

Dignity and Agency

Identifying Unmet Goods and Services in Vancouver's Hastings Corridor

January 2025

Executive Summary

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

Respondents pointed to a need for:

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

These gaps reflect critical areas for development to improve overall community well-being.



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 CERl, Community Impact Real Estate, Exchange Inner City, Matt Hessey, Landon Hoyt, and project participants for their invaluable support and contributions.

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



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
- Non-profit service providers
- Residents

Partner Organizations:

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



Methodology

This research utilizes:

- **Semi-structured interviews:**

Interviews consulted experts, including non-profit executives, business owners, and civil servants, focusing on gaps in affordable goods and services.

- **Surveys**

Surveys engaged 60-70 Bidders' project members, asking which goods and services they sought outside their neighborhood.

- **Focus groups**

Focus Groups, with 15-20 residents from the Exchange Inner City Resident Advisory Group, explored lived experiences and systemic barriers.



Community Engaged

Foundations and Organizations

- Vancity Community Foundation
- A Better Life Foundation
- Vancouver Chinatown Foundation
- Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House
- Carnegie Community Centre

Community members of the Downtown Eastside

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

Mission and Support Services

- 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

- Calabash
- Pidgin

Property and Real Estate

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

Business Improvement Associations (BIA)

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

Methodology

Map of Engagement

Methodology

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

The map displays the following locations categorized by methodology:

- Mission and Support Services (Blue pins):** A Better Life Foundation, Low Tide Properties, Calabash Bistro, 312 Main St, and Strathcona Business Im...
- Foundations and Organizations (Red pins):** A Better Life Foundation, Calabash Bistro, and 312 Main St.
- Property and Real Estate (Black pins):** Low Tide Properties and 312 Main St.
- Restaurants (Yellow pins):** Calabash Bistro.
- Business Improvement Associations (Green pins):** Low Tide Properties, Calabash Bistro, 312 Main St, and Strathcona Business Im...
- Community members of the Downtown Eastside (Purple pins):** 312 Main St.

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- Map of Engagement**
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 - Community members of the Downtown Eastside (Purple pins):** 312 Main St.

Map of Engagement

This map illustrates the geographic distribution of various engagement stakeholders across Vancouver, British Columbia. The map is divided into several key urban areas: Coal Harbour, Financial District, Downtown Vancouver, Chinatown, Japantown, Downtown Eastside, and Strathcona. A legend in the bottom-left corner defines the color-coded markers used to identify different groups:

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

The map shows a high concentration of engagement points in the central business districts and surrounding urban areas, with specific locations like 'A Better Life Foundation' and 'Calabash Bistro' labeled. The word 'Methodology' is prominently displayed in red in the bottom-right corner, indicating the map's role in defining the research approach.

Summary

Themes

Overarching neighbourhood themes found in this research include:

- **Dignity and agency**
- The **root issues** of the Downtown Eastside
- Establishing **social return** through local businesses and services for the Hastings Corridor.

Findings

We interviewed businesses, non-profits, and civil servants:

- 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 and support, addiction and mental health, and community spaces were referenced the most as future gaps in discussions.



Summary

Findings Continued:

We surveyed residents from the Binnners' 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 the Army and Navy.**
- Residents travel far for groceries such as **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.**



Neighbourhood Themes

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

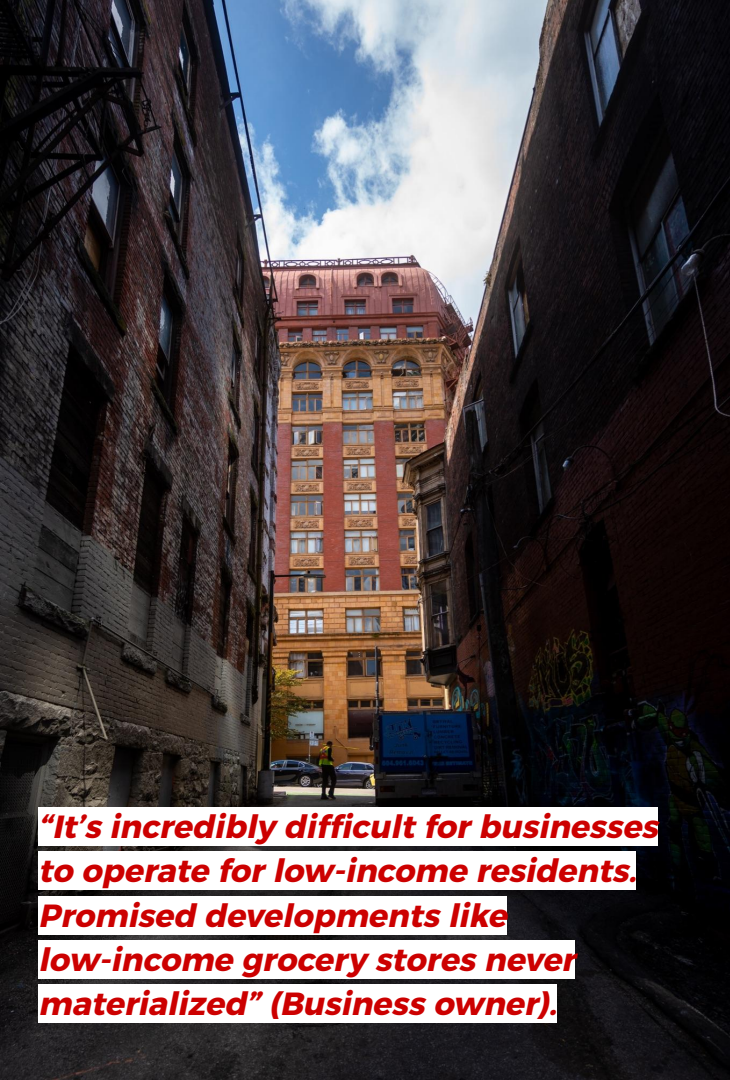


“People in the community want some sense of dignity in their lives. It really comes down to choice in the kinds of goods and services they desire” (Non-profit executive).

1. Dignity and Agency

A recurring theme was the importance of providing services that respect individuals’ dignity, particularly regarding food, clothing, and hygiene.

- For example, residents want food they can pay for. Participants express the need for programs and services that gives them autonomy for when and what they desire to eat.
- Overall, participants expressed a desire for resources that foster a sense of independence rather than charity-based options.



“It’s incredibly difficult for businesses to operate for low-income residents. Promised developments like low-income grocery stores never materialized” (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 highlighted 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. This financial strain limits businesses’ ability to effectively cater to a low-income demographic.

Systemic Issues

- Participants emphasize 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).***



“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).

3. Social Return

Discussions with participants emphasized the importance of creating social value that provides tangible benefits for residents. **Discussion points included:**

- **Non-Market Commercial Rentals:** Highlighted as crucial for enabling entrepreneurs to start and sustain businesses without the burden of high rent costs.
- **Peer Work Programs:** Identified as an effective way to support workforce reentry while fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.
- **Living Wage Jobs:** Emphasized 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.

Findings

1. Community Interview:

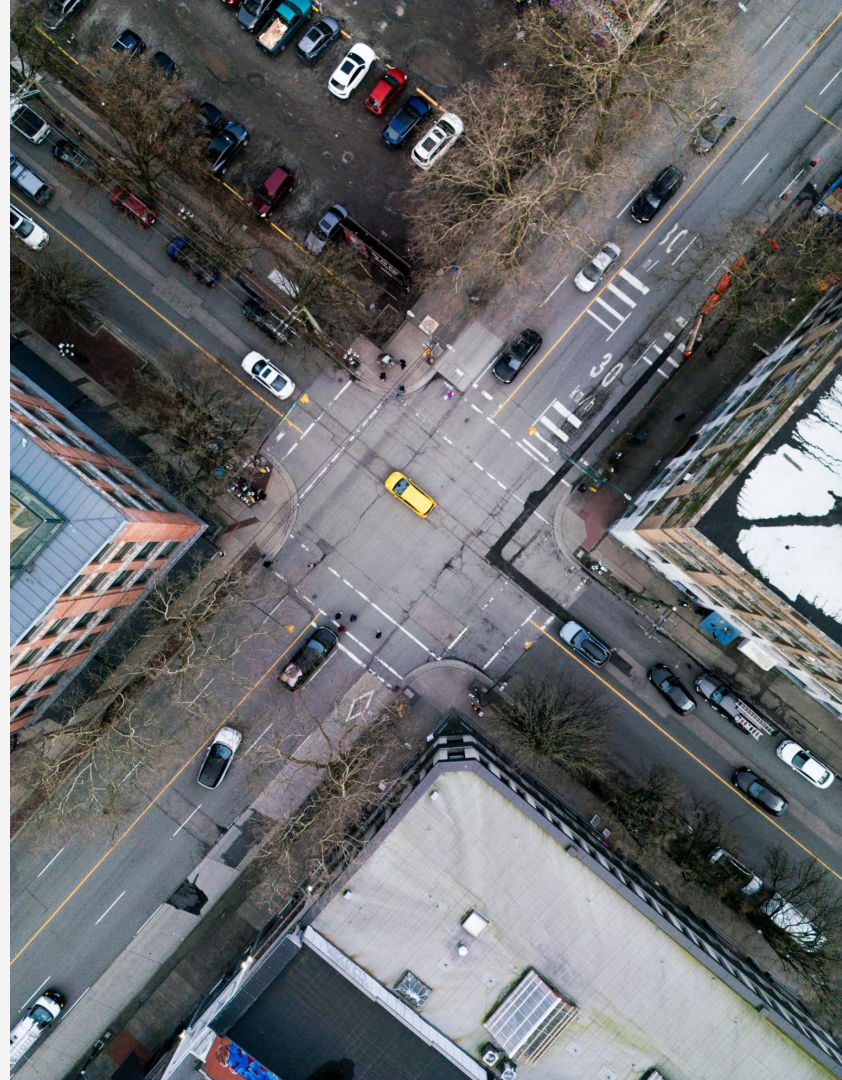
- Q1. What do you see as missing in the DTES from the categories of businesses and services?
- Q2. What goods and/or services do people travel outside of the neighbourhood for?
- Q3. How do you see the neighbourhood as changing and what gaps in goods and services do you anticipate in the future?

2. Focus Group:

Exchange Inner City Resident Advisory Council (RAC)

3. Survey Study:

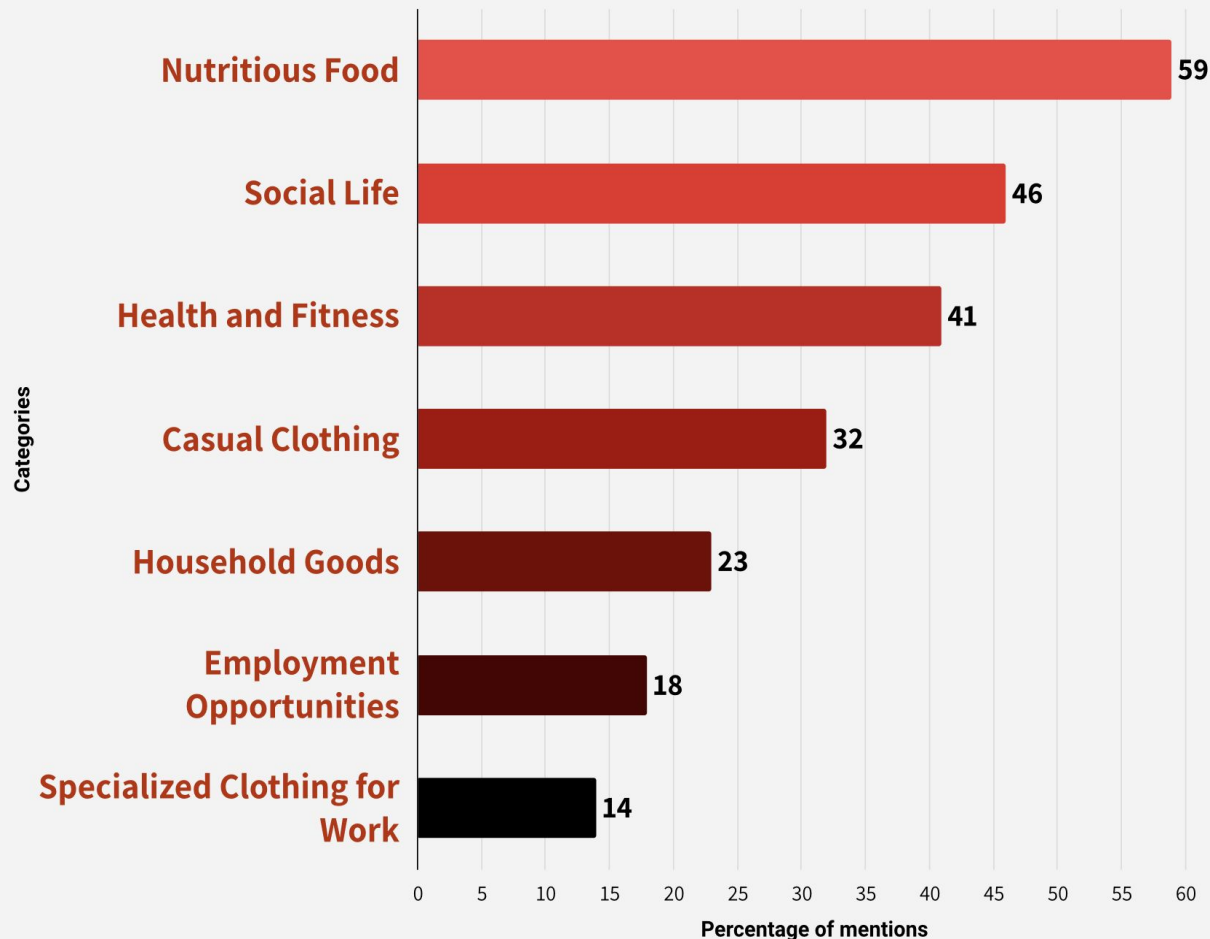
Binners' Project Study



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 business owners, civil servants, property managers, and non-profit executives in the Downtown Eastside about the Hastings Corridor to identify missing goods and services.





59% of respondents highlight nutritious food as missing

Respondents highlight the need for initiatives that prioritize food security, affordability, and accessibility. **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:** Many respondents emphasized the absence of affordable restaurants that provide balanced, nutritious meals for those who prefer or need dine-in options.
- **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 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 respondents highlight 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:** Respondents emphasize the need for affordable indoor spaces where they can gather, share meals, or simply enjoy casual conversations.
- **Community Centers:** Many highlighted the absence of an accessible community center, activities, and informal meetups that promote inclusivity.
- **Cultural and Recreational Spaces:** Participants noted the potential for spaces to celebrate local art, Indigenous culture, and diversity.



41% respondents highlight health and fitness as missing

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

- **Hygiene Facilities:** Public access to clean and safe bathrooms, showers, and laundromats, and pet care services are highlighted as a critical need.
- **Fitness and Wellness Options:** Respondents emphasized the importance of gyms, yoga classes, and other affordable fitness opportunities.
- **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.

“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).



“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 respondents highlight casual clothing as missing

Addressing this gap would empower residents to meet their clothing needs with dignity while supporting them in various aspects of daily life, from work to recreation. **Key discussion points include:**

- **Affordable Over Free:** Many 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.



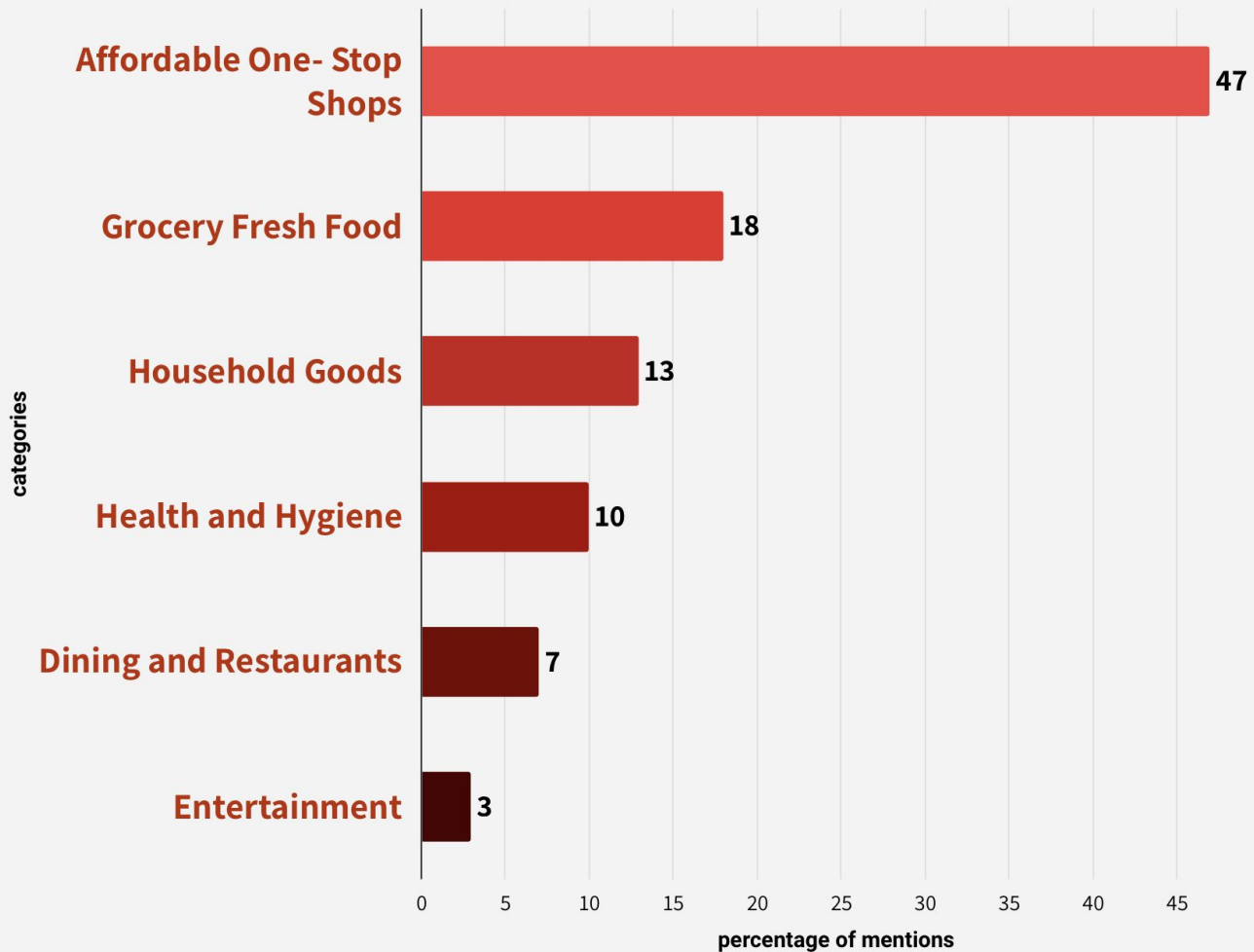
Further Results: Household goods, Employment Opportunities, and Specialized Clothing for Work

- **23% of respondents voice household goods as missing**
 - Residents struggle to find items like cleaning supplies, kitchenware, and personal care products locally at accessible prices.
- **18% of respondents voice employment opportunities as missing**
 - Residents in the Hastings Corridor of the Downtown Eastside express a need for stable and sustained employment opportunities.
- **14% of respondents voice 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 business owners, civil servants, property managers, and non-profit executives about accessing a range of essential goods in the neighborhood, as anchor stores such as Walmart or Army and Navy typically provide multiple categories of items under one roof.





**“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. Respondents stress that positive change in the street activity of the Downtown Eastside is needed to attract future local business investment.
- Discussion had also emphasise growing pressures that local business have because of safety concerns. More local business are needing to invest in security to deal with theft and storefront cleanliness.



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)

Respondents 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 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 about 12-15 participants from their 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 that offered a community space for art, book launch events, and a variety of food options.
- Army and Navy
- Pet Services: Supplies, food, and Veterinarians

What residents are traveling outside the community for:

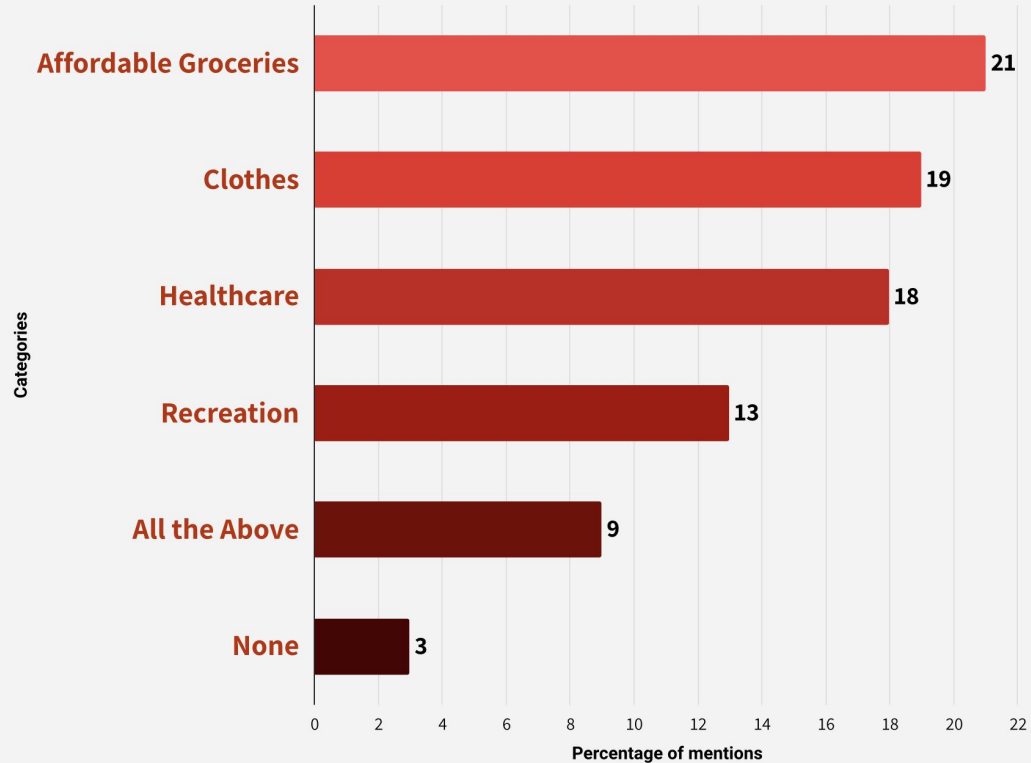
- Clothing
- Groceries: In particular fish and meat products — There is Chinatown, but residents voice the cultural differences make it hard to shop there.
- Food banks
- Massage and acupuncture services

Most valuable future services in the opinion of community residents

- Community gardens
- Community centre with amenities
- Storage centres for residents
- Employment centres

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

Binners' Project Response:



Key Takeaways

The Hastings Corridor in Vancouver faces a shortage of accessible, 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 and Survey Questions

What is the community group that your organization/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, transportation, and household goods.

- o What do you see as missing in the DTES from the categories of business 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 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, transportation, and household goods.

- o What do you see as missing in the DTES from the categories of business 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 business and services you would like to see in the DTES ? (I would like you to answer in terms of services that 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 comment on?