

DEPUTATION



To: Community and Economic Development Committee
DATE: Wednesday, October 14, 2020
RE: Interim Shelter Recovery and Infrastructure Implementation Plan (EC16.1)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). As you know, the TAEH is a network of partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision of ending homelessness. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with SSHA.

We are here to support Item EC16.1, the *Interim Shelter Recovery and Infrastructure Implementation Plan*. The TAEH sits on the task force convened by SSHA and the United Way and it is good to see the progress its recommendations made reflected in this report today.

As we noted at the Planning and Housing Committee last month when the Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy was first tabled, we agree that *“the solution for individuals experiencing homelessness during a pandemic is the same solution they need to avoid and exit homelessness: safe housing that they can afford, that provides them with the support they need.”*

Given that Toronto is moving into a winter period with climbing COVID-19 infections, and the deeper vulnerabilities of people experiencing homelessness – a population already over represented with people experiencing other profound barriers to the social determinants of health – it is urgent that the following recommendations in this report be approved and acted on as quickly as possible:

1. To **pivot the remaining resources and opportunities in the existing plan to build 1000 new shelter beds to build supportive housing**. This is the game-changing shift that is needed, that is supported by TAEH and our 100s of partners, and one which also allows the City to maximize the value of new federal capital funds. It is encouraging here too, to see that staff are ready to pursue supportive housing options at the Lake Shore site.
2. To conduct a **portfolio review of existing shelter assets to identify sites appropriate for conversion to supportive housing, and to use existing shelter operating funding for housing supports at these sites**. This is another big step forward and TAEH is more than ready to work with the City and our colleagues with the Toronto Shelter Network (TSN) to get this right. As such, we expect that the TSN will be fully engaged in these changes.

Regarding the City’s positive move towards its own role in developing and funding supportive housing in Toronto, we trust that the TAEH as well as people with lived experience will be closely involved. We bring experience from a variety of sectors and funders to the table, and can coordinate community and agency collaboration as we have been doing with the Modular Housing Initiative to date.

3. **To increase the provincial role in making the shelter health services framework, first developed with the Toronto area LHINs in 2018, a true reality.** This means increasing collaboration in order to create equitable access to primary health care, harm reductions, overdose prevention and mental health services.
4. That we work with the province to **end discharges into homelessness from provincial institutions** such as hospitals and correction facilities. It is possible to ensure that everyone has a housing plan before leaving a hospital or jail.

In addition to these explicit recommendations, the TAEH welcomes the following highlights in the report:

- The critical need to address inequality, racism and colonialism in how we plan and deliver services;
- The increased focus on prevention;
- The human rights-based approach to serving people in encampments; and
- The new Winter Service Plan, including its replacement of the migratory Out of the Cold system with the same capacity, running 24/7 and at consistent locations.

This report also speaks to areas we look forward to seeing, and being part of, being developed further:

- **Increasing access to housing benefits for people experiencing homelessness.** Ultimately, we envision a response to homelessness where every person experiencing it has access to a housing benefit. They work quickly and well for people who only need some income support to secure their own housing again, and we understand that opportunities exist with both advocacy to the other orders of government to make the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit more useful, and to enhance Toronto's own housing allowance program, the THAP.

We will advocate along side the City for these additional housing benefit resources. But we also will continue to encourage Council to increase Toronto's own role in funding and using this tool. As the experience of the last 8 months has shown, 1000s of people found their own homes only with income side support. And there are many more that still could, especially if there were new "made-in-Toronto" benefits that aligned with the evolution of our definition of affordability (to make up the gap between a household's income and 30% of AMR for example) and made widely available.

- A more **integrated and intentional approach**, including all orders of government, community agencies and relevant sectors, **to the housing and settlement needs of refugees** to Canada and Toronto.
- The **ongoing development and implementation of our Coordinated Access System** to better prioritize and match people to the housing and supports that set them up for success.
- The **next 5-year SSHA service plan** grounded in the vision of the interim shelter strategy.

Young people?

The one omission in this report and plan is the more focussed strategies on particular sub-populations of people experiencing homelessness, especially young people. The approaches to preventing, diverting and end youth homelessness are different.

We now know that at least a third of people experience homelessness have their first encounter in their youth, with 63% of those sleeping rough having done so. This is an instructive statistic, not only for what it tells us of the chronic nature of youth homelessness, or about the suffering of individuals throughout their growth, but that if we commit to a differentiated youth strategy, we can make progress in ending and preventing homelessness overall.

CONCLUSION

Simply put, this is a welcomed report with key recommendations that will improve how Toronto responds to both the diverse range of, and needs of, people experiencing homelessness right now, *and* to COVID-19.

We urge this Committee and Council later this month to approve the recommendations, to utilize the intergovernmental tools noted here and in other recent reports, and to draw on the TAEH and its partners across the city to act on them.

Thank you,

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