

2009 Street Needs Assessment: Results and Observations

Date:	April 9, 2010
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report outlines the results and key findings of the April 15, 2009 Street Needs Assessment, which provide a better understanding of the service needs of homeless individuals in Toronto. The results are also compared to the findings of the 2006 Street Needs Assessment to determine any changes in the characteristics and service needs of homeless people since that time.

The detailed results are documented in a stand alone report (“results report”), attached to this staff report. An overview of key findings is presented in this staff report with reference to the relevant page or pages in the results report as appropriate.

In 2005, City Council made a commitment to end street homelessness in Toronto. On April 15, 2009, the Street Needs Assessment demonstrated clear progress on this objective, with an estimated outdoor homeless population of 400. This represents a decrease of 51% over the 2006 outdoor homeless population estimate of 818.

In those service areas that are directly administered by the City of Toronto, street outreach and emergency shelters, there were an estimated 4,390 homeless individuals on April 15, 2009, a 1.7% decrease since 2006.

Continued implementation of the Housing First approach throughout all housing and homelessness services provided by the City, including in shelters and through the Streets to Homes program, is needed to build on the clear progress that has been made and to continue to assist homeless people to find and keep housing with supports appropriate to their needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council thank the more than 450 volunteers and the 278 Team Leaders who participated in the 2009 Street Needs Assessment and made it a success;
2. City Council thank the Street Outreach Steering Committee for supporting the successful implementation of the 2009 Street Needs Assessment, and reaffirm the Committee's important role in the Streets to Homes program; and
3. City Council direct that the 2009 Street Needs Assessment report be forwarded 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 Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Minister Responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, reconfirming Council's request that federal funding for initiatives to end homelessness, at a minimum, be doubled and made permanent;
 - b. the Premier of Ontario, the Provincial Minister of Finance, the Minister Responsible for 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 reconfirming Council's request that an ongoing sustainable source of funding be identified to provide the supports necessary to help people who were homeless and have found permanent housing to keep their housing; and
 - c. the Chairs of the Toronto Local Health Integration Networks for information.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Equity Impact

The purpose of the Street Needs Assessment is to understand the characteristics of the homeless population in Toronto and to determine the services that people who are homeless need in order to help them find and keep permanent housing. The results are used to identify the services needed by homeless people, many of whom are from equity-seeking groups (e.g. Aboriginal people, refugees, women, people with disabilities), in order to assist them to find and maintain housing. Results are also used to make further program adjustments and service improvements to meet the needs of homeless people.

Training is provided to volunteers and team leaders on conducting the survey and 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."

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc050201/pof2rpt/cl001.pdf>

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.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc051026/cmscl006a.pdf>

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

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060725/cms5rpt/cl010.pdf>

At its meeting of February 23 and 24, 2009 research on estimated cost savings possible through changes in use of services by clients of the Streets to Homes Program was presented to City Council. The report demonstrated that estimates of the cost of services that individuals used while homeless range up to \$48,000 per year, and that the cost savings for the majority of clients were greater than the cost of providing housing.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-18574.pdf>

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."

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/cc/decisions/2009-08-05-cc38-dd.htm>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The objective of the Street Needs Assessment is to determine the services that people who are homeless need in order to help them find and keep permanent housing. It is also to determine the number of people who are homeless and living on Toronto's streets and in its public spaces, or staying in shelters, health and treatment facilities and in

correctional facilities for the purpose of assessing the location, scale and dimension of service needs, and in planning appropriate program responses.

Toronto's first Street Needs Assessment was conducted on April 19, 2006. On the evening of April 15, 2009 the City's second Street Needs Assessment was conducted using a consistent, statistically valid methodology to ensure that results would be comparable to those in 2006. The enumeration methodology and survey design were developed in 2006 through extensive research and consultation with experts from other jurisdictions, as well as with a range of local stakeholders.

COMMENTS

As in 2006, the 2009 Street Needs Assessment was made possible through the partnership of a wide range of individuals, community agencies, City Divisions and provincial ministries, who contributed their time and effort to provide an up to date and comprehensive picture of homelessness in the City of Toronto. In particular, the 2009 Street Needs Assessment would not have been possible without the participation of more than 450 volunteers, along with 278 team leaders, who made it a success. With an overall response rate of almost 40%, people who were homeless in the City of Toronto once again took the opportunity to have their voices heard.

The attached results report documents the detailed findings from the 2009 Street Needs Assessment. An overview of key findings is presented below with reference to the relevant pages in the results report.

OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

Outdoor homelessness cut in half

In 2005, City Council made a commitment to end street homelessness in Toronto. On April 15, 2009 the Street Needs Assessment (SNA) demonstrated clear progress on this objective, with an estimated outdoor homeless population of 400. This represents a decrease of 51% over the 2006 outdoor homeless population estimate of 818.

In those service areas that are directly administered by the City of Toronto, street outreach and emergency shelters, there were an estimated 4,390 homeless individuals on April 15, 2009, a 1.7% decrease since 2006 (Pages 13-18).

Family shelter use driven by federal immigration policy

Volatility in the number of families who are homeless in Toronto is a key characteristic of homelessness in Toronto. Although the average number of people staying in family shelters on a given night has decreased by 45% since the peak in 2001, occupancy in the family shelter system is subject to widely varying ups and downs - decreasing by 59% between 2001 and 2005, and increasing by 43% between 2005 and 2009. It is clear that the numbers of families staying in the family shelter system are largely determined by international geopolitical circumstances and federal immigration policy. This has

contributed to a substantial increase in the number of refugee households in the family shelter system in recent years, which is reflected in the 9.3% increase in the number of people staying in shelters on the night of the Street Needs Assessment since 2006 (Pages 16-18).

Aboriginal people still overrepresented in homeless population but fewer sleeping outdoors

While the overall proportion of homeless people identifying as Aboriginal has decreased since 2006, from 16.2% in 2006 to 15.4% in 2009, Aboriginal people remain disproportionately represented in the homeless population and also in the outdoor homeless population (28.7%). However, the estimated number of Aboriginal homeless people living outdoors has decreased significantly. Of the total population estimated to be outdoors in 2009 (400), it is estimated that 115 (28.7%) identify as Aboriginal. In 2006, 25.8% of the total estimated outdoor population (818) were identified as Aboriginal, equating to 211 individuals. This represents a 45% estimated reduction in the overall number of Aboriginal individuals staying outdoors on the night of the survey (Page 27).

Panhandling down, employment up as reported sources of income

Panhandling has decreased as a reported source of income for 17.4% of all respondents in 2006 to 9.7% in 2009, and employment related income has increased from 23.2% of all respondents in 2006 to 28.8% in 2009 (Pages 36-37).

More homeless people may be able to access ODSP

The survey found that of those who were not currently in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits, 34.5% believe they are eligible. However, nearly two-thirds of those who believe they may be eligible for ODSP benefits have never applied (Pages 36-37).

More work needed to get people on waiting lists for housing

One of the recommendations from 2006 was to increase the proportion of homeless individuals on a waiting list for housing, and this was achieved, from 36.6% in 2006 to 45.4% in 2009. For the outdoor homeless population the increase was from 29.7% to 42.6%. Although this demonstrates success in working toward this goal, more work needs to be done to ensure that all homeless people are on appropriate waiting lists for housing (Pages 29-30).

Total number of Toronto homeless remains stable

Overall, there were a minimum of 5,086 homeless people staying outdoors, in shelters, in health care and treatment facilities, incarcerated in Toronto-area detention centres from a Toronto court, and in Violence Against Women shelters. This represents a 0.7% increase from the 5,052 homeless people in the same locations in 2006.

The number of homeless individuals in provincially administered health care and treatment facilities, incarcerated in Toronto area detention centres from a Toronto court,

and in Violence Against Women shelters on the night of the survey was 696, a 19% increase over the total of 585 in 2006. These data were supplied by the appropriate Provincial government department. Improvements were made to the collection of these data in 2009, and therefore caution should be exercised when comparing results from 2006 and 2009 (Pages 20-21).

Homeless people are frequent users of costly emergency services

Consistent with 2006 findings, the 2009 Street Needs Assessment once again shows that homeless people are frequent users of expensive emergency services like hospitals, ambulance, and the justice system. A comparison of the costs of housing and emergency services used by homeless people demonstrates that the use of emergency services (shelters, emergency health care, and incarceration) is substantially more expensive than housing-based responses to homelessness (Pages 33-34).

Homeless people want permanent housing

The Street Needs Assessment again shows in 2009 that overwhelmingly, homeless people want permanent housing. Approximately, 9 out of every 10 individuals who are homeless want to live in permanent housing (Page 28).

Other key findings include:

- The top five responses of what would help an individual find housing remain unchanged from 2006:
 - Help finding an affordable place
 - More money
 - Transportation to see apartments
 - Help with housing applications
 - Help getting identification (Pages 28-29)
- Although the survey did not ask people whether they have a mental health or addictions issue, 51.8% of homeless people self-identified that access to addiction, health and mental health services would help them to find housing (Page 35).
- Overall, the average length of homelessness decreased from 3.4 years to 2.9 years. As in 2006, individuals outdoors had been homeless for the longest at an average of 6.1 years. Overall, the number of people homeless for more than 10 years has decreased, from 12.2% of those surveyed in 2006 to 6.7% of those surveyed in 2009 (Pages 25-27).
- After shelters, drop-ins remain the service used most by homeless people (51.6%) (Pages 30-31).

OBSERVATIONS

Overall, these findings demonstrate that between April 2006 and April 2009 progress has been made on Council's Housing First plan to end homelessness in the City of Toronto, as outlined in the Housing Opportunities Toronto (HOT) Affordable Housing Strategy. Particularly in areas where strategic investments have been made to provide the assistance needed to help people to find and keep housing, these investments are achieving results. This is especially true for outdoor homelessness, where there was a 51% reduction in the number of people staying outdoors. This is despite the start of the recent economic downturn, and in contrast to other major Canadian cities where recent studies have found increasing numbers of homeless people.

Continued implementation of the Housing First approach throughout all housing and homelessness services provided by the City, including in shelters and through the Streets to Homes program, is needed to build on the clear progress made to end homelessness and to continue to assist homeless people to find and keep housing with supports appropriate to their needs.

The following observations based on the findings of the Street Needs Assessment will assist City staff and community partner agencies in continuing to move forward to end homelessness in Toronto based on Housing First principles:

More work needed on homelessness in correctional facilities

Because of the improvements in data collection made between 2006 and 2009 regarding homeless individuals in correctional facilities, it is not possible to draw concrete conclusions regarding the increase in number of people with No Fixed Address (NFA) in correctional facilities. However, it is clear that homelessness in correctional facilities is a major issue. There is already a successful program in place, the Post-Incarceration Housing Support Services through Streets to Homes, which is doing important work to assist homeless individuals to find and keep permanent housing upon release. Efforts will be focused on working with Correctional Services staff and partner community agencies, such as the John Howard Society, to confirm and understand the extent of homelessness in correctional facilities and to identify ways to build upon existing programs to improve housing outcomes of incarcerated homeless individuals upon release. Existing research has proven that having stable, permanent housing reduces the likelihood of recidivism significantly.

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration staff will work with the Ministry of Correctional Services and Community Safety to identify innovative solutions to assist homeless individuals who are incarcerated to find and keep housing upon release.

Maintain momentum to end Aboriginal homelessness

While the overall number of Aboriginal people sleeping outdoors has decreased between 2006 and 2009, Aboriginal people remain disproportionately represented in the total homeless population and also in the outdoor homeless population. Based on the 2006 Street Needs Assessment results, 20% of federal HPI funding has been dedicated to

develop an Aboriginal Homelessness Strategy over the past three years and great progress has been made in developing and strengthening Aboriginal-specific services. Momentum on this important work will be maintained to continue to address Aboriginal homelessness.

Over the past three years, funding has been allocated to priorities identified through consultation with the Aboriginal community, including capital investments and creation of new transitional housing, investment in leadership support for non-profit Aboriginal agencies, investment in front line training for staff at non-profit Aboriginal agencies, and planning for future large capital investments in the community. Staff will continue to work in partnership with the Aboriginal community to achieve these objectives and implement solutions to end Aboriginal homelessness.

Shelter system key to immigrant and refugee resettlement

Federal immigration policy plays a significant role in influencing family shelter occupancy, as refugee claimants often arrive in Canada with few resources and no place to stay. Because there are insufficient federally funded programs specifically aimed at sheltering and resettlement of refugee claimants, these families seek assistance at City administered emergency homeless shelters. Changes to geopolitical events and federal immigration and visa policies can result in dramatic changes in the number and nationality of families accessing shelter from year to year, and even from month to month yet no federal funding is provided to assist with shelter costs. The family shelter system has the ability to expand to meet need through contracts with motel operators to accommodate these sudden changes in demand for shelter. It is estimated that of the increase in the number of people in family situations between 2006 to 2008 (from a nightly average of 826 to 1069), approximately 72% of this growth is attributable to the increase in number of refugee families.

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration staff will initiate discussions with the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism regarding the provision and funding of emergency shelter for refugee claimants to ensure refugees claimants have access to safe shelter and appropriate resettlement services upon arriving in Canada.

Shelter system an important support to victims of family violence

Each year, hundreds of women and children are turned away from provincially administered Violence Against Women's (VAW) shelters because those shelters are full. These women and their children with no where else to go end up in City administered shelters. It is estimated that 13% of all admissions in the family shelter sector are women and children who end up there because there is inadequate capacity in the provincially administered VAW shelter system. The provincially administered VAW shelters are better able to provide the specialized supports needed by this vulnerable population and help them to end their homelessness. The funding provided to these VAW shelters is higher than the capped rate the Province provides for City administrated shelters, although 13% of admissions to family shelters are the same client group with the same support needs.

Access to ODSP key to obtaining a home

The findings show that many homeless people who may be eligible for ODSP have never applied. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration staff will continue to work with Toronto Employment and Social Services to expand the successful Homeless to ODSP Project Engagement (HOPE) program to increase access to ODSP for homeless people in order to increase their income and assist them to get permanent housing.

Need continues for affordable housing and housing supports

The reduction in street homelessness demonstrated by the 2009 Street Needs Assessment provides further evidence to support a Housing First approach and confirms that, overwhelmingly, homeless people want permanent housing. The results also show that demand for services is high and a lack of access to affordable housing continues to be the most significant barrier to ending homelessness in Toronto. The Street Needs Assessment findings reinforce the Housing Opportunities Toronto (HOT) ten-year plan recommendation that the provincial government implement a fully-funded, long-term affordable housing plan consistent with the City's strategic themes and targets, and that the federal government commit to create a National Housing Strategy with predictable, long-term funding for affordable housing and homelessness services.

Affordable housing with supports saves taxpayers' money

The results demonstrate again that homeless people are frequent users of expensive emergency services like hospitals, ambulance, and the justice system. Previous evaluation of the Toronto Streets to Homes program has shown that individuals who are housed through Streets to Homes are less likely to use such costly emergency services once they are housed and that these savings to other service systems can often offset the cost of providing housing and supports. The costs of providing affordable housing are less on average (\$31 per day) than the use of emergency shelters (\$69), jails (\$142) and hospitals (\$665) when people are homeless.

HOW THE 2006 RESULTS WERE USED

The results of the Street Needs Assessment from 2006 have been used in numerous ways, including: enhancements to Streets to Homes services; changes to grant funding applications; allocation of 20% of Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) funds to address Aboriginal homelessness; increases in funding to the drop-in sector to improve quality and accessibility of service; determining target groups for programs like the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Housing Allowance Program; as well as a variety of other program adjustments.

EQUITY ANALYSIS

The results of the Street Needs Assessment provide valuable information on the service needs of homeless people, many of whom are from equity-seeking groups. In particular, the report identifies issues regarding the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the homeless population, the increase in refugees staying in family shelters, the lack of

capacity in the provincially administered Violence Against Women shelter sector, and access to income supports for people with disabilities. The report identifies areas where more work is needed to address these issues.

As with the results from the 2006 Street Needs Assessment, the 2009 results will continue to help identify barriers faced by homeless people, many of whom are Aboriginal people, refugees, victims of family violence and people with disabilities, and to make further program adjustments and service improvements to meet the needs of homeless people. Such program adjustments and service improvements will continue to be evaluated to determine whether they improve outcomes for homeless people, including these equity-seeking groups.

NEXT STREET NEEDS ASSESSMENT: APRIL 2012

The next Street Needs Assessment will take place in April 2012, subject to budget availability, as outlined in the Housing Opportunities Toronto Affordable Housing Strategy. Staff are evaluating the 2009 experience and identifying areas for improvement. While the results of the Street Needs Assessment are an invaluable tool and well worth the effort involved, a survey of this scale is a great deal of work. The experiences of the last two Street Needs Assessments have shown that extensive lead time is required. Planning is already underway for the next Street Needs Assessment in 2012.

CONTACT

Laural Raine
Policy, Planning and Project Consultant
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Tel: 416-392-0546
E-mail: lraine@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Phil Brown
General Manager
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

ATTACHMENT

2009 Street Needs Assessment Results Report