leveraging existing community assets could contribute to more sustainable and locally driven community initiatives, rooted in local knowledge and resilience.

EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES



By focusing on community strengths and promoting capacity-building, the forum's outcomes point towards the possibility of more empowered and self-reliant communities especially when residents are engaged and actively participate in shaping solutions.

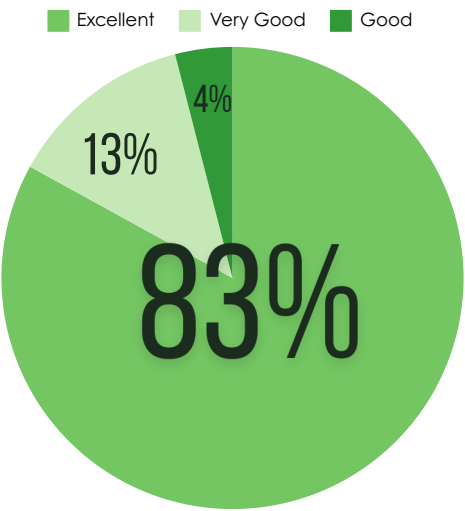
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Asset-based approaches emphasize leveraging community strengths rather than focusing on deficiencies.
- Change Perspective's From a need based to identify strengths and leverage those strengths build the community.
- Collaboration and partnerships are crucial for community development.
- Youth engagement is essential for fostering future community leaders.
- Equitable resource distribution is necessary to address socioeconomic challenges.
- Cultural spaces play a significant role in community strengthening.
- The forum concluded with words from the Community Development Advisory Committee and door prizes donated by clients of AHC's Entrepreneurship Supports Program, emphasizing the ongoing commitment to building inclusive communities in Edmonton.

PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK

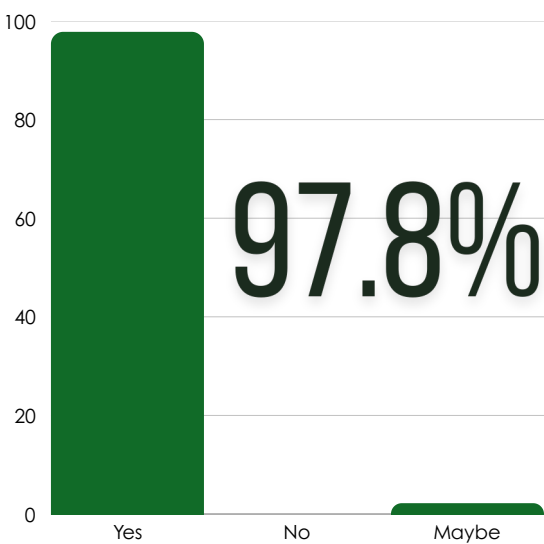
A post-event participant feedback survey, developed using a structured questionnaire, was distributed to attendees to gather their insights and perspectives on the forum. The survey aimed to evaluate the event's effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and capture participants' overall experiences. The collected responses and key feedback are summarized below, offering valuable input to enhance future events.

How would you rate Keynote by Dr. Jonathan Massimi and Breakout session?

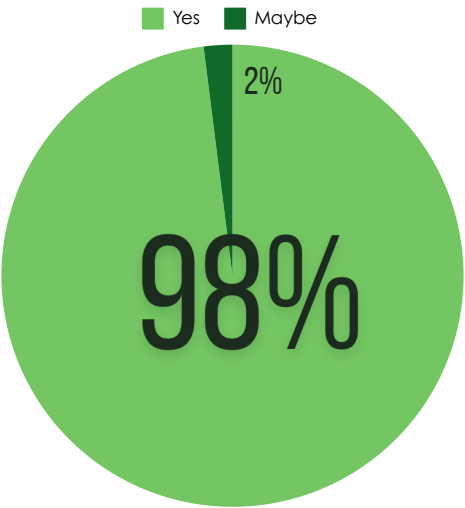


Keynote and breakout sessions were very impactful and practicable

Did you have the opportunity to network and form valuable connections during the event?



If we were to hold another community event/forum, would you or your community join us?



How satisfied are you with the overall experience of this event?



PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK

What was the most important insight or takeaway you gained from the event?

- The keynote speaker was great, learnt more about how community connected.
- Network connection.
- Learning about ABCD was amazing and the presentations too.
- The community networking opportunity and exposure of our organization.

As a community leader, I learned to search assets within community members before reaching outside for a help. In many cases we may have support we are looking for within the reach of our community.

- The teaching on the processes on ABCD was great and amazing.
- Meeting new people was amazing and hearing from speaker was insightful and yes the ABCD model.
- Focus on strengths rather than on deficiency in community development.
- ABCD learning and community gatherings
- networking was most valuable.
- Youth engagement part was great and I wish to join youths' leaders as well.

I got connected with the speaker Dr. Johnathan. I am glad he was able to highlight how we should be doing community work in the community.

- Seeing youths being engaged into the community work and ensure that.
- I was glad to see how AHC is empowering community leaders and members.
- ABCD teaching.
- Knowledge on how to engage community youths and get their voices on the table.
- togetherness and learning from the keynote speaker.
- Seeing small community-based groups trying to make a difference.

Learning and sharing is not always common as AHC is doing. I am super happy to be part of the community that is willing to learn and utilize the energy to better the community we live in.

- Seeing how communities are working to build this city.
- Getting to connect with other communities.
- The display on the tables, about the organizations supported by A4HC.
- Community uniqueness and how they came together in working to promote the well-being of the community.
- Make connections and learn about grant funding.
- Lots of learning.

As Congolese community working with youths, we got an opportunity to expose our activities to other communities. we do not get this chance often in Edmonton. we thank AHC for this earning exposure.

- I would like to see more effort put into the land acknowledgment. The acoustics in the hall were not great. I had trouble hearing much of what was said, even within the small group discussion. I would recommend putting mints on the table for after lunch. Mostly I would like to see more input and more participation from actual grassroots associations/volunteer led non-profits. We are consistently one of a small few, if not the only, volunteer led group at conferences like these and we consistently see our perspective being called imperative to this work, but then we are not represented in deeper discussions. Would have been great to see my peers' perspectives on the panel, for instance. We already know what the institutions are going to say. I did really appreciate Barhet's input as it had that urgency and passion community do bring to these topics. Overall the event was great, and I am appreciative to have appreciated.



CONNECT WITH US



Mon 9 AM - 5 PM **Tues-Fri** 9 AM - 8 PM

Sat 12 - 8 PM **Sun** closed

Stat holiday closed



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