

November 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**RE: Results of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment and Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration's Homelessness Solutions Service Plan**

To the attention of Mayor Tory and Toronto City Council,

I am writing on behalf of United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT) in support of the staff recommendation for City Council to adopt the Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration Division's Homelessness Solutions Service Plan ('Service Plan').

I would also like to express our appreciation to staff from the Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration Division for inviting United Way Greater Toronto to participate on the Advisory Committee for the Service Plan.

As evidenced by the Street Needs Assessment 2021, homelessness continues to be a persistent and complex challenge facing Toronto. Moving from managing homelessness to ending homelessness in the city will require strong cross-sector leadership, adequate resourcing, and the adoption of best practices within the growing literature on homelessness interventions, including ensuring access to culturally appropriate services.

Following United Way Greater Toronto's release of the final report from its [P&L Odette Homelessness Solutions Lab](#), which describes priority practices established by consensus with the homeless serving sector in the Region, we were pleased to accept the invitation from the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration Division to co-chair the Interim Shelter Recovery Taskforce. The Taskforce's [final report](#), released in September 2020, provided advice from the homeless-serving sector in Toronto to guide the recovery of the shelter system through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The council-adopted immediate priorities for the shelter system included:

1. Address the disproportionate representation of Black people in Toronto's homeless population;
2. Prioritize Indigenous-specific housing in strategies to secure more permanent housing infrastructure;
3. Invest in housing and supports to decrease the volume and duration of need for emergency shelter;
4. Deepen collaboration with health partners including Ontario Health and Toronto Public Health;
5. Provide COVID-19 safe, dignified shelter options to people experiencing homelessness; and,
6. Minimize the flow of people into traditional emergency shelters.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES IN  
**PEEL, TORONTO  
& YORK REGION**

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Corporate Office  
26 Wellington St. E.  
12th Fl, Toronto, ON  
M5E 1S2  
Tel 416 777 2001  
Fax 416 777 0962  
TTY 1 866 620 2993

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Peel Region Office  
90 Burnhamthorpe Rd. W.  
Suite 408, PO Box 58  
Mississauga, ON  
L5B 3C3  
Tel 905 602 3650  
Fax 905 602 3651

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York Region Office  
80F Centurian Dr.  
Suite 206, Markham, ON  
L3R 8C1  
Tel 905 474 9974  
Fax 905 474 0051

United Way Greater Toronto welcomes the formal adoption of several of these priorities, practices, and approaches into SSHA's Homelessness Solutions Service Plan, and the areas of alignment between the Service Plan and the input of sector partners, including actions to meaningfully address Indigenous homelessness and Anti-Black racism within the shelter system, implement housing focused service-delivery, diversion, and increase system coordination and planning as facilitated through Coordinated Access.

United Way Greater Toronto is additionally very supportive of SSHA's new commitment to allocating 20% of its existing grant funding through a dedicated Indigenous funding stream, in collaboration with the Indigenous community entity and the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB).

We support the long-term funding priorities identified in the Service Plan to increase homelessness prevention and permanent housing solutions, while reducing emergency shelter use but caution that investments in these priorities cannot wait. The pandemic has illustrated how ill equipped the current shelter system is for a system-wide shock, and the results of the Street Needs Assessment suggest that new approaches and homelessness priorities are needed given the increase in people using the base shelter system.

In the context of limited resources and growing need, United Way Greater Toronto calls for increased allocations of funding to Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration's budget for the administration of community grants to implement programs and initiatives that integrate best practice and align with the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan's long-term funding priorities.

Finally, the Service Plan's Implementation Priorities state that an operational plan will be developed for the transition out of hotel response sites being used within the shelter system. The City's use of hotels in response to the pandemic was a bold and effective response to the risks posed by congregate shelter environments. In addition to being COVID-safe and allowing for isolation, the shelter hotels provided a dignified form of shelter to many clients who have benefitted from the privacy they afford. We commend Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration's leadership in their operation of the hotels, along with other City divisions and community partners. United Way Greater Toronto recommends that the development of any transition plan include meaningful consultation with existing hotel shelter operators, community partners, and clients with lived experience of homelessness and the shelter system.

Acknowledging that housing with supports is the only solution to homelessness for many of the people who are experiencing it in the city, we reiterate our support for the COVID-19 Housing and Homelessness Recovery

Response Plan and its calls to higher levels of government to partner with the City of Toronto to create affordable, deeply affordable, and supportive housing opportunities.

Yours sincerely,



Ruth Crammond  
Vice President, Community Investment and Development  
[rcrammond@uwgt.org](mailto:rcrammond@uwgt.org)