



Reintegration Summit 2026

What We Learned
April 2026

Note of Appreciation

We recognize the staff of enCompass Community Safety Agency for making this day a success. The Reintegration Summit was made possible through the support of the City of Edmonton and funding provided in partnership with the Government of Canada's Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. We gratefully acknowledge their contributions to the development, implementation, and sharing of this work.

We would also like to thank Elder Barry Monkman and his *oskâpêwis*, Lyle, for opening up the Reintegration Summit in a good way.

We appreciate the following organizations for contributing their passion and expertise to the Reintegration Summit – and for strengthening the circle of support:

- Beccarian Correctional Care
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Bissell Centre
- Calgary John Howard Society
- Calgary Police Service
- City of Edmonton
- Correctional Service Canada
- Edmonton Police Service
- Edmonton Young Offender Centre
- Public Safety Canada
- Public Safety and Emergency Services, Government of Alberta
- REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
- Recovery Alberta
- The Mustard Seed
- YOUCAN Youth Services

Introduction

On March 13, 2026, enCompass Community Safety Agency, hosted a daylong gathering to reflect on the current state of reintegration in Alberta.

The Reintegration Summit brought together senior representatives from 16 different organizations from across Alberta to build relationships and to identify opportunities for collective action.

The following report captures the key learnings from these rich conversations.

The Reintegration Summit conveyed a clear and consistent message: successful reintegration is not primarily a single-program issue but a cross-system challenge.

Participants described a landscape in which justice, corrections, policing, housing, health, mental health, recovery, employment, child and family services, and community organizations all shape reintegration outcomes.

While many strong practices already exist, they are often fragmented, unevenly available, and overly reliant on informal relationships rather than on embedded, durable structures. Across the discussions, participants called for a fundamental shift from a disconnected, service-driven model to a more coordinated, person-centred, trauma-informed, and community-connected reintegration system.

The overall direction of change includes shifting the system...

- from program-centred to person-centred approaches
- from short-term intervention to continuous support
- from silos to coordinated partnerships
- from isolated services to shared accountability
- from ad hoc collaboration to structured coordination
- from gatekeeping information to responsible information-sharing

Overall Findings

Person-centred, individualized reintegration

Participants strongly emphasized that reintegration must be person-centred and individualized. Standardized or rigid service models were seen as ill-suited to the complex, intersecting realities people face when leaving custody. Summit participants stressed the importance of practical, needs-based support, individualized planning, and approaches that begin by asking people what they need rather than prescribing solutions from the outside. Effective reintegration was framed as relational and responsive, with attention not only to the individual but also to family, natural supports, and the broader community context.

Recurring ideas

- Individualized planning
- Practical, needs-based supports
- Let individuals identify their own needs
- Respect the agency and voice of participants
- Shift from service-centred to person-centred programming
- Ask people what works for them
- Support beyond the individual, including family and natural supports

Housing, navigation, and practical supports

Access to housing and other practical supports emerged as foundational reintegration conditions. Participants repeatedly cited housing, transportation, identification, banking, waitlists, and access to mental health and social services as core determinants of whether someone can stabilize after release. These were not treated as secondary logistical matters but as central reintegration infrastructure. The findings indicate that housing, in particular, should be understood as a reintegration intervention in its own right, especially when paired with outreach, navigation, and wraparound supports.

Recurring ideas

- Housing with services attached
- Intensive outreach for housing and follow-up
- Transportation planning at release
- Navigators who know all available resources
- Better access to psychological and mental health supports
- No more waitlists
- Identify short-term targets and practical next steps

Overall Findings

Early intervention and continuity of support

Another consistent finding was that reintegration needs to begin earlier and continue longer. Participants described release as a point within a broader continuum rather than a discrete event. They called for earlier intervention, stronger pre-release planning, transition training while in custody, warm handoffs to community supports, and follow-up that extends well into community stabilization. The findings suggest that many current models end support too soon or fail to ensure continuity between institutional and community settings, increasing the risk of instability and re-entry into crisis or justice systems.

Recurring ideas

- Early intervention and early planning
- Connect with people before crisis or escalation
- More transition training while in custody
- Better release planning
- Longer placements or more stable transitional supports
- Follow-up after release
- Avoid cutting people off from care too early

Mental health, trauma, and healing-centred approaches

Mental health, trauma, and healing-centred practice were also central themes. Participants advocated for trauma-informed services, greater access to psychologists and mental health care, healing-oriented approaches, and systems that recognize many offenders as survivors of significant trauma. Reintegration was described as inseparable from mental health support and trauma recovery. This reflects a broader shift away from narrow, compliance-based models toward public health, healing, and restoration-oriented approaches.

Recurring ideas

- Trauma-informed teams and services
- More psychologist options
- Accessible and responsive mental health services
- Healing-centred approaches
- Public health approach
- Recognize that many offenders are also survivors
- Build systems around healing, not punishment

Overall Findings

Lived experience and community voice

The summit findings also underscored the importance of lived experience, families, elders, and community voices. Participants repeatedly called for the full integration of people with lived experience, peer workers, natural supports, and culturally grounded approaches across both service delivery and system design. Reintegration was framed not only as an institutional process but also as a community process that requires legitimacy, relevance, and trust. Involving those closest to the experience was seen as essential to designing responses that work.

Recurring ideas

- Integrate lived experience more fully
- Hear from diverse voices
- Include families and natural supports
- Involve elders
- Include the right people in the room
- Use storytelling and community-based learning

Shift away from solely punitive models

Several groups explicitly argued that incarceration-heavy, control-oriented, and punishment-focused systems can deepen harm and undermine reintegration outcomes. At the same time, there was recognition that punitive measures, including incarceration, can play a role in accountability within existing systems. In contrast, participants emphasized restorative justice, cultural approaches, healing, repair, and more relational forms of accountability. This suggests an emerging philosophical shift in the field, although the findings also show that this shift is not yet fully realized in practice.

Recurring ideas

- Significantly reduce incarceration
- Non-punitive approaches
- Recognize offenders as survivors
- Build systems on healing
- Return to restorative justice and cultural approaches
- Support restitution and repair
- Use person-centred rather than control-oriented models

Overall Findings

System coordination and integration

A dominant theme throughout the summit was system fragmentation. Participants repeatedly emphasized that people leaving custody must navigate disconnected ministries, siloed services, inconsistent handoffs, and unclear roles across institutions and providers. Reintegration was described as being undermined not by the total absence of supports, but by the lack of integration among those supports. This creates duplication, service gaps, inefficiency, and confusion for both providers and individuals attempting to stabilize after release. The findings suggest that what is needed is not simply more programs, but stronger cross-system governance, clearer accountability, and shared pathways across sectors.

Recurring ideas

- Ministries and systems need to work together more intentionally
- Stop working in silos
- Create a consistent governing or coordinating body
- Use a hub, team model, or shared table approach
- Improve warm handoffs and transitions
- Clarify organizational roles and responsibilities
- Build a community of practice that includes frontline workers, leadership, and lived experience

Information sharing, data systems, and consent

A related theme was the need to improve information-sharing and data infrastructure. Participants highlighted disconnected databases, weak real-time information flow, privacy barriers, and inconsistent consent processes as major obstacles to coordinated reintegration. The concern was not that privacy should be abandoned, but that current approaches often prevent appropriate collaboration and continuity of care. There was a clear call for practical systems that allow relevant information to follow the person safely across institutions and service providers, supported by better consent protocols, shared tools, and more effective use of technology.

Recurring ideas

- Link databases across systems
- Create a central information system
- Share real-time information such as shelter or service availability
- Improve release planning through better information exchange
- Involve clients in consenting to share information
- Stop overprotecting information to the point that it harms outcomes
- Build better consent forms and clearer protocols

Overall Findings

Technology and innovation as enablers

Technology and innovation were discussed as potential enablers, particularly for coordination, access, service planning, and information-sharing. Participants were generally pragmatic rather than idealistic in this regard: technology was valued to the extent that it could solve real problems, such as linked databases, visibility into service availability, virtual access, and improved coordination across providers. At the same time, participants noted that the infrastructure to support this often does not yet exist.

Recurring ideas

- Linked databases
- Digital access to waitlists and housing teams
- Video calls/tours
- AI or adaptive thinking tools
- Better tech for resource coordination
- Technology to support planning and information-sharing

System capacity, funding, and sustainability

Finally, the summit highlighted structural concerns related to funding, workforce stability, and system capacity. Participants described unstable funding, staff turnover, long waitlists, and the fragility of models that depend on a few committed individuals rather than sustainable infrastructure. There was recognition that reintegration systems require not only better design, but also stable investment, workforce continuity, and the capacity to scale what is already working.

Recurring ideas

- More funding and resources
- Stable programming and service funding
- No more waitlists
- Sustain expertise even when staff or leaders leave
- Transition staff if funding changes
- Need evidence, data, and long-term outcomes to justify investment

Key Implications

These findings carry several important implications. First, program-level improvements on their own are unlikely to be sufficient. Because the barriers are systemic, isolated enhancements to individual services will have limited effect unless accompanied by stronger coordination, shared accountability, and more integrated infrastructure across sectors.

Second, reintegration outcomes depend heavily on conditions outside the justice system. Housing, health care, mental health supports, family and community connections, transportation, access to employment, and social inclusion all shape whether reintegration succeeds. This means reintegration cannot reasonably be treated as the sole responsibility of corrections or justice actors.

Third, the current system appears overly reliant on informal workarounds and personal relationships. While these relationships are often a strength, they also introduce fragility. When funding shifts or key people leave, effective connections can disappear. The findings therefore point to a need to institutionalize collaboration and continuity rather than relying primarily on goodwill and individual effort.

Fourth, fragmentation is not only inefficient but also harmful. Poor coordination delays access to support, increases burdens on people leaving custody, contributes to duplication, and heightens the risk of crisis, instability, and re-engagement with systems. In this sense, better integration is both a service quality and a public well-being issue.

Strategic Direction

Taken together, the findings point to a broad direction of change: from silos to integration, from program-centred to person-centred practice, from short-term intervention to continuous support, from gatekeeping information to responsible information-sharing, and from expert-driven approaches to models shaped by lived experience and community voice. This is not simply a call for expansion; it is a call for redesign.

Recommendations

A coherent response to these findings would begin by establishing a sustained, cross-sector reintegration coordination structure. This mechanism would bring together justice, corrections, policing, health, housing, child and family services, Indigenous and cultural organizations, and community providers to clarify roles, align on shared outcomes, and support joint problem-solving.

Reintegration should also be designed as a continuous pathway that begins before release and extends into community stabilization. This requires earlier planning, better transition supports, warm handoffs, realistic follow-up, and stronger continuity between institutional and community-based services. Housing should be treated as core reintegration infrastructure. Transitional, supportive, and therapeutic housing options need to be more closely aligned with reintegration pathways so that release planning is grounded in realistic conditions for stability.

Practical barriers such as transportation, identification, banking, benefits access, and eligibility requirements should be addressed as priority intervention points, not as afterthoughts. These are often the first barriers that determine whether other supports can be accessed.

Systems should also formalize and scale practices that are already showing promise, including navigators, reintegration workers, integrated teams, collaborative tables, and wraparound supports. The goal should be to move from localized success stories to stable, system-supported models.

At the practice level, person-centred, trauma-informed, and healing-oriented approaches should be more consistently embedded across the continuum. Services should be flexible and responsive to diverse populations and needs, including those of youth, women, Indigenous people, and people with complex mental health needs or FASD.

Strategic Direction

Recommendations

The role of lived experience, peers, elders, and culturally grounded models should be expanded across planning, delivery, and system leadership. These are not peripheral enhancements; the findings suggest they are central to trust, relevance, and effectiveness.

Finally, the system needs stronger information-sharing frameworks, more collaborative funding approaches, and greater investment in workforce stability and capacity. Improved data systems, multi-year funding, reduced competition among organizations, and attention to staff retention and training are necessary to support a more coherent reintegration system over time.

Conclusion

The Reintegration Summit findings present a strong, consistent picture. Reintegration is constrained less by a lack of commitment than by fragmentation. Participants described a system with real strengths, but one that remains too siloed, difficult to navigate, and insufficiently structured to reflect the realities people face when returning to the community.

The Summit points to a more effective alternative: a reintegration ecosystem that is coordinated, person-centred, trauma-informed, healing-oriented, practically accessible, and shaped by lived experience and shared accountability. The Summit also affirmed the importance of hosting future gatherings to deepen collaboration, build on existing best practices, and inspire innovation. We look forward to seeing where this journey takes us.