

TO: **Economic and Community Development Committee**

DATE: Monday, December 7, 2020

RE: Central Intake Shelter Access Data Indicators and Trends -
Update (**EC18.6**)



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.

The TAEH supports the staff report for EC18.6. The report responds comprehensively to the request made by City Council on October 27, 2020 to report back on available indicators on shelter access and capacity. It also, encouragingly, points to current and future progress towards a real-time, evidence-based, data strategy - one that will better ensure that the vision of homelessness as rare, brief, and non-recurring is fulfilled.

The Alliance came together to build a coalition believing that homelessness can be ended, not just better managed, and that the solution to ending it is housing. This is now the accepted belief and vision for most in Toronto, including our City Council. No matter how we differ on the steps to getting people from experiencing homelessness to living well in their own homes, or from where we approach the issue – government, service provider, community member - the consensus is that a permanent roof over everyone's head is the goal.

But we cannot get there without good data. For ending homelessness this means creating and maintaining a quality data infrastructure system to underpin a well-functioning Coordinated Access System to Housing and Supports. It includes identifying and tracking performance indicators that allow us to, in real time, respond to specific population-based needs, unresolved bottlenecks, unmet service demands as well as learn from things that are going well.

This includes of course, but is not limited to, data on Central Intake. Good data also allows us to invest funding in new supportive housing through programs like the Rapid Housing Program in the most effective ways by teaching us more about what we need and where. And how to ensure the best matches to people's needs and choices with the housing and supports available, as in the processes underway to select tenants for new modular supportive housing in Toronto.

In other words, without knowing what is going on, we will never make meaningful interventions to end – and prevent – homelessness.

Today's report tells us that we are making progress in this area. Housing and homelessness data infrastructure is improving in our city. We still have far to go, but today's report also commits to a new set of indicators being tracked through the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) that will soon be publicly available. These are the critical areas of shelter access, number of people experiencing homelessness, length of homelessness and returns to the shelter system – all essential to know so that

the city's plans to end homelessness are actually responding to what is happening, month over month, and week over week.

As the report also makes clear, these new data points will be part of tracking progress towards two of the City of Toronto's key Results Based Accountability outcome statements:

- 1 – People experiencing homelessness in Toronto have access to safe, high quality emergency shelter.
- 2 – People are provided housing-focused supports that ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

The TAEH also believes that these new indicators, as well as future ones to be developed through the process of constant evaluation and testing of our emerging data approach to ending homelessness, will also be useful in defining what is meant by quality in the shelter system. For example, perhaps knowing how long each person resides in a shelter before accessing permanent housing is as important an indicator of how well we are doing as what the nightly occupancy rate is.

If we truly want to get to our collective vision, most recently enshrined in Toronto's Housing Charter, we need data to track how well we are reaching homelessness that is:

- Rare – we need to know the real number of people experiencing homelessness so we can track its decline overall.
- Brief – critical to knowing that we are making people's experience of homelessness as brief as possible is knowing how long each person stays in shelter, or cycles in and out of sheltered and unsheltered environments.
- Non-recurring – we need to know what the outcomes are for each person and family, what worked or what didn't to find and keep housing, so that we can do all that is possible to make sure they don't become homeless again.

Today's report points us in this direction, demonstrating SSHA's deeper work on data over the last few years, and committing to even more.

CONCLUSION

We must keep moving forward in this direction. An ever more sophisticated data strategy is critical to getting there, as well as serving people better along the way. We will be more responsive, better able to develop and maintain access and matching pathways that meet people's true needs, and have accurate information from which to make investment decisions in the right housing and supports Toronto needs to make homelessness brief, rare and non-recurring.

Thank you,

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