

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM5.2	ACTION			Ward: All
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Expanding the City's Housing Allowance Program - by Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Ana Bailão

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Planning and Housing Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Ana Bailão, recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to report to the May 28, 2019 meeting of the Planning and Housing Committee on potential measures to expand the Housing Allowance program and funding options to do so, including but not limited to the creation of a new tier of the Municipal Land Transfer Tax for transactions above the current top tier.

Summary

On any given night, over 8,000 people rely on our shelters, emergency respites, overnight drop-ins, and Out of the Cold programs to find a safe place to spend the night; and, in a City that continues to become rapidly unaffordable, the cost of housing is skyrocketing.

Emergency response is not, and will never, solve homelessness. The stark reality facing those without adequate homes is a multi-year wait for supportive housing and 181,000 people on the waitlist for permanent affordable housing. We must respond by ensuring that everyone has a safe place to sleep, each and every night. But, we must also create a path out of our shelter system, and into stable and supportive housing for the thousands who need it.

There is no one solution to truly addressing homelessness. We need a continuum of programs and initiatives to create stable and supportive housing for every person in our City who needs it. Emergency responses, like our shelter and respite system, are critical to ensure that everyone who needs a safe place to sleep can find it. We need to aggressively expand supportive housing in Toronto. City Council has set a target of building 18,000 new units of supportive housing over the next 10 years, 1,800 per year, to help people transition out of the shelter system, and into more stable and permanent housing; and, we must address housing affordability for those experiencing homelessness.

One critical tool to addressing chronic homelessness is our City's Housing Allowance program.

A housing allowance is a fixed-amount portable housing benefit that is provided directly to eligible households as a monthly benefit, ranging from \$250-\$600/month, to address homelessness, eviction prevention, and targeted households on the centralized waiting list. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's 2014-2019 Housing Stability Plan points out that housing allowances are an important tool for the City to provide housing stability to homeless, vulnerable, and precariously housed populations in Toronto. The homelessness stream directly targets households experiencing chronic homelessness (that have been homeless for six months or more), who are connected to the program through our shelter and respite system, Streets to Homes workers, and community agencies.

As of December 2018, over 5,000 households are being housed in Toronto through the delivery of housing allowances. That's 5,000 households not in the shelter system seeking a place to sleep each night, but instead able to focus on education, employment and health. However, the need for housing allowances continues to grow. Critically, in 2019 the homelessness stream of the Housing Allowance program will stop the intake of new households without additional funding. Although the introduction of Housing Benefits through the Federal National Housing Strategy is anticipated in 2020/21, we must ensure that we can not only continue, but expand the current program.

Housing Allowances can be the difference between stable housing and an emergency shelter. Without new investment, thousands of households that might have been able to move out of homelessness with this crucial support will be unable to access it. For every additional investment of \$1 million, approximately 200 new households could begin receiving a housing allowance. With 181,000 people on the waiting list for subsidized housing, 15,000 people on the waiting list for supportive housing, and a strained rental housing market, Toronto clearly needs to expand the delivery of housing allowances in 2019.

It is critical that we review options to expand the delivery of housing allowances as an important initiative to address homelessness throughout our City.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM5.2