

# Insights from Interview with Kayla DeMong

## Housing & Homelessness during COVID-19 in Saskatchewan

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**What we're seeing is that experiences are really varied, and the experience is much different for someone living in privilege than the populations that we support.**

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- Things as simple as social distancing and washing your hands - if you have no place to go to and no thing to wash your hands in, what are you supposed to do?
  - Having access to emergency funding isn't something that's realistic for most of the people we serve, and having access to safe, secure housing is a huge barrier.
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**What we are finding with the pandemic is things are really highlighted - things that we've seen for years are really becoming more prominent.**

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- COVID-19 definitely brings to the forefront the lack of support for our homeless population, and we're seeing this across the province - the lack of resources and a real lack of interest in addressing those barriers.
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**Messaging from the province and from the government is very much geared towards the general population and not a lot of things specifically towards vulnerable populations.**

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**We've seen a huge increase in overdoses the last couple of weeks because again, there just aren't those resources available.**

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**The impact of a COVID-10 outbreak in shelters on the healthcare system could be huge.**

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- If those resources are being utilized by somebody who could have avoided contracting COVID if they were given proper accommodations, it could mean the difference between you or I or our parents getting access to a ventilator or not.

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**There is a lot of fragmented support and reactive support, but not a lot of upstream thinking.**

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**We need to step back and ask 'what would happen down the road with this pandemic if we supported this population now?'**

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- But there's nobody really stopping and saying if we did this preventative piece now, what could be impacted?
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## Saskatoon's Response (Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response)

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**Because we had a well-established system of interagency work already being done through the Safe Community Action Alliance, we had a great foundation to work together during the COVID-19 crisis.**

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- We were able to pool those resources together really quickly, and that all started from that safe Community Action Alliance structure.
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**They're not always easy conversations, but things are getting resolved together.**

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- Barriers are being addressed really quickly, and we have this fantastic channel for communication.
- Groups are meeting almost daily. That communication piece is there, and that has allowed us to offer the best support we possibly can right now with the resources that we have.

# Insights from Interview with Kayla DeMong (cont'd)

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**Harm reduction is really practical support, and it goes down to the roots of basic needs. We ask 'where are you standing today, what do you need?'.**

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**We have harm reduction supplies available to people who are accessing our hotels.**

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- We have the MAP program (Manage Alcohol Program) running in the hotel for people that are needing it.
  - We make sure people are well supported while they're there and that they have access to the things that they need, so that they will stay.
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**If we need to keep somebody in the hotel for two weeks it's not realistic to tell them you can't use substances while they are here.**

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- They will leave the hotel, not access support and that's going to put the community at risk.
  - We identified that people needed cigarettes. That one initiative stopped people from leaving the hotels almost completely.
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**Accessing those basic needs supports over time then leads to long term sustainable change.**

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- Our traditional support systems want quick outcomes, which often lead to people feeling alienated and pushed out of systems.

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**Right now we need the voices of voters. We need more people to start raising concern and advocating for this population.**

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- We have a lot of people on the ground saying that things aren't what they should be and we've made a lot of noise in the media. We've had a lot of advocacy efforts going on. We need more people to start raising concern and advocating for this population.
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**We need to make sure information going out is accurately capturing what the impacts could be if we don't support this population through this pandemic properly.**

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- We need to highlight what the impacts on our health-care system and our justice system could be if no action is taken. The trickle effect is immense.

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**Engaging for Health Equity**

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A Community-Campus Response to COVID-19 in Saskatchewan