



# STOP ANTI-HATE OUTREACH PROJECT HATE THE LETHBRIDGE REPORT

The **StopHateAB** Anti-Hate Outreach Project examines the impact of hate in smaller Alberta communities beyond Edmonton and Calgary. This report provides the foundation for regional coalitions to address and reduce hate.

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# StopHateAB Anti-Hate Outreach Project

StopHateAB (formerly known as Alberta Hate Crimes Committee) is a non-profit organization comprised of government, law enforcement and community partners who work together to raise awareness and education related to hate crimes and incidents in Alberta.

In 2001, shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City, Alberta-based representatives from the justice sector, government, law enforcement, human rights institutions and community organizations concerned with hate and bias motivated violence formed what would become StopHateAB.

The initial aim of the committee was to develop a province-wide framework to encourage a collaborative, integrated approach between law enforcement, the courts, and the community in preventing and responding to hate and bias motivated crime and incidents as well as advocating for the reform of hate crime laws. The mission of StopHateAB is to provide comprehensive insight into hate-motivated crime and incidents by raising community awareness through education, information, outreach, research, advocacy, and StopHateAB's online reporting tool. The vision of the StopHateAB is to ensure that all Albertans are living in a safe, caring, and respectful community where crimes and incidents of hate are not acceptable values of a democratic and pluralistic society.

## THE LETHBRIDGE REPORT

### *Land Acknowledgement*

StopHateAB recognizes that the community of Lethbridge is located on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot people of the Canadian Plains. We honour the Blackfoot people across generations and acknowledge their enduring relationship to this land, shaped by places of deep cultural and spiritual significance, including nearby Chief Mountain. We also recognize the Métis and all those who have established their lives on these lands, whose presence and responsibilities continue to shape the community.

This acknowledgement reflects a commitment to listening, accountability, and the shared work of fostering dignity and belonging for all who call this place home.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The StopHateAB Anti-Hate Outreach Project seeks to enhance awareness and strengthen an understanding of the impact of hate crimes and incidents in smaller communities across Alberta. Four regions outside of the major centres of Edmonton and Calgary were selected based on criteria informed by available local information, previous research and data from the StopHateAB reporting tool. In each region, the project began by connecting with community members, non-profit organizations, and local institutions to gather information about where hate is occurring, who is being affected, and what strategies may help counteract it. The publishing of this report will serve as the foundation for establishing an anti-hate coalition equipped to address and reduce hate in each of the regions.

The purpose of this report is to document and analyze the nature and impact of hate incidences and hate crimes occurring in Lethbridge based on 22 virtual and in person interviews with non-profit organizations, public institutions and community representatives. The primary guiding questions during the conversations were - "How is hate affecting Lethbridge?", "What demographics are being targeted by hate crimes and incidents?", "What supports and mechanisms are currently in place to report a crime or incident?" and "What anti-hate work is needed in Lethbridge?".

By amplifying the experiences, stories and perspectives of those working directly with impacted communities, the report will:

- Increase understanding of the patterns, contexts, and impacts of hate
- Inform education and advocacy efforts aimed at preventing and combatting hate
- Serve as a foundation for collective action in the community and guide policymakers and support organizations towards effective anti-hate strategies and approaches

Most importantly, the report is intended as a community resource—a tool to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and support evidence-informed strategies to combat hate and build a more informed and equitable city. It will serve as a valuable resource for those who want to stand up against hate and join the Lethbridge StopHateAB Anti-Hate Coalition - a locally informed anti-hate collaborative that will bring to life awareness, advocacy initiatives, education, and resources for a safer more inclusive community in Lethbridge.

## KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings summarize the themes that emerged from the interviews. They reflect the perspectives, experiences, and priorities shared by participants. The interviews also highlighted the patterns and trends that shape these findings. The first three reflect provincial and national trends identified in reporting by Statistics Canada, the Organization for the Prevention of Violence and other sources including StopHateAB's research projects.

- **Hate crimes and hate incidents are under reported.** Many individuals and groups choose not to report hate incidents because they distrust the police, fear retaliation, assume their concerns will be dismissed and/or are uncertain if what they have experienced is a hate crime. This finding is near universal across all hate crime and incident reporting.
- **There is a lack of clarity about what constitutes a hate crime or incident.** Community members often struggle to confidently identify what a hate crime or hate incident is. This is one of the key factors impacting their ability to respond and report.
- **Normalization of hate:** Hate is increasingly visible and normalized in public spaces and online, particularly targeting unhoused individuals, Indigenous people, newcomers, people with addiction, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
- **Community capacity to combat hate has weakened:** Coordinated anti-hate efforts declined during the Covid-19 pandemic in Lethbridge, resulting in less activity occurring to address hate in a city that has been seeing significant growth.
- **Indigenous people experience disproportionate systemic harm:** The Indigenous community in Lethbridge faces discrimination across housing, employment, healthcare, and public spaces, alongside higher exposure to harassment and violence.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the report, and the local context, there are several recommendations that would support the community in combatting hate. These are preliminary recommendations that could be made possible through advocacy initiatives and with the creation of a coordinated coalition to stop hate in Lethbridge. More details on

these recommendations are offered in the 'Recommendations' section of the report.

These include:

- Creating a coordinated coalition to address hate
- Building a Community-Based Anti-Hate education and partnership strategy
- Supporting initiatives that bring anti-hate work to children and youth in schools, sports organizations, and youth groups.
- Strengthening partnerships and engagement between marginalized groups, municipal leaders, and police services.

## THE LETHBRIDGE REGION

Lethbridge was selected for this research because of its consistently high levels of hate-related incident reporting, ranking among the highest in Alberta outside of Calgary and Edmonton. Data from sources such as StopHateAB and Statistics Canada indicate a pattern of ongoing hate-motivated activity in the region, reinforcing the need for deeper examination. As a medium-sized city, it offers an important context for understanding how hate manifests in communities that are large enough to experience diverse forms of hate and discrimination, but with less resources and community supports than major centres.

Reporting from the Lethbridge Police Service indicated that between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2024, they recorded an average annual total of 9 to 10 hate-motivated incidents, including both suspected and confirmed cases. Of those, 54% were motivated by race, 27% were motivated by religion, and 19% were motivated by sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. It is important to note here that these numbers will not be reflective of the actual occurrences of hate crime happening in the city. Hate crimes are one of the most underreported crimes across Canada and studies have consistently indicated this trend. Published reports by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) and the Organization for the Prevention of Violence (OPV) point to this, and local police services and the RCMP are aware of this reality.

Lethbridge and the surrounding region have experienced a number of notable and documented hate-related incidents. In 2018, there was a racist rant by a woman in a Denny's restaurant in which she was recorded on video saying "Go back to your f\*\*king country, we don't need you here" and other racist comments. In nearby Fort Macleod, anti-2SLGBTQIA+ protests took place in 2023 during a drag performance, whereby two youth were arrested for setting off a smoke bomb inside the historic Empress Theatre. The Lethbridge Police Service shared that hate related graffiti and stickers are also often found in various locations across the city.

Lethbridge has also been linked to the activities of Don Laird, who has a documented history of harassing and intimidating individuals, including racialized people and Muslims. On March 31, 2022, Lethbridge Police Service charged Laird with one count of harassment and two counts of inciting or promoting hatred toward Muslims in relation to incidents that occurred between August and September 2021. Police services indicated that its relationship with the Muslim community has seen positive strides since this incident.

Lethbridge has seen several cases of human trafficking impacting vulnerable victims in the recent past, including a very recent case reported where a man has been charged after three girls were found in his apartment. The same man was also charged in connection with a sexual assault that took place in October involving a vulnerable 24-year-old woman. Additionally, there was also a major investigation in August 2021 where ten men were charged in a human trafficking ring involving two teenage girls. Perpetrators often target vulnerable individuals,

Indigenous women and girls are historically and presently disproportionately targeted for gendered violence and sex trafficking in the area. In cases such as these, the perpetrators are almost exclusively men, and misogynist beliefs contribute to a broader culture that normalizes the exploitation of women and girls.

Finally, global conflicts, political polarization, and rapidly circulating misinformation/disinformation increasingly shape local attitudes and tensions, reminding us that hate is rarely confined by geography. World events, past and current, have reverberated within communities like Lethbridge influencing how fear, blame, and division take root.

## STATISTICS & DEMOGRAPHICS

Lethbridge is the fourth-largest city in Alberta, with a 2021 population of 98,406, and a population in 2025 estimated to be 115,000. The city has experienced relatively significant growth with an increase of 17.8% over the past decade. The proportion of visible minorities in Lethbridge, at 15.3% in 2021, have almost doubled since 2011 when they represented 8.6% of the population. The immigrant population saw growth of 2.7% between 2016 and 2021 and continued to show growth into 2025. Recent changes to federal immigration are expected to soften this growth going forward.

The below chart is based off the 2021 Census - the most recent comprehensive demographic data available:

2021 Census	Alberta	Lethbridge	Medicine Hat
Population	4,262,635	98,406	63,271
Non-Visible Minorities	72.2%	83.8%	85.8%
Visible Minority	27.8%	15.3%	8.54%
Filipino	5.2%	2.4%	1.8%
Black	4.3%	3.2%	1.5%
South Asian	7.1%	3.1%	1.9%
Indigenous	6.8%	6.6%	5.2%
First Nation	3.4%	4.1%	1.6%
Metis	3.1%	2.1%	3.9%
Immigrants	23.2%	15.1%	11.5%

Supports for community members impacted by addiction and homelessness have evolved since 2020. Access to safe and stable housing continues to be a challenge for marginalized populations, and increasing demand has not always been met with the level of funding needed to adequately respond in Lethbridge. Encouragingly, 2025 saw a shelter expansion in the city, adding 80 new beds for the unhoused and increasing overall capacity from 120 to 200.

A supervised consumption site that opened in February 2018, which was once the largest in North America, closed in August 2020. These services have since shifted to a mix of smaller, mobile, shelter-based, and community-based culturally informed care.

Food insecurity is prevalent with food bank usage in Lethbridge indicating significant increases. The Interfaith Food Bank in Lethbridge reported that in September of 2025, usage had doubled from the same time in 2019. This trend is seen across the province and Canada.

Indigenous people were identified as making up 68% of the unhoused population in 2024, despite being only 6.6% of the general population. Galt Gardens is a central location where many unhoused and vulnerable individuals gather. Lethbridge is located near the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe), the largest First Nation in Canada, and the Piikani Nation, located further west near Fort Macleod. Lethbridge has a history of collaborative efforts to address racism, discrimination, and social inclusion, though many of these structures weakened during the

COVID-19 pandemic. The Lethbridge Diversity and Inclusion Alliance (LDIA), which formed in 2019, dissolved in 2021. The City of Lethbridge had participated in the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD) between 2007 to 2019, later transitioning to the Coalition for an Inclusive Lethbridge, which eventually dissolved following changes in municipal leadership. Consequently, these changes have impacted Lethbridge with fewer formal initiatives to address hate, but also with significant opportunity to rebuild partnerships, renew trust, and strengthen coordinated anti-hate and inclusion efforts going forward.

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT APPROACH

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with community support organizations—primarily non-profits—and key institutional partners including police services, educational institutions, and municipal representatives. Data gathered covered the following areas in its exploration:

**How is hate affecting Lethbridge?** This served as the primary focus of the conversations. This question was designed to encourage participants to share their perspectives on hate incidents, hate crimes, and hate in general. It allowed individuals to guide the conversation in the most relevant direction to their experiences. Participants often spoke about their own encounters with hate, the impacts on their clients or customers, and any recent incidents they felt were significant. Follow-up questions were asked when needed, either to clarify specific examples raised or to explore whether participants were aware of other hate-related incidents that had not surfaced naturally.

**What demographics are being targeted by hate crimes and incidents?** This helped deepen understanding of which groups may be most affected. Although participants frequently addressed this topic in their initial responses, this direct check-in provided a clearer sense of perceived vulnerabilities within the community.

**What supports and mechanisms are currently in place to report a crime or incident?** This allowed for an exploration of the community's existing supports. Participants discussed the resources they were aware of and highlighted concerns related to accessibility, effectiveness, and perceived outcomes of reporting. This input provides valuable context for understanding both current gaps and potential opportunities to strengthen local response systems.

**What anti-hate work is needed in Lethbridge ?** This shifted the conversation towards solution-oriented insights. Participants were invited to reflect on actions that could reduce or prevent the hate described earlier and share examples of initiatives they had participated in or observed. Their insights will help guide the StopHateAB Lethbridge Anti-Hate Coalition as it plans future efforts following this report.

**Would your organization consider joining the StopHateAB Anti-Hate Coalition?** This ask was non-binding for participants but ensured the project had an indication of where there was interest in participating in the coalition, which represents the next phase of the project.

**Are there any other organizations we should contact that could be of benefit to this project?** The data gathered here helped ensure connections were made with organizations that would be supportive during this data gathering phase. Many participants have connections within the community that StopHateAB may not have been able to easily approach or been aware of. The responses also helped ensure we connected with as many potential partners as possible.

A review was also conducted to understand what other organizations have reported about hate crimes and incidents across Canada and in Alberta. A list of resources can be found in the 'References' section.

## Limitations

Despite efforts to gather a broad range of insights, there are several limitations. The sample size is shaped by the organizations who agreed to participate. Underreporting within communities—due to stigma, fear of being outed or targeted, or distrust of authorities—means the data may not fully capture the extent of hate incidents occurring in the community. Additionally, the perspectives collected are influenced by biases inherent to the people and organizations interviewed, as well as the absence of voices from groups or organizations that did not respond or could not be reached. It should also be noted that in this report, there is no data on the disabled community and a limited amount of information provided representing faith and religious groups. StopHateAB hopes to address these gaps as the project continues.



## LEARNINGS

Drawing from the inquiries identified above, the following is a detailed summary of what was shared in the interviews.

### *How is hate affecting Lethbridge?*

Several overarching themes were identified across groups, as well as distinct issues unique to particular marginalized populations. In the next section, a more detailed breakdown of each of the targeted groups is provided.

### *Online Platforms Provide an Outlet for Hateful Rhetoric*

Online social media was widely identified as a key space where hateful messages are shared. Often posted from anonymous accounts, this content includes racist, xenophobic, anti-2SLGBTQIA+, and anti-unhoused rhetoric. Online spaces also circulate harmful myths about immigrants, including claims that they spread disease, displace workers, drive up housing costs, and contribute to crime. Such narratives reinforce negative stereotypes and deepen stigma.

For example, the social media group 'Lethbridge and Area Roast and Toast' page has seen many hateful comments and memes posted. Recent examples include "Tim's has gone to sh\*t thanks to 'them'" and "very sad that so many locals are comfortable with the foreign invasion and replacement of our culture. We need remigration". This rhetoric establishes a dangerous precedent by normalizing hate and emboldening individuals to act on it outside digital platforms.

## ***Online Radicalization***

It was noted that youth are increasingly vulnerable to online radicalization and exploitation, particularly through underground white supremacist networks and sextortion schemes. These perpetrators often operate on social media, gaming platforms, and anonymous forums. Often using memes, coded language, and misinformation/disinformation to gradually introduce extremist ideas. Youth may be drawn in through curiosity, a desire for belonging, or feelings of isolation. Including prolonged exposure normalizing racism, misogyny, and other forms of hate that can escalate into real-world harm.

Additionally, sextortion poses a serious and compounding risk with young people manipulated into sharing intimate images and then threatened with exposure. This can cause significant psychological distress and deter youth from seeking help due to fear or shame. Together, these risks underscore the need for education, trusted reporting pathways, and accessible youth-centered mental health supports to help young people recognize online harms and seek support safely.

## ***Lack of trust in institutions***

Lack of trust in institutions in Lethbridge manifests as avoidance, disengagement, and silence. Many people who experience hate do not report it, not because incidents are rare, but because institutions are perceived as unsafe, ineffective, or biased.

Police can be perceived as predominantly white and male, and not reflective of the communities most targeted by hate. It was also indicated that personal experiences, or the stories of others they know, give them the perception that they are non-responsive to their needs, which is one of the indicators of why people choose not to report. One example provided was of an Indigenous woman who waited over an hour for the police to arrive after they had been the victim of a serious assault.

Without leadership and funding that prioritizes the experiences of marginalized communities, a perception is created that institutions are not supportive. The capacity to acknowledge and address the impact of hate on marginalized communities was described as “off the side of their desk” work rather than an integrated responsibility in the health care system. It was indicated that staff are at capacity and may at times lack cultural competency. It was noted that responses tend to be reactive during periods of heightened tension or crisis, with little emphasis on substantive preventive initiatives or sustained efforts to ensure a more consistent experience.

Public institutions such as hospitals and social services also reflect this erosion of trust. Language barriers, profiling, and even the location and timing of appointments can create obstacles to accessing care. As a result, institutions are often perceived as unsupportive, unpredictable, or complicit, leaving communities most affected by hate to collectively absorb and navigate the impacts of harm with limited support. As is consistent across hate crime research, it was also noted that people often say they do not know what constitutes a hate crime or where to report one, which reinforces a disconnect in reporting and in the access of supports.

## ***Structural and Political Factors Affect Anti-Hate Efforts***

Structural and political conditions play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of anti-hate efforts. Inclusion and equity initiatives are closely tied to municipal and provincial leadership, which can be a positive thing, but ultimately means their continuity often depends on the priorities of those in power. As leadership shifts, programs can become fragile, inconsistent, or quietly deprioritized rather than institutionally sustained.

As noted above, the Covid-19 pandemic period significantly weakened collaborative anti-hate work in Lethbridge. Existing partnerships lost momentum, and coordinated responses gave way to fragmented approaches that were not embedded in long-term governance structures.

In early 2026, the City of Lethbridge joined the Strong Cities Network and was invited to participate in the Prevention Academy. The Prevention Academy trains municipal leaders and officials on addressing hate, extremism, and social polarization. Engagement in this initiative and its learnings appear to be a positive step in the direction of stopping hate at a municipal level in Lethbridge.

## ***Anti-Immigrant Sentiment***

Anti-immigrant sentiment is increasing in Lethbridge, reflecting a broader trend across the province and country. Immigrants are frequently blamed for pressures within public systems and claims that immigrants are responsible for overcrowded classrooms, strained services, and job shortages. Narratives suggesting that immigrants are “taking our jobs” have become increasingly normalized in public discourse.

Online spaces also contain a significant number of hateful comments targeting immigrant communities. These include statements suggesting that immigrants are “taking over,” accusations that newcomers are exploiting public systems, and calls to “send them all back.” Anti-immigrant sentiment often overlaps with racism, affecting visible minorities in the community regardless of how recently they immigrated to Canada.

## ***Lateral Hate***

In Lethbridge, lateral hate is observed through increased conflict and negative attitudes between marginalized groups, particularly between Indigenous people and immigrant newcomers. This has been observed within shared community spaces such as shelters, food banks, and other social services. Service providers reported incidents of verbal and, at times, physical conflict. These dynamics are closely tied to high levels of stress, trauma, and resource scarcity in the community. They also point to opportunities for community-based responses that strengthen service capacity, foster understanding across communities, and address the underlying conditions of exclusion that give rise to tension.

## ***What demographics are being targeted by hate crimes and incidents?***

A breakdown of marginalized/vulnerable groups targeted by hate in Lethbridge:

### ***The Indigenous Community***

Disproportionate hate is directed towards the Indigenous population. Indigenous people, particularly those who are unhoused, are victims of hate-motivated verbal harassment, online hate, and physical violence, including assaults in public spaces. Physical violence, particularly in the downtown core, was recounted by several interviewees. Being unhoused compounds the risk for the Indigenous population, increasing vulnerability and limiting access to services due to fear of further harm or discrimination. Examples shared included incidences where individuals drove by, exited their vehicles, and deliberately targeted unhoused people.

Indigenous people experience frequent profiling, surveillance, and discrimination in public and institutional spaces, including by security officers and healthcare professionals. Several examples were shared, including Indigenous youth being followed by store security on multiple occasions and racial profiling in an emergency room that led to reduced care for an Indigenous woman. It was indicated that this unequal treatment, assumptions of substance use, and lack of cultural sensitivity result in avoidance of care.

In schools, it was shared that Indigenous girls have experienced verbal harassment, such as being called “hey chief” or told they look dirty. In another incident, an Indigenous youth was sent to the principal’s office after hairspray fell out of their backpack on a bus, based on the assumption it was being used for them to get high. These incidents highlight how both peer interactions and institutional responses negatively affect Indigenous youth.

It was also shared that the Indigenous community experiences significant barriers to housing, including evictions, and landlords and rental companies refusing applications or openly stating they will not rent to Indigenous tenants. Employment discrimination was also indicated, with a recent example of an Indigenous applicant receiving an interview response only after changing their name.

## ***Racialized Community (visible minorities, excluding Indigenous)***

Conversations highlighted several impacts affecting racialized communities. Profiling and mistreatment by police were identified, including an example in which a group of racialized young adults were pulled over, and multiple police vehicles responded despite there being no perceived reason to do so. One interviewee shared that when racialized individuals are arrested and the story is shared on social media, it often generates a surge of hateful commentary, reinforcing harmful narratives that frame immigrants and people of colour as inherently criminal.

A prevailing sentiment emerged that racialized individuals, and newcomer immigrants, are perceived as exploiting social systems and avoiding work due to assumed “laziness.” Online hate frequently observed included claims that racialized communities are “taking over” or placing undue strain on public services such as the healthcare system. Rather than acknowledging the systemic barriers and settlement challenges commonly faced by newcomer immigrants, these experiences contribute to stigma, social exclusion, and increased vulnerability to hate and discrimination within the broader community.

The experiences of racialized children and youth in schools indicate that racism and hate continue to have a direct impact on their daily lives. It was shared that racialized youth often experience different treatment within the school system than their white peers. This includes more frequent calls to police and being sent to the principal’s office more often for behaviours that do not result in the same consequences for non-racialized students. A 2022 news story shared the experiences of three Black female high school students in Lethbridge, who reported being mocked by non-Black peers for their appearance and told they were not feminine enough. They also described encountering racial slurs, including the N-word, through online messages and comments. These experiences, and the experiences identified above, demonstrate how racism can contribute to unsafe and unwelcoming school environments for racialized students.

English language barriers were identified as a significant obstacle for recent immigrants in reporting experiences of hate, as adults often require more time to acquire language proficiency and when combined with broader settlement pressures, addressing hate incidents is frequently deprioritized. Additionally, activities associated with movements such as the yellow vest movement, the convoy movement, and the anti-vaccination movement were identified as having negative impacts on racialized communities. These movements were described as promoting inequity, prioritizing individual freedoms over collective rights, and fostering resistance to globalization and immigration.

## ***The 2SLGBTQIA+ Community***

The 2SLGBTQIA+ community has been the target of a wide range of hateful incidents, as shared by interviewees. These include anti-2SLGBTQIA+ protests at City Hall, frequent acts of intimidation at Pride events and flag raisings, as well as the defacement of pride sidewalks and the theft of pride flags. Examples of harassment include drive-by incidents, for instance someone parking across the street from a flag-raising event with a large sign on their truck stating, “we need to protect our children from evil.” At another event, an individual was intentionally blasting loud music in an attempt to disrupt the event.

It was shared that transgender people have faced increased complaints in public, gender neutral change rooms, and that they are commonly accused of using the wrong change room. It was indicated that these concerns have only emerged within the past five years, and that formal policies have only come into play since the topic of gender diversity has become more prominent in public and media discourse.

Additionally, online platforms were described as intensifying harm, as unmoderated and anonymous spaces amplifying anti-2SLGBTQIA+ rhetoric, which frequently translates into real-world harassment and intimidation. It was also indicated that many of these incidents are normalized or go unreported, further obscuring their prevalence and impact.

## ***The Unhoused***

Hate has a disproportionate and compounding impact on unhoused people in Lethbridge, as also noted in the 'Indigenous Community' section. This includes several prevailing sentiments, such as the belief that unhoused individuals are unworthy of support, that they choose their circumstances, and that they are dirty. References to "cleaning up the streets" in response to perceived social disorder reflect these attitudes. One example shared was a comment made during a living wage presentation, where an individual stated that unhoused people should "just go get a job." Similarly, an online comment suggested that unhoused people are not vulnerable, that too much money is spent on them, and that they can only help themselves. This normalization of hate was also reflected in other comments, including one that read "How much are MAID machines??? Asking for a taxpayer." These views indicate a broader lack of understanding of the complex circumstances that contribute to homelessness and serve to fuel hateful rhetoric and actions.

It was shared by several interviewees that some business owners show intolerance and anger towards the unhoused. One example included the witnessing of several instances of a downtown business owner yelling at unhoused men outside their store. It was also shared that homelessness is perceived by some as an "Indigenous problem" in Lethbridge.

Another issue identified was the cycle in which unhoused individuals with substance use disorders return to the streets after entering recovery. It was shared that many struggle to access adequate supports to maintain sobriety and continue to face rejection from their families, making it difficult for them to sustain recovery.

## ***Disabled Community***

There is no data on the disabled community. StopHateAB hopes to further the inquiry pertaining to this community as the project continues.

## ***Faith and Religious Communities***

While we did not hear much in our community conversations, across Canada, data indicates that Jewish and Muslim populations are frequently targeted with Islamophobic, antisemitic and anti-Catholic sentiment. According to Lethbridge Police Service, 27% of all confirmed hate crimes are motivated by faith and religion. An example of this is noted in the opening section - Don Laird who was charged with one count of harassment and two counts of inciting or promoting hatred toward Muslims in 2022.

In Lethbridge, the one incident shared was graffiti of a swastika on the pavement at a public location. In this case, it was indicated that police were informed of it but that the perception was that they were not willing to meaningfully respond.

StopHateAB hopes to further the inquiry pertaining to this community as the project continues.

## ***Intersectionality and Increased Vulnerability***

The experiences of marginalized individuals are inherently layered and shaped by intersecting identities and perceptions. This is also known as the cumulative risk of hate crime victimization. Several interviewees emphasized that people with multiple marginalized identities face heightened risk (e.g. the unhoused and Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+ and racialized) and experience compounded levels of hate and harassment. Increased visibility because of being unhoused makes them especially vulnerable to discrimination, bias, and hate related crimes and incidents. It was shared that an estimated 50% of the unhoused in Lethbridge identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, which means that a large proportion of the unhoused face the stigma of being unhoused, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+.

Assumptions are often made that a person's skin colour, particularly Black, signifies recent immigrant status. In a context of rising anti-immigrant sentiment, such assumptions can intensify and compound the lived experiences of racialized individuals.

## ***What support and mechanisms are currently in place to report a crime or incident?***

It was indicated that most hate incidents go unreported because people feel nothing will come of their decision to report, based on past experiences where complaints lead to no action, or the perception of no action. It was also shared that people do not know how to respond or support someone in the moment when they are being victimized by a hateful act, beyond acknowledging the harm. Trust in formal reporting mechanisms is low, particularly toward police among the unhoused, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. As a result, people often rely on informal supports, including friends and family, although organizations such as Lethbridge Family Services were also mentioned as a potential resource.

## ***Opportunities for Anti-Hate Work in Lethbridge***

Based on the interviews conducted and conversations about what is possible in Lethbridge, several important opportunities were identified. Overall, participants emphasized that anti-hate work must be community-driven, relationship-based, visible, and action-oriented with a strong focus on leadership accountability, youth, and ways to heighten empathy and humanize the varying targeted communities' experiences of hate.

While training and workshops exist, they often reach people who are already receptive. There was a strong need identified to expand anti-hate education to the broader public in accessible and human-centered ways that combat stereotypes. Such as exhibits, storytelling, panels, and community gatherings in everyday spaces like libraries, schools, and public parks.

- Anti-hate efforts should start with children and youth through in-person conversations, empathy-building programs, bystander training, and meaningful exposure to diverse cultures. Schools, Elders, and community mentors can play a key role in fostering empathy, cultural understanding, and social connection.
- Sharing real stories, lived experiences, and cultural practices helps people move past bias. Initiatives like Indigenous ceremonies, immigrant-led discussions and cultural cafés, have already shown to effectively create opportunities for learning, connection, and mutual understanding in Lethbridge.
- Community leaders, elected officials, and organizations need to actively model anti-hate values, speak openly about racism and bias, and set the tone for accountability. Leadership should promote multicultural events,

- support safe spaces, and take visible action rather than symbolic gestures with limited long-term impact.
- Hate is closely tied to isolation, stigma, and unsupported mental health needs. Improving access to mental health supports, reducing stigma, and rebuilding social connections are seen as foundational to reducing hate.
- Bystander intervention training would add significant value. A community-based hate response model and possibly training trusted local leaders was identified as potential opportunities.
- Distrust of institutions, fear of retaliation and uncertainty about whether anything will be done prevents reporting. Any reporting system must clearly show what actions result from reports, how people are protected through privacy and confidentiality, and how trust is built through follow-up and accountability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered through this project and based on previous research conducted, including “Victimized Community Perceptions About Hate Crimes and Incidents in Alberta: A 2019-2022 Analysis”, the following recommendations are offered:

### ***Create a coordinated coalition to address hate***

Establish a cross-sector collaborative that provides sustained advocacy, shared leadership, and ongoing support for marginalized individuals and communities experiencing hate. The coalition will offer a coordinated, community-driven approach to anti-hate initiatives. It will bring together community organizations, institutions, and passionate community members to strengthen collaboration and allyship, improve awareness and education, and support a clearer pathway for reporting. It will also provide an opportunity to build trust between marginalized groups and law enforcement, engage marginalized groups in decision-making, and enable more agile and tailored responses to hate incidents in the community.

### ***Build a Community-Based Anti-Hate Education & Partnership Strategy***

A coordinated approach to anti-hate education should prioritize visibility, humanization, and early engagement, moving beyond traditional workshops that tend to reach only already engaged audiences. This approach would include a community-based hate response model that brings together strong leadership, practical response tools, and transparent reporting processes to build trust and accountability. Emphasis should be placed on in-person, relational learning in everyday community spaces such as libraries, schools, parks, and cultural venues, led by trained and trusted community leaders, and supported by key organizations and institutions across the community.

Key elements could include:

- A foundational understanding of what a hate crime and hate incident are, the value of reporting, and how to do so.
- Bystander intervention training for community members, frontline workers, and leaders
- Storytelling initiatives, exhibits, panels, and cultural gatherings that amplify lived experiences of marginalized groups.
- Opportunities for direct dialogue and participation rather than passive learning, helping normalize diverse

- identities and experiences across the community.
- A clear and safe reporting protocol that explains what happens after a report is made, how individuals are protected from further harm, and what actions or follow-up will occur.
- Visible leadership from elected officials and organizations that openly name racism and bias, model anti-hate values, and demonstrate commitment through action, not just symbolism.
- Integration of mental health supports and referral pathways for those impacted by hate, particularly youth and marginalized groups.

This approach seeks to reduce hate by increasing understanding, strengthening social connections, and fostering empathy through regular, visible, and accessible community engagement. It also emphasizes restoring confidence in systems, empowering communities to respond effectively, and ensuring that anti-hate efforts result in tangible action rather than silence or inaction.

### ***Prioritize anti-hate children and youth focused initiatives in schools, sports organizations, and youth communities***

Most interviewees indicated the value of connecting with youth to help them learn and understand the impacts of hate. Given the cited incidents of hate and racism happening in high schools, particularly towards racialized and Indigenous youth, the need is further compounded. This could include anti-bullying initiatives, education, community partnerships, and bystander intervention training.

### ***Strengthen partnerships between marginalized groups, municipal leaders and police services***

There is an important opportunity to develop or deepen partnerships between the community, city officials, and police services. Given persistent challenges around reporting, trust, and perceived inaction, these partnerships could prioritize transparent and continuous communication, shared accountability, and ensure consistent engagement and follow-through. Coordinated response protocols with regular check-ins and joint problem-solving around hate-related incidents can help build trust and improve outcomes.



## CONCLUSION

Hate crimes and incidents have been impacting the Lethbridge community, and global conflicts, political polarization, and rapidly circulating misinformation/ disinformation increasingly shape local experiences of fear and division. Lethbridge has both the capacity and the responsibility to respond with intention, collaboration, and a shared commitment to building safer and more inclusive communities.

By treating the reduction of hate as a collective priority and drawing from the success of prior initiatives, Lethbridge has strong potential to build safer and more inclusive systems that support newcomers, affirm marginalized communities, and reduce harm for those most affected. Lethbridge is well positioned to respond in ways that are intentional, collaborative, and community-driven - what remains is making the choice.

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