



May 9, 2023

Toronto City Council

Sent via email - councilmeeting@toronto.ca

RE: MM - Review of Policies and Procedures Related to Warming Centres

Dear Deputy Mayor and Members of Council,

The Toronto Shelter Network (TSN) represents more than 35 organizations that collectively deliver Toronto's 24-hour homelessness services, including traditional shelters, respite centres, 24-hour drop-ins, transitional housing and the COVID-19 shelter hotels. We enhance the collective capacity of homelessness service providers in Toronto through knowledge sharing and learning, collaborative planning, research and advocacy, and champion access to housing with dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

Earlier this year SSHA engaged with the homelessness services sector through a roundtable and survey when reviewing the policies and procedures of emergency Warming Centres operations. We are pleased to see that much of the feedback has been incorporated into the actions detailed in the Review of Policies and Procedures Related to Warming Centres report through:

- Revising the criteria for activating warming centres from -15 degrees to -5 degrees Celsius and/or when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues inclement weather warnings
- Ensuring low barrier shelters and allied services are an important part of the system - SSHA is revisiting models to transition back from a referral-based model to a walk-in based service model to make sites and services more accessible
- Investing in a multi-year strategy to increase funding allocations to non-profit shelter service providers to help increase capacity to deliver housing focused services and establish housing focused performance metrics as well as provide more consistent service levels across the shelter system
- Enhancing partnerships and collaboration

TSN supports the activation of warming centres on a 24/7 basis for the winter season with additional spaces open for surges due to extreme weather conditions. This not only benefits clients who can more easily access the warming centres and the associated services but also helps community partners who are severely challenged with staffing by the constant opening and closing of these facilities. A historical funding and wage disparity as well as staff burnout from COVID has placed a huge strain on the

community partners to retain staff. Expanding and contracting their workforce on a regular basis exacerbates this.

We are also supportive of the recommendations to request funding from other orders of government to increase the allocation of Canada Ontario Housing Benefits for 2023.

We understand that the City is facing urgent financial challenges and that without the support of other orders of government or new revenue tools the City will not be able to maintain even current service levels in the shelter system. We are encouraged by the City's efforts to continue to develop and improve the system to move people out of the shelter system into permanent housing and develop a long-term strategy for Warming Centres and other winter services to protect those experiencing homelessness during the winter season. We must maintain the current capacity, however, to meet the current demand.

Like the City, TSN is committed to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring but we still have twice as many people entering the shelter system as leaving it currently. We have now reached 10,000 people per night staying in shelters in Toronto. Affordable and supportive housing is the only long-term solution but until we can achieve that, we need an effective, supportive, low barrier, housing focused shelter and allied services system that supports people experiencing homelessness. The recommendations in this report help to move us towards this goal.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Leslie Gash, Executive Director, Toronto Shelter Network

Cc: TSN Board of Director Organizations

Dixon Hall - Eva's Initiatives - Fred Victor Centre - Homes First - Salvation Army - Street Haven
- Sojourn House - Friends of Ruby - St. Felix Centre - City of Toronto