Results from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and Next Steps to Improve Services for Those Experiencing Homelessness

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<td>To:</td>
<td>Community Development and Recreation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From:</td>
<td>General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration</td>
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**SUMMARY**

This report provides a summary of statistical results and key findings from the Street Needs Assessment conducted on April 17, 2013. This report also describes steps to be taken by Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, in response to the Street Needs Assessment survey, to improve outreach and housing support for Toronto’s homeless residents.

The 2013 Street Needs Assessment was undertaken at Council’s request to better understand the evolving nature of homelessness in Toronto, and the most effective ways to target services in order to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The Street Needs Assessment includes a point-in-time estimate of Toronto’s homeless population as well as a 13-question survey administered to almost two thousand homeless respondents in indoor and outdoor sites.

The total estimated homeless population in Toronto on April 17, 2013 was 5,253 – representing a 1.6 percent increase from 2009. A number of key findings regarding Toronto’s homeless population are described in this report including an increase in the share of seniors, persistently high representation of Aboriginal-identified individuals, new data regarding respondents identifying as LGBTQ and Veterans, trends in health service use, and a reported decrease in the incidence of panhandling. Where possible, the results of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment are compared to the findings from previous surveys conducted in 2006 and 2009.

A detailed review of all results is provided in the attached document “2013 Street Needs Assessment: Results.”
RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, recommends that:

1. City Council thank the more than 550 community volunteers and team leaders who participated in the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and contributed to its success;

2. City Council thank the Street Outreach Steering Committee for supporting the successful implementation of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment, and reaffirm the Committee’s important role in planning services for the homeless;

3. City Council direct that the 2013 Street Needs Assessment report be forwarded for information to:
   a. the Prime Minister of Canada, the Federal Minister of Finance, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister Responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation;
   b. the Premier of Ontario, the Provincial Minister of Finance, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; and
   c. the Chairs of the Toronto Local Health Integration Networks;

4. City Council reconfirm its commitment to ending street homelessness by working together with other orders of government, private sector landlords, social housing providers and community partners to strengthen service integration, access to housing, necessary supports and employability services; and

5. City Council direct the General Manager of SSHA to review service levels in the Streets to Homes program in response to the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and other service benchmarks, and ensure that any changes to service delivery that may be recommended based on the results of the survey be reviewed as part of the 2014 Operating Budget process, with a focus on delivering programming that is targeted to finding and maintaining housing for persons living outside.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
**Equity Impact**

The results of the Street Needs Assessment are used to inform program adjustments and service improvements to meet the needs of homeless people. Many individuals surveyed for the SNA are members of equity-seeking groups (e.g. Aboriginal people, LGBTQ, refugees, women, people with disabilities).

Training is provided to volunteers and team leaders prior to conducting the survey. This training involves developing sensitivity to issues related to interacting with homeless individuals from diverse backgrounds.

**DECISION HISTORY**

City Council, at its meeting of February 1, 2 and 3, 2005 approved the report "From the Streets into Homes: A Strategy to Assist Homeless Persons Find Permanent Housing."

Recommendation 10 of that report reads, “to better focus ongoing outreach activities, the General Manager, Shelter, Housing and Support recommend to Council at its meeting on July 19, 2005, through the Community Services Committee, an appropriate method for determining the number and service needs of homeless persons living on Toronto’s streets and in its public spaces.”


City Council at its meeting of October 26, 27, 28 and 31, 2005, approved the report “Determining the Number and Service Needs of Homeless Persons Living on Toronto’s Streets and in its Public Spaces: Follow-up Report,” which outlined the approach that would be taken for the initiative.


At its meeting of July 25 and 26, 2006 the results of the 2006 Street Needs Assessment were presented to City Council.


The Housing Opportunities Toronto Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010-2020, approved by Council at its meeting of August 5 and 6, 2009, identifies as a key City action to: “Use the Street Needs Assessment and other research to help guide future affordable housing strategies by: (a) Conducting a Street Needs Assessment every three years, with the next to occur in 2012; and (b) Analyzing available data to identify changes and evidence for future service needs.”


At its meeting of May 11 and 12, 2010 the results of the 2009 Street Needs Assessment were presented to City Council.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Street Needs Assessment (SNA) is intended to be undertaken every three years to better understand the evolving nature of homelessness in Toronto. (The most recent survey was postponed to 2013 as a result of the possibility of a City labour disruption in 2012.) The objectives of the SNA are to assess the service needs of those experiencing homelessness and indentify the most effective ways to target available resources to address the needs of this population. Any service changes that are made in light of these findings are intended to strengthen homelessness supports and help those without a home transition to safe, secure and affordable permanent housing.

The SNA is a unique data source for the City of Toronto, as neither Statistics Canada nor any other institution systematically collects information regarding Toronto's homeless population as a whole. The SNA provides information regarding both sheltered homeless respondents – including those encountered in City and provincially-administered Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, health and treatment facilities, and correctional facilities – as well as those sleeping outdoors.

The SNA employs a point-in-time methodology for enumerating homelessness that is now the standard for most major US and Canadian urban centres. The City of Toronto also employs quality assurance measures, described in the attached results report, to refine the accuracy of the estimate. Study teams administer an anonymous survey to respondents (who receive a small restaurant voucher for participation), which includes questions about basic demographic attributes, sources of income, service needs and services used.

A consistent methodology and approach to the Street Needs Assessment survey has been used each year to ensure comparable results over time. Both the methodology used to estimate the homeless population and the survey design were first developed in 2006 through extensive research and consultations with subject matter experts, as well as a range of local stakeholders.

Modest changes to the SNA survey were implemented in 2013 to facilitate the collection of new data, including questions about military service, LGBTQ status and residency in Toronto. In addition, slight adjustments have been made to prior year estimates for the homeless population in Toronto to ensure consistency with the 2013 report and to incorporate the most up-to-date information available. These adjustments do not meaningfully impact the findings from prior year reports or the interpretation of results.

COMMENTS

This year, the SNA was conducted on Wednesday, April 17 – consistent with both time of year and day of the week of the two previous surveys in 2006 and 2009. The SNA was implemented by City staff with integral support from over 550 community volunteers and team leaders. Most surveys were conducted between 7:00pm and 1:00am; however, all volunteers were dismissed by midnight. Surveys with respondents in VAW shelters and correctional facilities were completed throughout the day on April 17.
In addition to the strong community support received, the 2013 SNA was the result of collaboration between a wide range of sector stakeholders and agencies, various City divisions and ministerial partners in the Governments of Ontario and Canada. The 2013 Street Needs Assessment would not have been possible without the benefit of these relationships.

The response rate for the survey was approximately 40 percent - generally consistent with previous years – and the total number of valid respondent surveys was 1,981, representing the largest sample of data yet collected. The relatively strong response rate and large sample size for this voluntary survey demonstrates, once again, both the perceived importance of the Street Needs Assessment among respondents as well as the value of the information it provides.

The cost to conduct the 2013 SNA was $66,200. Budget details, with comparison to prior years, are provided in Appendix A. The Street Needs Assessment is funded with support from the Government of Canada.

As in past years, this data will be used by SSHAs and other City divisions to review and evaluate the services currently provided to Toronto’s most vulnerable residents, in order to identify opportunities for improvement. Some immediate actions to be taken by SSHAs in response to the 2013 Street Needs Assessment are summarized at the end of this report.

The report attached as Appendix B provides detailed findings from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment, including comparison with prior year results. An overview of key findings is presented below.

**KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2013 STREET NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

1. **The total homeless population in Toronto has remained relatively stable since 2009 while the number of people sleeping outdoors has increased**

   The 2013 Street Needs Assessment produced an estimate of 5,253 for Toronto's total homeless population, including both those with and without shelter on the night of April 17. This represents a 1.6 percent increase from the estimated count for 2009 (5,169). Any rise in the incidence of homelessness is undesirable; but because it was below the projected population growth rate in Toronto during the same time period (4-5 percent), it is reasonable to consider the overall homeless count in 2013 as "stable" with 2009.

   447 individuals, or 9 percent of Toronto's homeless population, are estimated to have been sleeping outdoors on the night of April 17. The outdoor population estimate for the 2013 Street Needs Assessment represents a 24 percent increase from 2009, but remains 39 percent below the street population observed in 2006.

2. **The vast majority of people experiencing homelessness want housing**

   Ninety-three percent of those experiencing homelessness indicate a desire to get into permanent housing, a consistent increase since 2006. The relatively small number who indicated that they do not want housing in 2013 are most likely to state that it is because either they intend to leave Toronto or that they have a specific challenge that keeps them
from housing (such as a health problem or a legal issue.) For most respondents, homelessness is not a choice.

3. The most important services to help the homeless get housing are those that address housing affordability

Clearly evident from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment is that 1) most homeless respondents want housing and 2) above all else, it is a lack of affordable housing that stands in their way. To the question "What is the one most important thing that would help you get housing," almost two thirds of respondents provided responses related to housing affordability – 29 percent indicated "more money from OW/ODSP," 20 percent indicated "Subsidized housing or a housing allowance", and 15 percent indicated "Help finding an affordable place."

4. Panhandling among the homeless has decreased to roughly a third of what it was in 2006

When asked what sources of income they have, the share of respondents who reported panhandling was 6 percent - down from 10 percent in 2009 and 17 percent in 2006. The most commonly cited sources of income in the 2013 Street Needs Assessment are some form of government transfer (indicated by 71 percent of respondents), with 37 percent receiving Ontario Works (OW) and 29 percent receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Eleven percent of respondents stated that they have no source of income whatsoever.

5. The share of homeless seniors has more than doubled in the past 4 years

A concerning trend observed in the 2013 results was the dramatic increase in the share of seniors in Toronto's homeless population. The share of respondents who indicated that they were aged 61 and older increased from 5 percent to 10 percent between 2009 and 2013. Further indication of the trend towards an older homeless population is change in respondents aged 51 and above – 29 percent of the homeless population in 2013 compared to 20 percent four years ago. Although this trend is consistent with the aging trend in the general population, the 2013 results point to a more rapid shift occurring in the homeless population.

6. Aboriginal people continue to be overrepresented in the homeless population, especially those sleeping outdoors and younger age groups

Since the implementation of the first Street Needs Assessment in 2006, the results have indicated mixed success in addressing homelessness among Aboriginal-identified people. While the absolute number of those sleeping outdoors has decreased since 2006, the Aboriginal share of the total homeless population has remained persistently high.

Aboriginal-identified individuals represent approximately 1 percent of the general population in Toronto, but 16 percent of its homeless population. This is roughly consistent with results from 2006 and 2009. The disproportional level of Aboriginal homelessness is even more apparent among those without shelter on April 17, with one third of outdoor respondents identifying as Aboriginal, a proportional increase of 4
percentage points since 2009. The Aboriginal homeless population also tends to be younger, with 52 percent under the age of 41 compared to 46 percent among non-Aboriginals respondents.

7. One in five homeless youth identify as LGBTQ

For the first time in a SNA survey, respondents were asked about their sexual identity. Twenty-one percent of respondents in youth shelters identify as a part of the LGBTQ community, more than twice the overall rate for the total homeless population. The rate of identification with the LGBTQ community is higher among the female homeless population (11 percent) than the male population (7 percent).

8. Emergency health care services are the most commonly used services by homeless people in Toronto

Sixty-nine percent of respondents in the 2013 Street Needs Assessment indicated they had accessed health and treatment services during the 6 months prior to the survey, more than any other type of services. These respondents frequently made use of emergency health services; with 46 percent indicating that they had visited a hospital/emergency room and more than one in four indicating they had contact with an ambulance. In part, this result points to the negative health effects of homelessness – effects which are diminished, if not entirely resolved, once housing stability is achieved. It should also be interpreted in terms of the considerable cost difference between providing housing responses (such as housing subsidies) versus more expensive emergency responses, as previously described in the 2009 SNA report. Substantial cost savings can be achieved when people have housing.

9. Homelessness among Canadian Veterans is evident within Toronto

Street Needs Assessment respondents were asked about military service for the first time in 2013. Seven percent of the overall homeless population indicated that they had some experience in the Canadian Forces. Although data behind this result is limited (respondents were not asked about length or type of service) it is nonetheless an important result of the SNA. There has been little to no research yet conducted to understand the prevalence of homelessness among Veterans in Canada. However, studies in the United States indicate that roughly 7 percent of the country's homeless population are Veterans, while in the United Kingdom it is 6 percent.

10. Homelessness in Toronto is a challenge faced by both long-term residents as well as newcomers

When asked where they were living one year prior to the 2013 Street Needs Assessment, 81 percent of respondents indicated Toronto. The notable exception, as described in detail in the 2009 Street Needs Assessment report, are those encountered in the City's family shelter system, where roughly 30 percent indicated recent arrival from another country.

OBSERVATIONS

The following provides a summary of current and planned action to be implemented by SSHA in immediate response to the results from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment.
In response to key findings 1, 2, 3, & 4: Implement changes to Streets to Homes to strengthen housing outcomes for homeless clients

The Streets to Homes program was implemented in 2005 to provide direct outreach services and housing assistance to street involved people in Toronto through a "housing first" approach. In 2008, Council expanded the mandate of the Streets to Homes program to include 24/7 outreach services and a social-service response to people who legally panhandle (whether housed or not).

These service enhancements effectively changed the Streets to Homes program goals – to provide comprehensive service in addition to intense, individualized case management support to street involved clients. The enhancements also expanded the Streets to Homes program clientele to include persons who are housed (but loitering and/or panhandling), Business Improvement Areas and business owners.

The results of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment, including the estimated increase in the outdoor homeless population, point to a need to evaluate the effectiveness of these service enhancements in meeting the mandate of the Street to Homes program.

In response to the results of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and other service benchmarks, SSHA will review current service levels in the Streets to Homes program, and recommend changes to ensure that program resources are best targeted to finding and maintaining housing for persons living outside. This will include:

- Refocusing street outreach towards addressing the needs of the outdoor homeless population, including reconfiguring the schedule of street outreach services to the times of day that have the most impact.
- Reconsidering the use of Streets to Homes program resources for social service interventions for people who are housed and panhandling.
- Redirecting resources in the Streets to Homes Program to strategies that increase service integration, access to housing and supports and employability initiatives.

In response to 1, 2 & 3: Continue to invest in housing allowances as a critical tool to achieve housing stability for all homeless people

It is critical that steps be taken to enhance access for those experiencing homelessness to safe, secure and affordable housing. Subsidized social housing is one option. However, owing to the tremendous pressures on the limited number of available rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units, waiting times can extend multiple years, even for those with priority status such as homeless households. Alternatively, housing allowances have been shown to be an effective tool in creating housing stability. Housing allowances provide a fixed subsidy amount to recipients to help with housing costs wherever they wish to live. In many cases, housing allowances can also be paired with additional housing supports in order to promote successful tenancies.

The City has already demonstrated success in supporting those experiencing homelessness to find and maintain housing through the "Toronto Transitional Housing Allowance Program," (TTHAP) funded through the Federal-Provincial Investment in Affordable Housing program and approved by Council in February, 2012.
Through TTHAP, the City currently provides assistance to almost 4,000 households who are formerly homeless, seniors, and transitioning to employment to find and maintain housing.

Additionally, as a part of the "Housing Stabilization Fund: Updates and New Housing Allowance" report brought forward to the September 18 meeting of Community Development and Recreation Committee at the request of Council, SSHA and Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) have made a joint recommendation with respect to a new housing allowance program aimed at target groups specifically indentified through 2013 SNA. This recommendation proposes:

- That Council authorize the General Managers of TESS and SSHA to reinvest one-time surplus funding into a housing allowance program to assist up to 260 homeless and at-risk senior households in Toronto.

In response to 1, 2 & 3: Recognize and address barriers in both the private market and social housing sectors for those trying to overcome homelessness

Beyond the affordability challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness are various other barriers to finding and accessing available housing units. In response, staff will:

- Investigate the possibility of creating a new staff role of "Private Sector Liaison" with responsibility for working with landlords to create new points of entry for housing for homeless clients, addressing perception problems, and helping to resolve issues.

There are also opportunities to work more proactively with social housing providers, including TCH, to address the housing needs of those experiencing homelessness. Staff will:

- Work with TCH and other social housing providers to develop new service arrangements (such as referral agreements and/or head leases) that help newly housed clients to maintain successful tenancies.

In response to 5: Keep at-risk seniors housed and target services, to the aging homeless population

In May 2013, Council approved the Toronto Senior's Strategy which sets the strategic direction for City divisions in addressing the needs of Toronto's aging population, including housing needs. With the principles and objectives of that strategy now in effect, staff will ensure that all housing services delivered by the division are consistent with and, wherever possible, actively advance Council's objectives for seniors.

A number of specific steps can be taken to assist seniors to get out of the shelter system. For example, the redevelopment of Seaton House men's shelter provides the City with a singular opportunity to transform the way services are delivered to homeless seniors. As the redevelopment gets underway over the next few years, opportunities can be pursued to:
• Seek out community input on programs, services and design elements that would best meet the needs of homeless older adults.

• Investigate a new health integration service model for seniors, drawing upon community input and best practices.

• Implement a transitional housing pilot program that specifically caters to the needs of seniors.

In addition, SSHA will continue to work with community agencies that target service supports to homeless seniors. SSHA will seek opportunities to:

• Target funding received under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) towards projects and program innovations delivered by community agencies that meet the needs of at-risk and homeless seniors.

There are also steps that the City and its partners can take in order to reduce the occurrence of homelessness among seniors altogether. SSHA staff will:

• Work with Toronto Community Housing (TCH), to support implementation of the Ombudsman's findings to ensure that no senior is evicted from social housing for preventable reasons.

• Work with all social housing providers to ensure service supports and effective communication are built into the rent-geared-to-income eligibility review process with a focus on supporting housing stability and eviction prevention.

• Target investments in new and existing housing allowance programs to meet the needs of seniors.

In response to 6: A focus on addressing homelessness among Aboriginal people, particularly those sleeping outdoors

The 2013 Street Needs Assessment indicates mixed results in reducing the incidence of homelessness among those who self-identify as Aboriginal. As with other equity-seeking groups, the SNA provides an opportunity to reflect on how we currently provide services to the Aboriginal community and what changes should be made. To that end, it will be important to:

• Seek out input from sector agencies and community representatives in order to better understand the particular service needs of the Aboriginal community in Toronto. Aboriginal representation is particularly important as SSHA staff conduct consultations for the development of the comprehensive Housing Stability Service Plan.

There are a number of community organizations working to provide services and supports that are specifically catered to the needs of Aboriginal homeless persons in Toronto. To support this work, SSHA will:

• Continue to target 20 percent of HPS funding towards projects and program innovations delivered by community agencies that specialize and have proven effectiveness in addressing the needs of Aboriginal homeless people.
In response to 7: Review resources and service approach for homeless LGBTQ and other youth groups

SSHA is committed to ensuring that shelters and other housing services are accessible to all equity-seeking groups within Toronto. In order to actively support this commitment in the shelter system, it will be important to:

- Deliver staff training and workshops that strengthen staff capacity when working with LGBTQ-identified clients.
- Identify and implement improvements to Shelter Standards.
- Reform the complaints process to ensure that LGBTQ shelter clients receive the support and accommodation to which they are entitled.

Staff will also pursue new partnerships with community agencies and shelters that target youth and LGBTQ communities, including HPS funding as appropriate.

In response to 8: Seek out partnerships within the health sector to ensure that all residents get the care they need

There is considerable opportunity to create new partnerships to better meet the health needs of those experiencing homelessness in Toronto. As a first step, SSHA will:

- Review the findings of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment with City partners, including Toronto Public Health and Long-Term Care Homes and Services, to identify opportunities to leverage services currently offered and opportunities for future coordination and/or integration to better meet the health needs of those in the shelter system.

As directed by Council in April 2013, staff are currently undertaking a review of the social housing waiting list. As a part of this review staff will:

- Identify opportunities to provide linkages to housing services and/or referrals for those experiencing mental health issues through the Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing (CASH) system.

In response to 9: Work with federal partners to support homeless Veterans

Staff will share the results of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment with partners in Veterans Affairs Canada. Where possible staff will:

- Engage with Veterans Affairs Canada to identify opportunities for referrals and/or service coordination for Veterans experiencing homelessness in Toronto in order to ensure that they are connected to all available housing services for which they qualify.

In addition, SSHA will:

- Update shelter intake materials in all SSHA programs to incorporate questions about clients' past service in the Canadian Armed Forces.
In response to all key findings: Ensure coordinated action by all service partners through the Housing Stability Service Plan

SSHA is preparing a comprehensive Housing Stability Service Plan for Council approval. This plan will provide a framework for a coordinated, client centered and outcome focused approach to housing and homelessness services and indicate investment priorities for provincial funds provided through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and other sources as available.

In response to all key findings: Renew the call for all orders of government to work together to end street homelessness

The release of results from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment provides a meaningful opportunity for the City to reconfirm its commitment to end street homelessness. SSHA will continue to work with other City divisions, other orders of government, private sector landlords, social housing providers and community partners to find opportunities to strengthen service integration, access to housing and supports and employability initiatives.

NEXT STREET NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In the Housing Opportunities Toronto: An Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010 – 2020 a commitment was made to conduct a Street Needs Assessment on a regular three-year cycle. Prior to implementation of the next Street Needs Assessment, staff will evaluate this current implementation schedule with respect to budget, operations and methodological considerations. Staff will consult with sector stakeholders to determine the right approach to the Street Needs Assessment going forward, which balances these considerations, and ensures that homeless residents have the opportunity to make their voices heard and the City is able to measure progress on its goal of ending homelessness.

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SIGNATURE

_________________________________________
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General Manager
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: 2013 Street Needs Assessment Budget with prior year comparisons

Appendix B: 2013 Street Needs Assessment Results Report
## Appendix A: 2013 Street Needs Assessment Budget with prior year comparisons

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