

Lethbridge Helping Organizations COVID-19 Response



Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

When COVID-19 first arose in the Canadian city of Lethbridge, the province of Alberta shut down all businesses, schools and non-essential operations. The severity of the outbreak was relatively low, but the restrictions affected the whole community. The “Lethbridge Helping Organizations COVID-19 Response” was launched by city authorities to strengthen collaboration by local groups to serve the needs of all residents, and ultimately helped maintain low numbers of COVID-19 cases in the city.

Community action galvanized by city authorities – to support vulnerable populations

A total of 146 members representing approximately 50 local organizations joined an online platform (called “Slack”), including not-for-profit charities, not-for-profit businesses, faith-based organizations, community-based funders, city staff, police, the public library and indigenous organizations. A University of Lethbridge funded organization, Lethbridge Public Interest Research Group (LPIRG), helped create a Facebook COVID-19 Support page where 3,000 community members offered each other help with things such as picking up medications, offering rides, lending each other house supplies etc. This support page also included daily updates with information and support from the COVID-19 leadership group, as well as other key information from local, provincial, and federal government initiatives (e.g. about the Canada Emergency Response Benefit).

Other programmes created included volunteer wellness checks and the delivery of food bank hampers to older people. Restaurant suppliers and local hotels had a surplus of pre-ordered food that they gave to the food bank. The food banks coordinated food distribution to any social service agency that required food. Local food programmes delivered 15–25% more meals to community residents than before the pandemic. The school system worked with family organizations to provide activity packs and resources for families as well as meal and grocery deliveries where necessary. Several organizations worked together to help homeless people and our low-income population through food deliveries and setting up a clothing and furniture bank. And because there was limited mobility for people with disabilities during the pandemic, all of the services listed above were provided in partnership with disability services. It is expected that health outcomes have improved significantly due to all these organizations working together so closely.

Building future resilience: a strong local network ready to support city-wide responses

It is the first time that the social organizations in Lethbridge have worked this well together, and they have now established a long-term sustainable network for community support that can be used for future city planning and response. The City of Lethbridge now knows that community partners and stakeholders can – utilizing an online platform – respond quickly in emergencies and pandemics, and can collaborate effectively to address the needs of its most vulnerable populations.

Quote: *“This new normal of community partnerships illustrates the innovation, strength, and resilience of the City of Lethbridge,”* Rob Miyashiro, City Councillor and Executive Director, Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization



Handover

of facemasks by Jan Gong of the Southern Alberta Chinese Association to Rob Miyashiro, Executive Director of Lethbridge Senior Citizen's Organization and City Councillor

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