



# Strategic Framework

## 2023-2028



# Leadership Message

**The work our incredible team accomplishes would not be possible without the larger community rallying behind us.**

Bissell Centre was founded in 1910. During our tenure, we have now been through two pandemics, two world wars, numerous economic depressions and recessions, and several shifts in the demographics of people needing our services. We have seen the lasting impacts of public policies, the development of automobiles, airplanes, television and now the internet. The team today is chronologically removed from our founders and yet their original vision of supporting people and communities in need is as true today as it was when they first rolled up their sleeves.

Our history books reveal a long collection of stories that reveal themes of hope, determination, entrepreneurial pragmatism balanced with a deep commitment to the values that have guided us along the way. Bissell's posture has been one of

continued learning and innovation, taking risks and keeping those that we are invited to walk alongside at the center of everything we do.

This document is intended to provide a high-level overview of the next season of our journey. It strives to integrate our new learnings and identify the key areas on which we will focus our energy and resources. This includes our four strategic priorities:

1. High Quality Programs & Services
2. Truth & Reconciliation
3. Systems Change
4. Organizational Strategy

We invite you to view this document as invitation to participate, to join in, align, and journey with us towards a better future. The other thing

that our history books reveal is that the idea of Bissell is far greater than any one organization. It is a collective movement of people and communities throughout the decades who are committed to bringing those on the margins into the centre, to fighting for justice and equity, to providing a listening ear and hot meal, to giving an opportunity to move beyond the trappings of poverty and houselessness and to adding light into our world.

If you are reading this, you are probably already aware that this includes you. We are excited to share this journey together with you!

**Gary St. Amand**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



*“Thank you for being a part of our Bissell community.”*

# Our Inspiration

The water finds and fills the gaps as it flows.

Think about water. Think about how our ancestors were in relation to the water. Go to the water, sing it songs, offer tobacco, and talk to the water.

It is a conversation of gratitude and reverence. Without it we would die, we would not exist. Keep the water healthy and make sure it does not harm anyone. Keep it clean.

With our deepest gratitude our eyes fill up with water; it embodies Creator.

We must protect it. Value the water, be by the water, listen to it, watch how it moves. It is always different. It never flows the same.

Water has a spirit. Talk to it. Pray. Every day- in the shower. Acknowledge all the elements that give us life so that it will continue to help our children and give us life. Everything has a life.

Our ohtisiy belly button connects us to woman's womb that was once full of water. Our mother's womb is like Mother Earth. Ohtisiy is our connection to Creator; it is still part of us. Everything about us, our ohtisiy, our hair, is sacred. Pray for it and protect it. To acknowledge the land is to acknowledge that we are still here.

This is an invitation to allyship, to acknowledge us and be our ally.

We have to find ways to exist on the land in a good way, where we can all share the land and the water. The true intention of the Treaty was for us to live harmoniously on Turtle Island. Our families are coming out of pain and hurt.

Let's make the world better.  
We can make it better.  
We want change.

Bissell Centre's work is about change.  
Our work is like water. We fill the gaps.

Ask what would the water do? As it flows, moves, changes with alignment with all of creation, so must we.

We stand, live and work on the land now called the City of Edmonton. For thousands of years, this land was known as AMISKWACIY WASKAHIKAN Cree, "Beaver Hills House"), Sawyah-thay-koi (Dene, "Beaver Hills House"), Omukoyis (Blackfoot, "Big House"), Titunga (Nakoda, "Big House"), Saulteaux Q'Chiese First Nation. This is the home of these Nations and the Metis.

As the river flows through our city and this strategic plan, we invite you to reflect with gratitude on this land acknowledgement.

The teachings were shared with us through protocol with Janet Paskemin, Sweetgrass First Nation, Indigenous Engagement Coordinator, Bissell Centre. With special thanks to Sarah Higgins (she/her), Red River Métis, Descendent of James Todd and Caroline Laframboise, Director of Employment and Indigenous Engagement, Bissell Centre.

**Hiy hiy to Janet & Sarah.**

*“Bissell's work is about change.”*





## OUR VISION

To eliminate poverty in our community.



## OUR MISSION

Working in community, we remove barriers and support people as they move out of poverty.



## OUR CORE VALUES

Our values of Respect, Human-Centered, Collaboration, Integrity, Equity and Accountability are reflected in all aspects of our work and within the culture of Bissell. They are our commitment to ensuring our participants, employees and stakeholders are involved with an organization that puts people first.





## Vision of a Community Without Poverty

**What does a poverty-free community look like?**

**How will we know when we have achieved it?**

Ending poverty in our community may seem like an impossible dream, but Bissell Centre believes that if we all take steps that align with that goal, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In our experience, great things happen when we work together toward change. Just ask any of the 15,759 people who have found homes because of Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

We know that eliminating poverty cannot be done by a single individual or group. It takes a commitment from the entire community, even you!

**Working toward a poverty-free community is not simply a hope, belief, or bold statement. It is an invitation for you to join us. We believe that a community without poverty will see:**

1. Families and individuals have sustainable livelihoods, secure and safe housing, and can meet their basic daily needs.
2. Families and individuals have strong and healthy support networks, a sense of safety, and physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health to engage in their community more fully.
3. Families and individuals have an increased sense of hope for the future.
4. Individuals have access to the resources and opportunities they need to recognize and reach their full and desired potential.

# Our Strategic Plan

We are working towards the day when Bissell Centre no longer exists in its current form because there is no more poverty.

Eliminating poverty is a complex task that requires systemic change. Families and individuals are often trapped in the cycle of poverty because of social structures and systems that keep them at a disadvantage.

The experience of living in poverty is interwoven with different and distinct realities for each person depending on their race, culture, gender, sexuality, age, and ability.

Ending poverty requires combined efforts at all levels to transform our individual, communal, and social experience to include everyone, especially those who are most marginalized.

To that end, we centralize our organizational strategy using a cascading method, like a waterfall, that includes our core values, organizational approach, riverbanks, and practice philosophy to set a clear path towards a poverty-free community.

This way of conceptualizing our strategic plan allows for innovative changes as the river flows, changes speed, fills up, and sometimes dries out. The river guides the possibilities and limits of our work, so we remain focused and determined to reach our goals.



**ORGANIZATIONAL  
STRATEGY**

**CORE  
VALUES**

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
APPROACH**

**PRACTICE  
PHILOSOPHY**

**RIVERBANKS**



Bissell Safety Walk  
MARCH 2023

## Our Commitment to Justice

**Bissell Centre is committed to justice for all peoples and together, with compassion, kindness, and intentional action.**

We are committed to creating a world that honours difference, celebrates diversity, and stands up against racism, discrimination, and social inequality. We stand with Indigenous communities, communities of colour, communities of people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

At Bissell Centre, we recognize that we are *all* Treaty people. Our relationship to the land and Indigenous Nations of Treaty 6 are omnipresent.

As Canadians, we have historically and contemporarily dehumanized and violated Indigenous societies and people through Western values, systems, and ways of being.

The colonial structure of this country is evident by the lasting impacts of residential schools, the 60's scoop, the current state of the child welfare system, and systemic inequality and racism. These are Canadian issues.

Poverty is a social construct that can be deconstructed and ultimately ended in our community. We acknowledge that we are part of a larger system of public and community services that have structural racism and inequality embedded in them. Change begins with us. **To this end, we will:**

- Commit to working with the Sovereign Nations as an ally and partner, looking to their leadership and perspectives to shape our efforts in the community
- Seek the wisdom of Elders and lived experience experts to guide our practices and approaches to our work with a continued commitment to decolonization and reconciliation
- Maintain our commitment to the priority of self-determination for individuals, communities, and nations, and to our value of human-centred services
- Continue our work of supporting individuals, families and communities to achieve their goals and thrive in community, and promote the need for structural change where inequity exists in our community and public systems
- Build broad coalitions centered on those with lived experience towards ending poverty in our community
- Develop our practice of reflection, evaluation, and ongoing learning using the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing to ensure we understand the impacts of work and are continually finding opportunities for growth and improvement
- Promote and amplify opportunities for learning and development about inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in our community

The path toward justice is no easy feat but it is necessary. It requires all of us to take steps forward together, admit our mistakes, integrate new learnings, and continually recommit to our responsibilities toward each other.



# Our Core Values

Bissell Centre's core values are part of our strategic foundation.



## Respect

Deep regard and recognition of the value and dignity of *all* people and their gifts, strengths, experiences, values, cultures, rights, beliefs, and property.



## Human-Centered

The individuals and families we support are at the centre of all we do. Participants self-determine their path forward with the support of Bissell Centre and our programs and services.



## Equity

The goal of fairness that includes diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Equity is actively ensuring everyone gets fair access to opportunities so they can engage in their community fully.



## Collaboration

Commitment to working with others to increase quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of supports for individuals and families living in poverty.



## Integrity

To act with honesty, accountability, and trustworthiness toward participants, colleagues, partners, and leadership.



## Accountability

To be good stewards and take responsibility for our personal and organizational actions and decisions.



# Key Terms

To ensure a common understanding of Bissell Centre's Strategic Framework, here is a short list of key terms.

**Community(ies)** refers to the social and geographical eco-system where Bissell Centre engages in its work. It is both the neighbourhoods in which we live and the relationships with people and groups with the common values of the equality of all people and the elimination of poverty.

**People** means “all of us.” We acknowledge and respect the Indigenous Nations and individuals who are the First Peoples of this land.

By using the term “people”, we acknowledge and respect the humanity of all those who come to Bissell Centre. We put people first, uphold and celebrate differences, and work collaboratively.

The term aligns with our value of human-centredness because those living in poverty, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, differently-abled, neurodivergent (neurodiverse), newcomers, people of colour, women, and children, are too often dehumanized, criminalized, marginalized by systems and people, and vulnerable to experiencing poverty due to systemic inequality and racism.

**Prosperity** is the opposite of poverty. It is a reality where individuals, families, and communities are thriving economically, socially, and culturally, such that they can participate fully and meaningfully in the world around them.

Poverty is broadly defined as “when people lack, or are denied, economic, social and cultural resources to have a quality of life that sustains and facilitates full and meaningful participation in the community” (EndPoverty Edmonton Task Force definition, 2014). These individual experiences are inherently connected to systemic inequality that disproportionately and violently impacts Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, differently-abled, neurodivergent (neurodiverse), newcomers, people of colour, women, and children.

To eliminate poverty, we must focus on eliminating the systemic inequality that creates the conditions for poverty to exist in the first place.

**Indigenous homelessness** is a human condition that describes First Nations, Metis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews.

These include individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships. (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).

*“Together, we can eliminate poverty in our community.”*



# Our Organizational Strategy

“*What we do and how we do it.*”



## 1. High Quality Programs and Services

Bissell Centre develops and provides high quality programs and services and impactful community and economic development initiatives that benefit individuals, families, and neighbourhoods in poverty by:

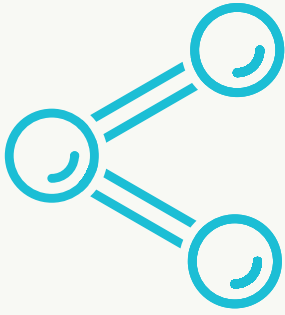
- Increasing involvement in, and advocacy for, appropriate and accessible housing options and supports
- Continuing our commitment to providing supports that address systemic gaps and barriers
- Enhancing alignment and collaboration with partners to increase effectiveness of supports
- Engaging collaboratively with local neighbourhoods and stakeholders
- Developing community-based social enterprise that will be sustainable and impactful for the community



## 2. Truth and Reconciliation

Bissell Centre commits to participating in the large systems work required to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the National Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice by:

- Building honest, meaningful, and good relationships with Indigenous communities (Nations/peoples), leadership, and organizations that support and act *with* them
- Centering the lived experience of Indigenous participants and staff
- Providing proper protocol to listen and learn with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous people to gain understandings of traditional knowledges of all Indigenous Nations in Treaty 6
- Developing opportunities for staff to build understanding and capacity to work with Indigenous participants, colleagues, Nations, and organizations



### 3. Systems Change

Bissell Centre aims to influence systems and societal change by:

- Engaging with all levels of government and other institutions to contribute to policy change and best practices that support families and individuals to move out of poverty
- Ensuring the voices of people with lived experiences are heard in a meaningful way to them
- Building an organizational culture based on learning, reflection, and a commitment to evidence-based practice
- Educating and raising awareness about the issues and complexities of poverty and inviting the community to actively engage in the elimination of poverty



### 4. Organizational Sustainability

Bissell Centre develops resources, capacity, and long-term organizational sustainability by:

- Organizational planning with a continued commitment to excellence that includes governance, risk management, infrastructure, and administrative capacity development to achieve our vision and mission
- Ensuring our work is consistent with, and pays close attention to, environmental sustainability across the organization's operations
- Raising funds to directly impact the people we serve and ensuring a high-quality donor experience
- Increasing public awareness about Bissell Centre and the impact of our work in the community
- Developing a healthy culture of employee engagement, accountability, celebration, and professional development that supports employees to understand their role in our vision and mission
- Providing equal opportunity, competitive staff compensation and benefits, and pay equity for all employees



## Our Riverbanks

Riverbanks guide and direct flowing water; the water flow also shapes the riverbank. This inherent relationship allows for directed and relational change over time.

For us at Bissell Centre, our riverbanks act as our short- to medium-term parameters that support us to remain focused on our mission and vision. Our riverbanks can shift as the environment, the individuals and families, and the work we do changes. They are necessary to ensure our organizational approach and programs and services are streamlined and intentional.

All of Bissell Centre's programs, services, initiatives, and efforts will align with our vision and mission. We will only engage in service delivery or community development initiatives that reasonably show they are supportive opportunities to move individuals and families out of poverty.

### Bissell Centre will not:

- Participate in any activity that harms Indigenous people or communities. If we make a mistake, we will take responsibility and work towards repairing the harm. We will engage in opportunities to learn, support, and act with Indigenous leaders, Nations, and communities.
- Duplicate services except where capacity may lack, and a direct need is evident. We will focus on innovative and evidence-based service development in partnership or coordination with others when considering new service delivery and community development activities.
- Engage in social enterprise initiatives unless they are, or will become, self-sustaining and generate social and/or economic benefit to the community.
- Own residential apartment buildings. Generally, it would be a conflict of interest as we would then be required to function as both the landlord and advocate. Additionally, as buildings age they become increasingly expensive to maintain.



# Our Practice Philosophy

Our community-work practice is guided by these key philosophies that represent the leading practices of the human services sector and our commitment to ensuring our participants are served with accessible, high-quality, informed, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate programs and services.

## Cultural Responsiveness

Bissell Centre will seek to provide programs and services that are culturally safe at their core. Our culturally responsive practice includes empathy and caring, reflectivity about our own beliefs about people from other cultures, our own cultural frame, and that we seek knowledge about other cultures.

## Strength-Based

Bissell Centre will seek to find, affirm, and encourage people to build and apply their strengths, assets, and supports to move out of poverty and prosper. All communities, families, and individuals have strengths, assets, and supports they can develop to make change.

## Trauma-Informed

Bissell Centre will provide services that are consistent with the principles of trauma-informed practice including safety, trust, choice and control, and compassion.

Childhood, personal, and historic, intergenerational trauma is pervasive among our participants, particularly those who self-identify as Indigenous. Trauma overwhelms an individual's and a community's ability to cope. It forces fight, flight, or freeze responses that help protect individual and community survival.

## Harm Reduction

Bissell Centre will practice harm reduction by involving a range of support services and strategies to enhance the knowledge, skills, resources, and supports for individuals, families, and communities to be safer and healthier.

Harm reduction aims to keep people safe and minimize death, disease, and injury from high-risk behaviour, especially psychoactive substance use. This approach recognizes that this behaviour may continue, despite individual knowledge about risks.

## Anti-Oppressive

Bissell Centre will ensure staff work in an anti-oppressive way to ensure participants and colleagues experience equity in our interactions and service delivery. Each staff member has a responsibility to anti-oppressive engagement.

## Restorative Justice

Bissell Centre will support individuals and families in a manner consistent with the values of restorative justice. Restorative justice strives to repair harm and restore relationships by focusing on the impact on, and wellbeing of, the victim, offenders, and the larger community.

## Evidence-Based

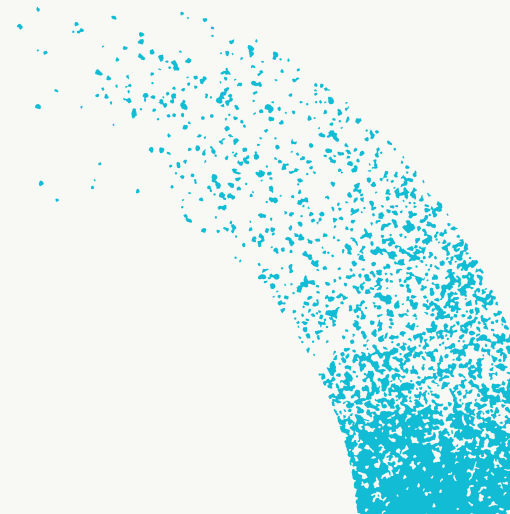
Bissell Centre will make decisions based on evidence-based practice and produces evidence-based program evaluation to guide decision-making and program supports.

Evidence-based practice acknowledges the importance of robust research, analysis, participant feedback, and demonstrated outcomes to effective.

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder FASD -Informed

Bissell Centre will be informed about the nature of FASD and the needs of those with FASD to help them be part of the community.

FASD is prevalent among Bissells participants and affects each person differently. It happens when a fetus is exposed to alcohol in utero.





## GET INVOLVED

For more information about how to  
get involved with Bissell Centre through  
volunteering, partnership, or to donate, please reach out to:

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