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January 16, 2018

TO: Community Development and Recreation Committee, Toronto City Council

FROM: Kwame McKenzie, CEO, Wellesley Institute

**Re: Agenda item CD25.5 (Jan. 17, 2018), “Winter Respite and Shelter Services”
Supportive Housing for Homeless People**

The urgent needs of homeless people in Toronto this winter have led to calls for more shelter beds and more housing. I am writing to support City steps to make housing the priority in responding to this. This position is consistent with that of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH).

Wellesley Institute carries out research to inform policy and government action, to improve health and health equity in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. Our focus is the social determinants of health – the conditions of life that foster better health. Housing has large impacts on health, and homelessness has severe negative effects on health.

Supportive housing is a significant part of Wellesley Institute work. We have prepared three research reports on supportive housing in the past two years. We are completing a project with The Access Point and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA Toronto Branch) to analyse the needs of people on the waiting list for mental health supportive housing. I was a member of the provincial Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness (2015). I have chaired a provincial Supportive Housing Working Group, part of Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council (2015-2017) providing advice to Minister of Health and Long Term Care.

Supportive housing is the long-term solution to chronic and episodic homelessness. It provides affordable rents as well as support staff who help ensure that people who live with mental illness or addictions, or have experienced chronic homelessness, can live in stable housing in the community. Its cost-effectiveness has been shown in a wide range of research, including the *At Home Chez Soi* initiative funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in Toronto and other cities.

While added shelter beds are a necessary first response to the recent surge in homelessness, the priority now should be housing. The City can build on the role it already plays – through its funding of Alternative Housing providers, support to new affordable housing, Streets to Homes, Habitat boarding homes, and other initiatives – in housing for homeless people.

Public attention to housing and homelessness this winter provides an opportunity to go further in supportive housing. We would stress the following key points, some of them made in the TAEH submission, consistent with the research literature and with our own work on supportive housing.

A range and continuum of supportive housing is needed. For example, somewhat different support may be needed by people coming out of psychiatric hospitals and people living with addictions; scattered rent supplement in private rental (as in Streets to Homes) can provide immediate solutions, while purpose-built supportive housing is accommodation that will be there for the long term.

The provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) and Ministry of Housing (MHO) have the primary responsibility to fund more supportive housing. The City, however, has an important role, as funder of a range of housing and services and in its role as system planner locally.

The issue is not lack of knowledge or experience in how to house people experiencing chronic homelessness, but rather that we need to do more. The recent addition of more MOHLTC-funded units and MHO's Home for Good are important steps. But more is needed, and the Supportive Housing Working Group noted above (<https://www.ontariominds.ca/s/Supportive-Housing-WG-FINAL-s5kn.pdf>) has recommended a provincial target of 3,000 more units annually.

Our research supports the importance of collaboration between the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and the City. City-LHIN collaboration is moving forward in several program areas. Supportive housing has emerged as a priority for Toronto-area LHINs, and there is potential to develop stronger City-LHIN partnerships in this matter.

The City's expertise in serving homeless people directly, and working with homeless-serving providers, creates an opportunity to develop proposals tailored to the needs of specific homeless populations. As well as feeding into HFG planning, some of these can also be brought forward to be considered for funding through the LHINs and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness has emerged as an important voice for supportive housing. It is also a forum for collaboration between City staff, community-based providers, and others, on more systematic solutions to homelessness. City staff are working with TAEH in planning the most effective ways to use the new Home for Good funding. Now is the time to build on these efforts, emphasizing long-term housing solutions to homelessness.

The National Housing Strategy will provide somewhat enhanced resources for affordable housing. In Toronto, this can provide part of the resources needed for new supportive housing.

In sum, today's context is favourable to stronger action on supportive housing. The National Housing Strategy, the Ontario government's interest, City-TAEH collaboration, and stronger LHIN priority for housing, can all contribute. The City has a key role as funder and system planner in helping create action on supportive housing as the main solution to homelessness.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Sutter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

On behalf of

Kwame McKenzie
CEO, Wellesley Institute