

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

Date: October 6, 2021

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the results of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment (SNA), and seeks Council approval of the attached Homelessness Solutions Service Plan for Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA).

The SNA, conducted in April 2021 for the fifth time in Toronto, is a needs assessment survey and point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto led by SSHA, in collaboration with community partners in the homelessness sector. The 2021 results provide critical data needed to understand the impact of the pandemic on homelessness, and to understand broader service needs of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The SNA also gives people experiencing homelessness a voice in what services would help them get housing and the supports they need to end their homelessness.

Based on the results of the SNA, as well as extensive engagement and feedback with frontline staff, service providers, sector partners and people with lived experience of homelessness, the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan identifies the implementation priorities to guide SSHA and our partners in the homelessness service system in Toronto over the next three years. The plan supports our ongoing efforts to build and strengthen a responsive homelessness service delivery system which uses an integrated and person-centred approach to address homelessness.

These priorities will advance the outcomes of ensuring people experiencing homelessness in Toronto have access to safe, high quality emergency shelter, and are provided housing-focused supports that ensure homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved by any one organization or sector. While the Service Plan identifies the actions related to the homelessness service system, it also highlights the importance of working together. Effective delivery of the housing and homelessness system will require continued close collaboration between

SSHA and the Housing Secretariat, other interdivisional partners, as well as ongoing engagement and partnership with community providers, other service sectors, other orders of government and people with lived experience of homelessness, towards our shared goal of ending chronic homelessness in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council adopt the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan outlined in Attachment 2 to this report.
2. City Council thank all of the community partners, frontline staff and stakeholders who provided input into the development of the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan, the City and community provider staff who led the implementation of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment, and the more than 2,500 people experiencing homelessness who participated in the 2021 Street Needs Assessment survey and shared what services they need to find and maintain housing.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to approve and implement all ongoing enhancement and development of the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) and its alternative iterations required to transform the system into a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS), including enhanced flow of information across programs with all of the necessary security, privacy and client consent practices in place.
4. City Council reiterate its requests to the Federal and Provincial Governments to:
 - a. continue to provide funding to deliver the COVID-19 response for people experiencing homelessness until such time as Ontario Ministry of Health guidance related to physical distancing in congregate living settings changes and allow for the implementation of the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan while ensuring stabilization of the homelessness service system through to recovery;
 - b. provide ongoing and sustainable funding to ensure that appropriate primary health care, harm reduction, overdose prevention, and mental health case management services are available to adequately support individuals who are homeless and implement the shelter health services framework to provide a coordinated and consistent approach to health services across the shelter system; and
 - c. recognize that permanent solutions to ending chronic homelessness are not possible without increased, long-term funding commitments and provide the capital and ongoing operating funding needed to meet the City of Toronto's supportive housing targets of 1,800 new supportive housing units every year for 10 years.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts expected based on the recommendations in this report.

The implementation of the priorities outlined in the Service Plan will be considered as part of the 2022 Budget and subsequent Budget processes. City staff will continue to request additional funds from the Provincial and Federal Governments to cover the cost of addressing homelessness in Toronto.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

EQUITY IMPACT

Toronto's homelessness service system serves a range of equity-deserving groups, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, seniors, low-income households, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, Black people, 2SLGBTQ people, women and youth. Ensuring people experiencing homelessness have access to safe, high quality emergency shelter, and access to permanent housing opportunities is an important determinant of health and also improves the social and economic status of an individual.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of October 27, 2020, City Council adopted Item EC16.1 "Interim Shelter Recovery and Infrastructure Implementation Plan" which identified actions needed to equip the sector to continue to enhance the way we work together to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the shelter system in the short term. In addition, the strategy identified opportunities to leverage the response to strengthen the shelter system and further develop long-term solutions to end homelessness.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC16.1>

At its meeting of December 17 and 18, 2019, City Council adopted, with amendments, Item PH11.5, "HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan" and its recommended actions as a strategic framework to guide the City's programs, policies and investments on housing and homelessness needs over the next ten years.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.PH11.5>

At its meeting of December 16, 17 and 18, 2013, City Council unanimously adopted the "2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework". The Framework included nine strategic directions and a number of key actions to begin transformation of Toronto's housing stability service system.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

COMMENTS

Purpose of the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan

Toronto's homelessness service system provides immediate, housing-focused, person-centred services for people experiencing homelessness, and consists of emergency shelters, 24-hour respite sites, 24-hour drop-ins, temporary COVID-19 response programs, street outreach services, and day-time drop-ins.

The primary role of the homelessness service system within the broader approach to community and social services for vulnerable residents are to provide:

- Safe and welcoming emergency shelter and overnight services for those in housing crisis
- Street outreach services for people staying outdoors, with a focus on establishing supportive relationships to address immediate health and safety needs and provide supports to move into shelter and housing
- Supports for people experiencing homelessness to develop a housing plan and to access housing and stabilization supports
- Navigation and referrals to appropriate community and health services

SSHA's first service plan, the Housing Stability Services Framework, was approved by City Council in December 2013, and set out a series of actions to guide SSHA and our partners in the delivery of a full range of housing and homelessness services.

This is SSHA's second service plan, and it will guide the division and the homelessness service system in Toronto towards achieving our collective goals over the next three years. The Homelessness Solutions Service Plan identifies our priorities as we continue to build and strengthen a responsive homelessness service delivery system that uses an integrated and person-centred approach to address homelessness. These priorities will advance our shared goal of ending chronic homelessness in Toronto.

The HousingTO Plan includes a key strategic action to Prevent Homelessness and Improve Pathways to Housing Stability. SSHA is responsible for implementing the components of the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan that relate to the homelessness service system. Components of the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan that relate to housing are led by the Housing Secretariat and are supported by ten other City divisions. Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved by any one organization or sector. Key to addressing homelessness are also upstream interventions to prevent people from becoming homeless, and adequate supply of affordable housing with support opportunities to assist people to quickly exit homelessness. The strategic actions related to these broader housing system priorities are addressed through the City's HousingTO plan and progress will be reported to Council annually through the Planning and Housing Committee.

Organizational Changes to Housing and Homelessness Service Delivery

In 2022, the City will undergo a strategic shift in how housing and homelessness services are being delivered. In order to support City Council's priorities and improve

upon service delivery, the Housing Secretariat will have consolidated responsibility as the City's housing lead and lead for the HousingTO Action Plan 2020-2030, including accountability for social housing; market and affordable rental housing; supportive housing; and affordable home ownership. These changes are designed to ensure that the City is better positioned to successfully deliver the HousingTO plan.

With these changes some of the functions currently within SSHA related to housing will be moving under the leadership of the Housing Secretariat. However, effective delivery of the housing and homelessness system will require continued close collaboration and partnership between SSHA and the Housing Secretariat.

While these changes are being phased in, this current Service Plan reflects the transition state of these roles. A review of SSHA's name and mission and vision statements will be considered as part of this process. The three year timeline for this Service Plan reflects this transition process, and is intended to align the next Service Plan with the five year review of the HousingTO plan.

Engaging with partners and people with lived experience with homelessness

SSHA works closely with more than 200 community service providers and sector partners. Staff regularly engage community partners and seek advice and guidance on program development and collaborative service planning through our advisory bodies such as the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness, Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board and Toronto Shelter Network.

In addition, SSHA regularly engages people with lived experience of homelessness and services users for feedback and input into program and service delivery through surveys, user testing and feedback, consultation processes, as well as formal engagement through groups like the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness People With Lived Experience (PWLE) Caucus. SSHA is committed to building on and expanding these approaches to collaboration and coordination with sector partners and people with lived experience. Staff also engage with the public and broader community, particularly related to opening of new homelessness services. This engagement is intended to facilitate information sharing, address concerns and increase public awareness about the causes and solutions to homelessness.

To develop the Service Plan, SSHA staff engaged with frontline staff, service providers, sector partners and people with lived experience of homelessness. Input was gathered from over 500 people through an online survey, virtual engagement sessions and self-consultation kits in Spring 2021, and was analyzed and compiled into an engagement summary report.

This input is complemented by the recent engagement of people experiencing homelessness through the 2021 Street Needs Assessment (SNA). Through the 2021 SNA, we heard directly from more than 2,500 people experiencing homelessness, including people staying outdoors; in City-administered shelters and overnight services, including COVID-19 response sites and recovery/isolation programs; and in provincially administered Violence Against Women shelters.

The plan also builds on input received from the [Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy: Advice from the Homelessness Service System](#) report, and the [Meeting Crisis With Opportunity: Reimagining Toronto's Shelter System](#) report from the Toronto Shelter Network, as well as guidance from our designated advisory groups, the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness and Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board.

Using data to inform service planning and service delivery

Data from Toronto's 2021 SNA provides us with a better understanding of the scope and complexity of homelessness in Toronto. The SNA directly informs the service plan, telling us where we need to focus our efforts.

The implementation priorities outlined in the service plan responds to the SNA key findings:

1. The profile of those experiencing homelessness has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic

As has been previously reported through existing shelter data, the SNA confirmed that the primary reasons for an overall decrease in homelessness since the previous SNA in 2018 is fewer refugee claimant families experiencing homelessness in Toronto as a result of COVID-19 border restrictions. At the same time, the number of people provided shelter in non-refugee programs has increased as a result of the City's COVID-19 response. Outdoor homelessness has also increased, and many people experiencing homelessness move between indoor and outdoor locations. The SNA found that people experience homelessness in all areas of Toronto, pointing to the need for services and supports available in all areas.

One of the priorities in the Service Plan is delivering high quality services, which focuses on improving access to homelessness services including providing safe, accessible and welcoming environments; eliminating barriers that prevent or inhibit access to service; and locating services in neighbourhoods throughout the city. A key action is also to increase and enhance outreach services to meet the unique needs of people sleeping outdoors, based on a human-rights approach, meaningful engagement and choice.

2. Homelessness affects people from different backgrounds but specific groups are overrepresented in Toronto

The SNA found that Indigenous people continue to be overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. A key Service Plan priority is "Advancing Reconciliation". Actions under this priority aim to reduce homelessness among Indigenous people and increase the number of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness who are assisted to find housing.

The SNA also found that racialized individuals, in particular people who are Black are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Additionally, people who identify as non-binary, transgender, and Two-Spirit are overrepresented in Toronto's homeless population. More than one-quarter of youth experiencing

homelessness identify as 2SLGBTQ+.

Another key Service Plan priority is "Focusing on Equity", with actions related to addressing Anti-Black racism and incorporating an intersectional and inclusive approach to preventing and reducing homelessness. Specifically, SSHA will deliver homelessness services with an approach that recognizes and addresses the reality of Anti-Black racism and aims to reduce homelessness among Black people in Toronto. SSHA will also use an intersectional approach for all system planning whereby the unique experiences and backgrounds of diverse service users (including 2SLGBTQ+ adults and youth) are considered. Services will continue to be informed by and recognize inequities for diverse socio-demographic groups that experience intersecting barriers.

3. Gaps in other service systems are key contributors to homelessness

The SNA found that changes in provincial systems, such as increased discharges from correctional facilities and reduced capacity in Violence Against Women shelters, have increased pressures on the municipal shelter system. This relates directly to the Service Plan priority "Developing an integrated systems response", which aims to reduce new inflows into homelessness, in part through developing protocols with regional partners and provincial systems (i.e., health and corrections) to reduce discharges into homelessness wherever possible and improve coordination of transitions.

The SNA also found that people experiencing homelessness have multiple health support needs, and that there is a gap in access to substance use treatment and harm reduction services in particular. These findings have informed the priority "Delivering high quality services" related to providing a range of person-centred supports. This action aims to ensure that people experiencing homelessness can access primary health care, mental health and harm reduction services and are supported to transition to housing with a sustained attachment to these services by building on and expanding our partnerships with the health sector in all shelter locations.

4. The key solutions to homelessness are increasing income and access to affordable and supportive housing

The SNA reported that more than three-quarters of respondents self-report experiencing chronic homelessness (i.e. homeless for six months or more in the past one year), and that the most important supports that people experiencing homelessness need to help find housing are those that increase affordability and income. The Service Plan priority "Reducing chronic homelessness" identifies as key outcomes ensuring people are assisted to develop a housing plan and find housing as quickly as possible and that all people experiencing chronic homelessness have a comprehensive assessment of their housing and support needs. Ultimately, the actions under this implementation priority aim to reduce chronic homelessness and homelessness for populations with the greatest need.

Implementing a Homelessness Management Information System to support the priorities of the Service Plan

Implementing a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) is a necessary

step in achieving the priorities outlined in the Service Plan, meeting federal and provincial funding requirements, and adopting best practice approaches to ending chronic homelessness.

Toronto currently uses a Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) which was developed in 2010. SMIS was designed as a shelter bed management system to assist shelters with intake, admissions, and discharge. With all required security and privacy requirements in place as outlined by Technology Services Division and applicable legislation, it enables all City-administered emergency and transitional shelter programs to manage their bed capacity, collect basic client information, and share information with the City as the system administrator to inform system planning.

Changing needs around system integration, the use of data to measure outcomes and inform decision-making, advancements in human-centred design and user research, requirements from federal and provincial governments to implement Coordinated Access and By Name List approaches, and City commitments to equitable outcomes and accessibility, means that further updates need to be made to SMIS.

In addition, implementing a broader HMIS will provide the digital infrastructure needed to support a comprehensive homelessness response in Toronto. A HMIS will provide improved access for service providers and system administrators to real-time homelessness data, ensuring that experiencing homelessness receive the best possible service through coordinated data collection and case management within and across services. By adopting enhanced privacy and consent practices to enable the sharing of client information across service providers, and better supporting staff workflows, SSHA will be able to more effectively address homelessness by:

- Improving access to housing and services for people experiencing homelessness by fully implementing a Coordinated Access shared service delivery model, including establishing a Common Assessment Tool and By Name List of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto;
- Streamlining processes and enhancing a person-centred experience by reducing the need to recollect the same information multiple times because it is locked up in a programmatic silo;
- Improved connections within and across service systems to ensure the coordination of supports required to move people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing that best meets their needs; and
- Improving data quality to inform service system planning and outcome measurement for equity-deserving groups.

Given the rapid speed with which business practices and technology change, and ongoing efforts within the City to modernize and integrate across divisions and systems, periodic reviews and updates to SSHA's technological infrastructure are expected to be necessary going forward – both in the form of ongoing enhancements to the HMIS once implemented, and fulsome reviews to ensure that appropriate technology infrastructure are maintained to support effective function of the homelessness response system.

Enhancing system tools and data as well as increasing system coordination are key priorities identified in the Service Plan which will only be possible through

implementation of these ongoing improvements to transform the Shelter Management Information System.

Next Steps: Implementing the Service Plan and Measuring Progress

The Service Plan sets out implementation priorities and defines outcome statements that will guide longer term planning towards our shared goal of ending chronic homelessness in Toronto.

The Service Plan meets SSHA's requirements under the federal [Reaching Home](#) program to develop a community homelessness plan, in partnership with our community advisory boards, that identifies funding priorities, work required to implement coordinated access approaches to address homelessness and performance indicators that will be used to track progress toward achieving community-wide outcomes.

SSHA will be expanding on the indicators already available through our [shelter system flow data](#), to develop a comprehensive set of system level indicators to measure progress in implementing the Service Plan, allow all system partners to understand their contribution to achieving our shared goals, and enable us to adjust our response as needed. These indicators will also inform regular reporting on progress through the required annual federal Community Homelessness Report.

Ongoing evaluation, community engagement, and input and feedback from service providers, service users and people with lived experience of homelessness will continue to shape our implementation of the Service Plan over the next three years.

CONTACT

Laural Raine, Director, Service Planning and Integrity, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, 416-392-0546, Laural.Raine@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Mary-Anne Bédard
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2021 Street Needs Assessment Results Report
Attachment 2: Homelessness Solutions Service Plan (October 2021)
Attachment 3: Service Plan Engagement Summary Report: What We Heard (June 2021)