

Shelter System Pressures and Responses, including Planning for Winter 2023/2024

Date: October 10, 2023

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto's shelter system is full, and demand for shelter services is at an all-time high. Current demand for shelter space is so high that every night the City is unable to provide shelter to hundreds of people requesting a space.

This report provides an update on the City's Winter Services plan. Expanded services during the winter season (November 15 to April 15) provide warm, indoor space for people experiencing homelessness and protect people from cold and extreme weather during the winter months. SSHA's preparation for winter 2023/2024 began at the end of the last winter season in April 2023, and has sited Warming Centres and a 24-hour winter respite, as directed by Council. The added space during the winter is critical to help move people who are sleeping outdoors into indoor space, including those people currently sleeping in encampments and on the transit system. With recent surges in demand, there are undeniable significant pressures on Toronto's shelter system, and the City expects demand to continue to rise during the winter months and throughout 2024.

The winter spaces that have been secured may not be sufficient to address overall shelter system capacity needs. Demand is far greater than the current system can accommodate. The City is doing everything it can to support the increasing number of refugee claimants that continue to add pressure to the system. The City desperately requires immediate support from the Federal and Provincial governments to avoid a worsening humanitarian crisis in the winter months. The City has communicated its need to the Federal Government, as adopted by City Council in [CC10.2](#), as it relates to responding to the increasing refugee crisis in Toronto. This need for federal support becomes even more critical as we get into the winter months. Although the City continues to reiterate the need for support from the Federal and Provincial Governments, SSHA is also continuing to identify additional options to respond to the demands during winter, including continuing to work with other City divisions, as part of a City-wide approach, to responding to this crisis.

The report also provides report backs to Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) as requested by previous Council motions, including updates on the frequency of Deaths of Shelter Residents data sharing, Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) in the shelter system, audits of shelter-hotel operations examining health and safety, harm reduction practices, food quality, and rules such as bed checks, and the feasibility of obtaining more rent supplements and housing allowances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for 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, refugees and refugee claimants, 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.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The 2023/2024 Winter Services Response initiative crosses two fiscal years, beginning in November of the current fiscal year through April of the following fiscal year.

The Winter Services Response is included in the budget based on the expected level of winter events or plan activation requirements. Any variance (or anything unexpected) that might result from responding to unplanned actual events will be reported through variance process/reports.

Funding of \$16.2 million is included in SSHA's 2023 approved Operating Budget to deliver the Winter Services Response, of which \$8.6 million was spent between January and September of 2023 as part of the 2022/2023 initiative. These costs are part of the City's inter-governmental request for \$317 million in COVID-19 funding and if required is supported by the City's one-time 2023 back-stop strategy. The remaining \$7.6 million will support services as part of the 2023/2024 initiative in November and December this year. If weather conditions are worse than anticipated and Warming Centres are activated for longer periods, actual costs will exceed the remaining funding approved. SSHA will report the financial implications of the Winter Services Response to Council through the City's variance reporting process.

Funding for the Winter Services Response between January 1, 2024 and April 15, 2024 has been included in SSHA's 2024 Operating Budget submission and will be considered for Council approval through the 2024 Operating Budget process.

At its meeting on May 10, 11 and 12, 2023, City Council requested the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario to provide \$5 million to the City of Toronto in additional funding for the Winter Services Response for the activation of additional Warming Centres in the 2023-2024 winter season. To date, the City of Toronto has not received commitment for the requested \$5 million from the Government of Canada or the Government of Ontario.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been informed of the financial implications as presented in the Financial Impact Section of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on September 6, 2023, City Council adopted CC10.2 "Immediate Federal Government Support Required for Refugee Claimants in Toronto", which requested the Federal Government to fund and implement a regional response in municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and beyond that provide adequate shelter and support for refugee claimants, and requested Federal funding to reimburse up to \$750,000 to churches or community organizations.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.CC10.2>

At its meeting on July 19, 2023, City Council adopted MM8.29 "Securing Shelter and Support for Refugees, which requested the City Manager to immediately make available temporary shelter for a minimum of 150 refugees and further find locations for an additional 100 refugees thereafter.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM8.29>

At its meeting on May 10, 2023, City Council adopted EC3.13 "Review of policies and procedures related to Warming Centres," which requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to report back to the September 21, 2023 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee with the results of a request to the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario to provide \$5 million to the City of Toronto in additional funding for the winter services response for the activation of additional Warming Centres in the 2023-2024 winter season, and a strategy to fund the opening of additional Warming Centres prior to the 2024 budget.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC3.13>

At its meeting on May 10, 2023, City Council adopted EC3.16 "Data on the Health of People Experiencing Homelessness", which requested appropriate staff to report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee on September 21, 2023, on the recommended process to be implemented for frequent and aligned reporting on the deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC3.16>

At its meeting on February 7, 2023, City Council adopted EC1.5 "COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023," which requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to work with the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat to consider the feasibility of obtaining more rent supplements/housing allowances to assist in transitioning shelter clients into housing; to conduct an audit of shelter-hotel operations examining health and safety, harm reduction practices, food quality, rules such as bed checks and COVID infection control practices, and to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee, in the third quarter of 2023 on these items.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC1.5>

At its meeting on June 15, 2022, City Council adopted AU12.2 "Part 2 of the Audit of Emergency Shelters: Lessons Learned from Hotel Operations" which requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to report back transparently to City Council, through the Economic and Community Development Committee, on Infection Prevention and Control areas requiring improvement, including corrective action plans to strengthen Infection Prevention and Control measures in the shelter system. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.AU12.2>

COMMENTS

1. Shelter System Update

Toronto's shelter system is the largest in Canada, providing more shelter beds per capita than any other Canadian city. As of October 2023, the City is sheltering 10,700 people, with approximately 9,000 people in the shelter system and 1,700 people outside the shelter system (of which 1,300 are refugee claimants) in bridging hotels and programs supported by the Canadian Red Cross (see Figure 1). As of August 2023, approximately 53 per cent of people accessing Toronto's shelter system are experiencing chronic homelessness.

Shelter System Trends

Toronto's shelter system is full, and demand for shelter services is at an all-time high, for singles, as well as couples and families. Current demand for shelter space is so high that every night the City is unable to provide shelter to hundreds of people requesting a space. In September 2023, an average of 278 callers to the Central Intake call centre could not be matched to a shelter space (see Figure 2), and an average of 386 families were on the Central Intake family placement wait list, awaiting access to family shelter services.

The number of unique callers contacting Central Intake seeking shelter space each month has increased over time, with trends differing slightly between refugee claimant and non-refugee claimant clients. In January 2021, approximately 2,500 non-refugee claimant callers were contacting Central Intake each month seeking access to shelter space. Since then, demand has trended upward by an average of 40 or more callers per

month, with approximately 3,500 unique non-refugee claimant callers contacting Central Intake each month this summer (see Figure 3).

Demand for shelter from refugee claimants resumed when Canadian borders reopened in September 2021, reaching nearly 500 callers a month through the first half of 2022. It then increased to nearly 700 callers a month for the second half of 2022 and first few months of 2023. Since then, demand has surged, reaching over 1,000 callers in May, over 1,700 in June and over 1,900 in July, before decreasing somewhat in August 2023 to just over 1,600 callers. This demand for shelter space far exceeds the available capacity in Toronto's shelter system. In July and August 2023, just under 800 people per month have been able to enter the shelter system.

Along with the increased demand for space, there is a visible increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who are living outdoors, in encampments, and on the City's transit system. Currently, people are once again camping outside of SSHA's intake and referral centre at 129 Peter Street. The City expects demand to continue to rise during the final months of 2023 and into 2024, for many reasons including, but not limited to, insufficient affordable housing supply, increasing costs of living, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in the number of refugee claimants arriving in the city.

Figure 1: Nightly occupancy in Toronto's shelter system

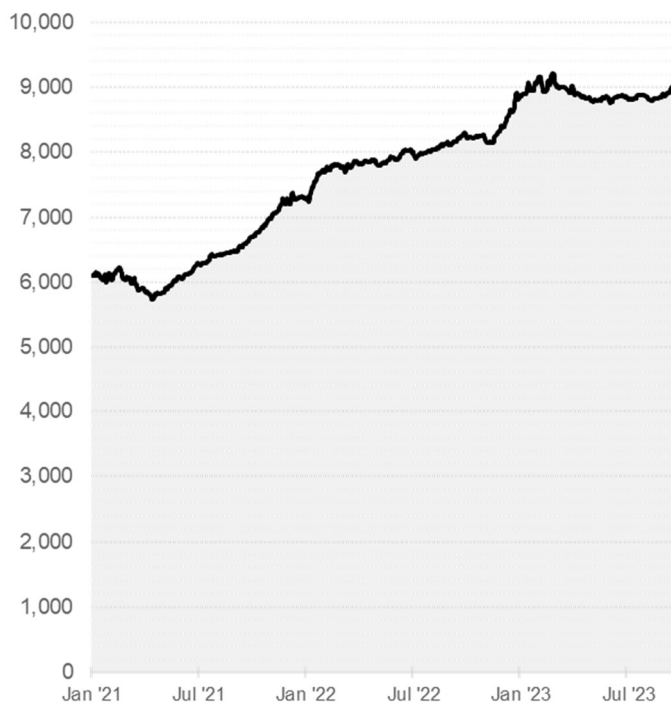


Figure 2: Daily unmatched callers at Central Intake

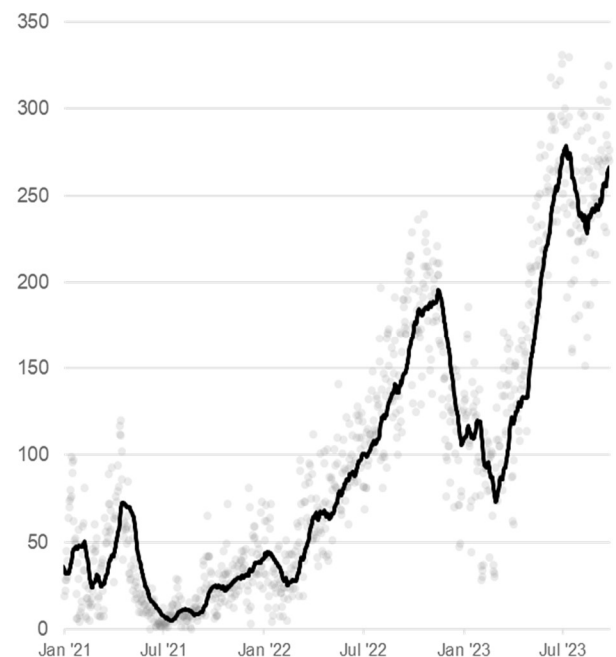
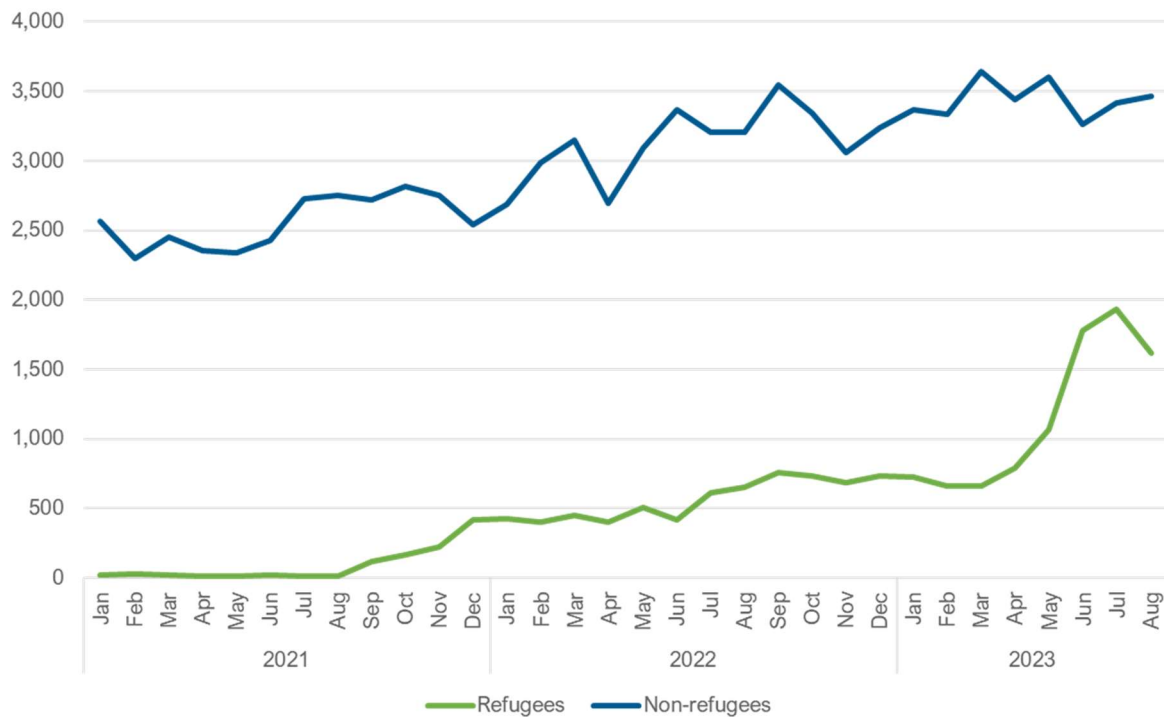


Figure 3: Monthly demand for shelter, refugees and non-refugees



Demand for Services from Refugee Claimants

The number of refugee claimants arriving in Canada has surged in recent months, with an all-time high being set in August both for the country and Ontario. August has also been the fifth month in a row with more asylum claims made in Ontario than in Quebec. The impact is acute in Toronto and neighbouring municipalities, where shelter systems have already been strained and are operating at or near capacity.

Since the reopening of Canadian borders in September 2021, the number of refugee claimants in Toronto’s shelter system has increased from a low of 530 people per night to over 3,700 people today. Over 40 per cent of the 9,000 people using Toronto’s shelter system are refugee claimants. Of the more than 3,700 refugee claimants, approximately 1,700 are sheltered in programs that are not resourced to provide refugee-specific services and supports. This is resulting in less targeted service for refugee claimant settlement needs and is putting additional pressure on shelter availability for all Toronto residents.

The number of first-time refugee callers to Central Intake is increasing. On September 27, 2023, there was an average of 34 new refugee claimant callers over the last week. At this rate of growth, SSHA projects that there could be as many as 4,500 refugee claimants inside the City's shelter system by the end of the year, accounting for 50 per cent of all shelter spaces available in Toronto. This does not include the more than 1,300 refugee claimants being supported outside the shelter system in bridging hotels, and programs supported by the Canadian Red Cross.

Refugee claimants are once again camping outside of SSHA's intake and referral centre at 129 Peter Street. The City is doing everything it can to support the increasing number of refugee claimants that continue to add pressure to the system. With hundreds of new refugee claimants arriving each week to Toronto, the City expects that expanded winter services may not be sufficient to meet the demand for indoor space during the winter season. Recent surges in demand require significant new and sustainable investment to address ongoing need for shelter. The City desperately requires immediate support from the Federal and Provincial governments to prevent a worsening humanitarian crisis in the winter months. The City continues to reiterate key requests to the Federal Government, as adopted by City Council in [CC10.2](#), as it relates to responding to the refugee crisis in Toronto. As the City reiterates the need for support from the Federal and Provincial Governments, SSHA is also continuing to identify additional options to respond to the demands during winter, including working with other City divisions as part of a City-wide approach to responding to the crisis.

Increase in Shelter System Capacity

In June 2023, SSHA added over 450 spaces to the shelter system by reducing lateral bed separation at various sites from 1.25 to 0.75 metres, in alignment with Infection Prevention and Control and other public health measures. Per Council direction via [MM8.29](#), SSHA added 250 spaces to Toronto's shelter system to support refugee claimants. While these additions have increased shelter system capacity and helped to reduce occupancy pressures, they are not sufficient to meet increasing demand for shelter space.

Increased Demand and Shelter Staffing

The increasing demand for emergency shelter services and the range of supports that are needed to support an increasingly diverse service user population places greater pressure on the shelter sector workforce and shelter operations. With increasing pressure on the shelter system there is greater risk of staff turnover, reduced staff retention, and increased difficulty in recruiting skilled employees. As evidenced by the contributions made by this workforce and the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency shelter staff remain a critical part of the City of Toronto's and Ontario's caring workforce, which also includes workers in the health care, education, childcare and other social service industries. During the pandemic, the Government of Ontario provided temporary pandemic pay designed to support eligible employees in the critical caring workforce. Although the province's temporary pandemic pay program has now ended, investment in the emergency shelter workforce is still needed, particularly as the demands continue to increase.

2. Winter Services Plan 2023/2024

Every year, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) division develops a Winter Services plan for people experiencing homelessness during the winter. The City expands services during the winter season (November 15 to April 15) to provide warm indoor space for people experiencing homelessness and protect people from cold and extreme weather. Adding space during the winter is critical to help move people who are

sleeping outdoors into indoor space, including those people currently sleeping in encampments and on the transit system.

SSHA’s preparation for winter 2023/2024 began at the end of the last winter season in April 2023. The City is working to deliver a comprehensive 2023/2024 Winter Services Plan, which includes siting Warming Centres and/or 24-hour winter respite sites, as well as incorporating feedback from what was learned last winter to improve planning and coordination for this season. To meet additional needs during periods of cold weather, when health and safety risks for people experiencing homelessness are higher than normal, the City is:

- maintaining and adding space in the shelter system
- activating four Warming Centres and one 24-hour winter respite
- enhancing street outreach
- opening new supportive housing units and accessing available social housing units with supports

There continues to be undeniable significant pressures on Toronto’s shelter system, and the City expects demand to continue to rise during the winter months. We will continue to do everything we can to support people experiencing homelessness during the winter. The City’s Winter Services plan addresses the need for space during the cold weather season – but it is not a plan for overall permanent growth in shelter system capacity. SSHA’s Homeless Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy provides a long-term strategy to improve shelter system stability and recovery, achieve cost-savings, and be more responsive to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The City will track winter spaces usage. As many of the people using the Warming Centres will likely be refugee claimants, the City will be monitoring the scenarios and reporting to the Federal government.

Figure 4: Winter Services Plan 2023/2024



Maintain
and Add
Capacity



Warming
Centres



Enhanced
Street
Outreach
Response



Supportive
Housing

Maintaining and adding spaces

To address the increasing demand for space, SSHA will expand shelter capacity at existing shelter sites in preparation for the 2023/2024 winter season. This will include adding up to 180 spaces by reducing lateral bed separation to 0.75 metres at three shelter sites. In addition, SSHA will add spaces through warming centres and a 24-hour

winter respite site, as outlined below. We also are looking at additional spaces beyond the spaces identified in the winter response plan.

Warming Centres

On May 10, 2023, Council considered EC3.13, A Review of Policies and Procedures Related to Warming Centres. The Council report outlined revised criteria for activating Warming Centres which, going forward, will be activated when the temperature drops to or below -5°C, or when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues freezing rain, snow squall, winter storm, snowfall and/or blizzard warnings. With the new activation criteria, it is anticipated that Warming Centres will be activated more often each winter season than in previous years.

Since spring 2023, SSHA has been working collaboratively with Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) and other partners to identify locations for Warming Centres and/or 24-hour winter respite sites and to review available buildings, including City/agency-owned sites, private market spaces and/or community partner-owned and/or operated spaces. A focus has been the development of multi-year leases, which create greater operational continuity, ensure adequate space is prepared and available, and provide more cost-effective solutions for extreme weather planning.

SSHA has worked with CREM to assess approximately 130 properties to date. Staff have connected with real estate brokers, faith leaders and community groups, and other City divisions and agencies. However, most community and faith spaces are no longer viable options due to the increased number of activations anticipated based on the new -5°C activation threshold. There are also additional challenges by way of private market landlords seeking short-term leases, zoning restrictions and sites needing substantial renovations.

To search for sites that can be used exclusively for Warming Centre space, SSHA issued two Requests for Expression of Interest (REOI) to support winter planning, one of which was a request for sites that closed on August 7, 2023. The second REOI for Warming Centre operators and operators that may have physical space was issued on September 7, 2023 and closed on September 25, 2023. Operators will be selected by the end of October 2023.

As of October 6, 2023, the City has confirmed four Warming Centre locations that will have a total of 170 spaces. The City has also identified one 24-hour winter respite location with 40 spaces available during the 2023/2024 winter season. Per Council direction, the 24-hour winter respite site will remain open for the duration of the winter season (November 15, 2023 to April 15, 2024). A list of confirmed Warming Centre and 24-hour winter respite locations for the 2023-2024 winter season is available in Appendix A.

The City has also identified additional surge space to be activated during the coldest weather or extreme weather events such as freezing rain, snow squall, winter storm, snowfall and/or blizzard warnings. This surge space would not have the capacity to activate at the -5°C temperature threshold.

In addition to the Warming Centres, 24-hour winter respite, and surge site, SSHA is preparing to be ready to activate up to 40 spaces in Alternative Space Programs (ASP) during extreme cold weather. ASPs are temporary overnight spaces that are activated only when there are no suitable shelter or other overnight spaces available. These spaces (chairs or cots) are not intended for use as long-term shelter spaces and are located within existing homelessness shelter facilities in common spaces such as dining rooms or meeting rooms. SSHA continues to work with community partners to identify additional ASP space options to support clients during extreme cold weather.

Enhanced Street Outreach Response

To support people during the coldest weather, Streets to Homes expands 24/7 street outreach services through the addition of one extra outreach team on the day and evening shifts and two extra teams on the overnight shift. Street outreach teams connect with people living outside and encourage them to come indoors. They also provide blankets, sleeping bags, and warm winter clothing to those living outdoors throughout the winter season.

To support people experiencing homelessness and individuals with complex needs that may seek shelter on the transit system, Streets to Homes will continue to provide outreach on the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) during the winter. This will maintain the current number of Streets to Homes resources dedicated to the TTC (20 employees in total), connecting people with shelter and housing services. In addition, the one-year LOFT Community Services Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (LOFT/M-DOT) pilot program will be extended to 2025, providing transitional services to individuals with complex psychiatric and/or concurrent disorders. The response from clients has been positive and the program continues to develop strategies for building relationship with clients.

The City of Toronto is also planning to partner with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to activate buses to support transportation between Warming Centres, shelters, and Union and Spadina stations. The TTC has assisted SSHA with transportation for the last several years and moves people to Warming Centres as space becomes available. As part of this partnership, the City and the TTC are also exploring the feasibility of stationed buses outside certain locations.

Supportive Housing and Housing with Supports

During the 2023-2024 winter season, up to 275 housing units are expected to become available to move people experiencing homelessness from shelter into permanent housing. This will include approximately 200 units under the Rapid Rehousing Program, and approximately 75 units under the Priority Access to Housing and Supports (PATHS) program.

The City works closely with social housing providers and supportive housing developers to plan for the number of anticipated units and mitigate risks to timelines. This includes

monitoring of social housing vacancy rates and oversight of construction timelines, to ensure that projections of available units are as accurately reflected as possible.

Table 1: Overview of spaces available during Winter 2023-2024

Maintaining and adding capacity	Up to 180 spaces at three existing locations
Warming Centres	Up to 170 spaces at four locations
24-hour Winter Respite	Up to 40 spaces
New housing opportunities	Up to 275 units
Total	Up to 390 spaces and 275 units

Community and Sector Engagement and Communications

SSHA is committed to working with a wide variety of stakeholders, including local Councillors, service providers, health experts and sector partners, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), community members, shelter users and advocates on how to support the success of each site and get feedback on the 2023/2024 Winter Services plan. Both proactive and ongoing engagement work will take place between November 15, 2023 to April 15, 2024 with communities where sites are opening as part of the winter services plan.

Through the review of policies and procedures related to Warming Centres in winter 2022/2023, the City heard feedback around the importance of improving communications about Warming Centre activations. This winter, the City will be communicating the activation and closing of Warming Centres via a Listserve to which members of the public, the media, shelter providers, and other key stakeholders can subscribe at <https://www.toronto.ca/home/social-media/e-updates/>. Shelter providers will also be able to see a notification about Warming Centre activations and closures in the City’s Shelter Information Management System (SMIS) database. Information about Warming Centre activations and closures will be shared on the City of Toronto’s website at www.toronto.ca/homelesshelps and on social media platforms.

In addition to engagement on winter services, the City has also heard about the importance of continuing to explore opportunities for people who use shelters to provide feedback on the shelter system, its operations, and the services they receive. An advisory group or committee of shelter users provides an opportunity to share experiences of using the shelter system and offer independent input and feedback to the City on how to improve and strengthen the overall system and services available.

Furthermore, the City continues to work toward ensuring people who use shelters have access to the services and supports they need to help them achieve a suitable housing outcome. This includes exploring increased partnerships with community organizations and faith institutions to incorporate community programming and supports within the City of Toronto shelter system. Incorporating programming from community and faith-based organizations into shelter spaces complements the services and supports already available for people who use shelters and helps them connect to other services

and culturally relevant support. It also contributes to embedding shelter services into the local community as part of a network of community-based supports and services.

3. Deaths of Shelter Residents Data

On May 10, 11 and 12, 2023, City Council adopted EC3.16 requesting that the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration work with the Medical Officer of Health to implement more frequent and aligned reporting on the deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

In response, SSHA and Toronto Public Health (TPH) staff have undertaken work on two datasets:

- TPH's [Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) data (i.e., data collection and reporting on deaths that occur in shelters, outdoors and in other locations in Toronto); and
- SSHA's [Deaths of Shelter Residents](#) data (i.e., reporting on the number of deaths reported only for shelter residents)

Since 2007, SSHA has collected and reported on deaths of individuals staying in municipally administered shelters. When current or recent residents of Toronto shelters die, shelter providers must notify the City within 24 hours and submit a written report within 30 days. In 2016, City Council directed TPH to expand the scope of data capture and reporting to include the deaths of people experiencing homelessness inside and outside of the shelter system. SSHA contributes the subset of deaths for those living in a shelter (i.e., Deaths of Shelter Residents data) to the data summarized on TPH's [Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) dashboard.

SSHA and TPH have worked together to identify and improve processes for more coordinated reporting on deaths of people experiencing homelessness. This includes improved coordination regarding the release of respective datasets to support clearer communications internally and to the general public about deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

As of November 2023, SSHA is resuming monthly release of Deaths of Shelter Residents data. A return to monthly data will benefit the community by providing more frequent information, including to those who organize the Toronto Homeless Memorial. SSHA will also start reporting Deaths of Shelter Resident data via the City's Open Data portal, eventually moving all historical data to the Open Data portal while maintaining the web page to report more current data.

TPH continues to report their Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness data summaries on a semi-annual basis. The data from TPH's Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness can be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the number and causes of deaths in the broader unhoused or under-housed community and identify mortality trends related to the population. Since May 2023, TPH's Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness current and historical data is available on the Open Data portal.

4. Infection Prevention and Control in the Shelter System

Infection prevention and control (IPAC) is an important component of reducing risk from the transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. While SSHA's efforts to support homelessness service providers and staff to implement IPAC measures pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, the focused and targeted implementation of IPAC measures at shelter sites has been a critical component of the COVID-19 response in the shelter system.

In June 2022, City Council adopted Part 2 of the Audit of Emergency Shelters: Lessons Learned from Hotel Operations, where the Auditor General recommended that SSHA keep the Infection Prevention and Control manual for shelters settings up-to-date and available to all shelter service providers; monitor to ensure shelter service providers' Infection Prevention and Control plans are up-to-date; obtain independent assessments of Infection Prevention and Control procedures; and report transparently to City Council, through the Economic and Community Development Committee, on IPAC areas requiring improvement, including corrective action plans to strengthen IPAC measures in the shelter system. This report back addresses this requirement from the Auditor General.

Recognizing the areas for improvement, SSHA has undertaken key initiatives to strengthen IPAC compliance across the homelessness service system, including in shelter hotels. This work helps to move forward and deliver on priority actions identified in the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan.

Enhanced communication and engagement with the sector on IPAC guidance

Beginning in April 2020, SSHA held monthly webinars with homelessness service providers to share IPAC best practices, COVID-19 policies, and related guidance for shelter and 24-hour respite providers. SSHA shared this information with the sector as it became available through the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and Toronto Public Health. Following the webinars, SSHA would disseminate resources to assist with implementation and respond to questions from service providers. Webinars continue to be held on an ad-hoc basis.

In collaboration with IPAC consultant Practice Health Check (PHC) and Toronto Public Health, SSHA has also updated the [IPAC Manual for Shelter Settings](#). SSHA continues to update IPAC directives, including providing direction on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), screening and outbreak management to enhance health and safety in shelters. These updates are regularly communicated to the homelessness services sector to promote awareness of evolving IPAC expectations and best practices.

Quality Assurance Assessments and Activities

The Toronto Shelter Standards (TSS) provide City of Toronto-funded shelter providers and clients with a clear set of expectations, guidelines and minimum requirements for the delivery of shelter services in Toronto. All emergency and transitional shelters

funded or directly operated by the City of Toronto, are expected to meet the minimum service standards outlined in the Toronto Shelter Standards, as updated in 2022.

In February 2023, City Council requested the General Manager, SSHA to consider conducting an audit of shelter-hotel operations examining health and safety, harm reduction practices, food quality, rules such as bed checks and COVID-19 infection control practices and report to the Economic Development Committee in the third quarter of 2023.

SSHA assesses compliance to the TSS and the 24-Hour Respite Site Standards (TRS), and IPAC guidance on a regular basis. These assessments are done at all City-funded shelters, including hotels, 24-hour respite sites, and 24-hour women's drop-ins. Various sections of the TSS/TRS are assessed every quarter. A number of indicators, developed for each section, are assessed for observability. Providers are scored on compliance with indicators.

Following each assessment, providers receive a report that outlines all the indicators included in the assessment and compliance with each of them. Service providers also receive a separate assessment highlighting all items that were non-compliant from the current and previous assessments, providing a complete list of all standards that have not been met across all assessed sections.

SSHA staff support service providers in remediating any non-compliant items in several ways. During an assessment, staff may advise how to remediate an item and allow the service provider to immediately address the issue. Following an assessment, supports and resources are identified and shared with the service provider in collaboration with multiple SSHA teams. Service providers then revise policies, procedures, and processes as needed to ensure they are meeting City requirements. Service providers are generally very engaged in the quality-assurance process and work very hard to ensure they are meeting City requirements.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Assessments

Section 11.1 "Infection Prevention and Control" was added to the Toronto Shelter Standards as part of the 2022 administrative update to the TSS. This section reinforces the importance of IPAC processes and practices, and serves as a basis for IPAC assessments across the homelessness services system. Similar IPAC updates are planned for the TRS.

In June 2021, SSHA initiated regular IPAC assessments at all emergency, transitional and hotel shelters, 24-hour respites and 24-hour women's drop-ins. Sites were assessed on SSHA's IPAC checklist and remedial actions were communicated to providers. Assessments were initially conducted bi-weekly, before moving to a monthly and then quarterly schedule as IPAC compliance increased and the frequency of COVID-19 outbreaks in shelter sites decreased.

Between June 2021 and September 2023, 1,340 IPAC assessments work conducted across 119 shelter locations by SSHA staff. Of these, 822 IPAC assessments were

conducted in 2022, including 244 assessments conducted at 28 shelter hotel sites. Additionally, 270 IPAC assessments have been conducted to date in 2023, including 66 assessments conducted at 25 hotel shelter sites, as three sites underwent closures.

The average compliance score for shelter hotel sites is 97 per cent, indicating a consistent and high degree of IPAC compliance. IPAC compliance across shelter sites improved throughout 2021, and has since remained consistently high for all indicators across shelter sites, based on findings from the Quality Assurance assessments. There has been sustained improvement in the following areas: hand hygiene, PPE supply and use, screening, documentation, signage, physical distancing and room occupancy, and cleaning and disinfecting.

Building sector capacity on IPAC practices

Since June 2021, SSHA has taken measures to build capacity within the homelessness services sector on Infection Prevention and Control practices. Between June 2021 to September 2023, IPAC consultant Practice Health Check has trained over 4,800 frontline shelter staff at 103 different sites on IPAC practices. This includes staff, management and property services staff working in shelter hotels.

SSHA has also provided funding to each site, including shelter hotels, to have an IPAC lead on site. IPAC leads support shelter sites to implement IPAC measures and best practices, and participate in a monthly IPAC Community of Practice, jointly hosted by SSHA and Practice Health Check, to share best practices in IPAC implementation.

IPAC consultant Practice Health Check has also worked with shelter sites to develop individualized COVID-19 outbreak plans to improve planning and IPAC implementation during outbreaks. As of September 2023, Practice Health Check has met with 91 IPAC leads representing shelter sites across the City. Of these, Practice Health Check has met with 17 IPAC leads at shelter hotel sites for 17 COVID-19 outbreak management plan reviews and has conducted 23 initial audits at these sites, along with several follow-up audits.

SSHA continues to have regular meetings with Toronto Public Health and Practice Health Check through IPAC/health advisory groups and continues to modify the Quality Assurance Team (QAT) IPAC assessment to reflect the most up-to date public health guidance. Most recently, SSHA is focusing efforts on improving and reinforcing IPAC practices applicable to all communicable diseases and outbreaks, including but not limited to COVID-19.

Harm Reduction Assessments

SSHA has updated the Toronto Shelter Standards Section 10.2.1 on “Harm Reduction” to reflect the revised harm reduction standards and practices that were issued through SSHA Directive 2021-01 on Harm Reduction. These changes were issued as part of the Toronto Shelter Standards 2022 Administrative Update.

In Q2 2023, 33 indicators related to harm reduction were assessed at all shelter locations, including all active hotel shelter sites. Indicators included availability of harm reduction supplies and naloxone on site, sharps containers (locations within the site and disposal procedures), and various harm reduction-related policies. At shelter hotel sites, the availability of harm reduction supplies, including the availability of sharps containers in each room, and naloxone demonstrated a high degree of compliance, as did staff training on harm reduction and overdose recognition, prevention and response, referrals for harm reduction supports and services, and disposal procedures for sharps. The average compliance score across harm reduction indicators for hotel sites was 82%.

SSHA also conducts Harm Reduction and Overdose Preparedness assessments across the shelter system, with priority given to newly opened shelter sites. To date, 13 assessments have been conducted at shelter hotel sites, and recommendations for improvement and remediation have been provided accordingly.

Food Quality Assessments

Section 9.2 “Food, Diet and Nutrition” of the Toronto Shelter Standards includes standards related to food quality. Food-related standards will be assessed across the shelter system, including in shelter hotel sites, in Q4 2023. Standards to be assessed will include food safety and handling, menu planning, and dining area cleanliness.

Though data on food quality assessments is not available, SSHA has gathered feedback from clients on food quality through the eight indicators related to satisfaction with food in the Client Satisfaction Survey, conducted in November and December 2022. Of all sections in the Client Satisfaction Survey, clients were the least satisfied with food, and food at shelter hotels was rated particularly low. This was in part due to the food at shelter hotels generally not being prepared on site but rather brought in by catering companies, resulting in shelter hotel providers having less control over food quality and variety. SSHA responded to concerns expressed by following up with catering providers and resolving complaints on a case-by-case basis. The findings from the Client Satisfaction Survey continue to inform actions by SSHA to improve client satisfaction with food. In addition, shelter providers are expected have their own processes for client feedback on shelter services including food.

Bed Check Assessments

Section 8.5.3 “Occupied Bed/Rooms” of the Toronto Shelter Standards includes updated guidance around bed checks. In 2023, this section was updated to clarify that shelter providers, including family shelter providers, will conduct regular bed checks; and that bed checks will not be conducted during overnight hours. These indicators, along with other indicators under the category “Sleeping Areas” will be assessed in Q4 2023.

5. Housing Opportunities

The emergency shelter system is essential to respond to the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness. However, the solution to ending chronic homelessness is

housing, including supportive housing, which provides a combination of deeply affordable homes and a range of support services to help people live independently and with dignity.

In September 2020, City Council approved the [24-month COVID-19 Housing and Homelessness Recovery Response Plan](#) to expedite delivery of the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#), and create 3,000 permanent housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the support of the federal and provincial governments, in 2021 and 2022, over 3,000 new supportive and affordable housing opportunities were made available to move people out of shelters. From the beginning of 2020 to November 2022, the City has made significant progress on advancing the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, including moving over 13,000 people previously experiencing homelessness into permanent housing (including private market rental, supportive, and rent-geared-to-income housing). Additional affordable and supportive homes were also delivered through other City programs such as the Open Door Program and moving people into the private rental market through housing benefits.

In May 2022, City Council adopted report EX32.6 and approved the [24-Month Housing Recovery and Resilience Plan \(2023-2024\)](#) aimed at creating 4,000 new affordable and supportive housing opportunities in 2023 and 2024, including 2,500 new supportive housing and 1,500 affordable housing opportunities through the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. Through this report, Council also approved Open Door financial incentives to support the creation of these new homes. Further, Council requested the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada to provide new and enhanced investments to support this plan.

Importance of rent supplements/housing allowances to assist in transitioning shelter clients into housing

Shelter system flow describes the number of people entering the shelter system compared to the number of people exiting the shelter system. Over time, there has been a shift where key housing placement programs serving people in shelters are delivering almost all housing outcomes from the shelter system (see Figures 5 and 6). The housing market in Toronto reached this point in mid-2022, where there were almost no exits from the shelter system without the support of a housing benefit or rent-geared-to-income housing.

The extremely low rates of social assistance rates do not reflect the actual cost of living in Toronto. Improving the adequacy of social assistance to increase social assistance rates so that recipients are better able to meet their basic needs, including the cost of living (including housing) in Toronto and equalize the benefit rate across the Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are necessary to prevent more households from falling into deep poverty and homelessness. In the past 10 years, average market rent for a bachelor unit has increased 57%, while Ontario Works (OW) shelter allowance rates have increased only 4% (Figure 7). The gap between OW shelter benefits and rent for a bachelor unit has increased from \$464 in 2012 to \$927 in 2022 (a 100% increase in the affordability gap). The difference between social

assistance rates for shelter amounts and the cost of rental housing in Toronto means that Torontonians who rely on social assistance are consistently at risk of losing their housing unless they are in rent-geared-to-income housing. The affordability gap also means that Toronto’s shelter system has great difficulty connecting shelter residents who rely on social assistance benefits to housing opportunities without significant additional financial supports.

Figure 3: Total people housed through key housing placement programs

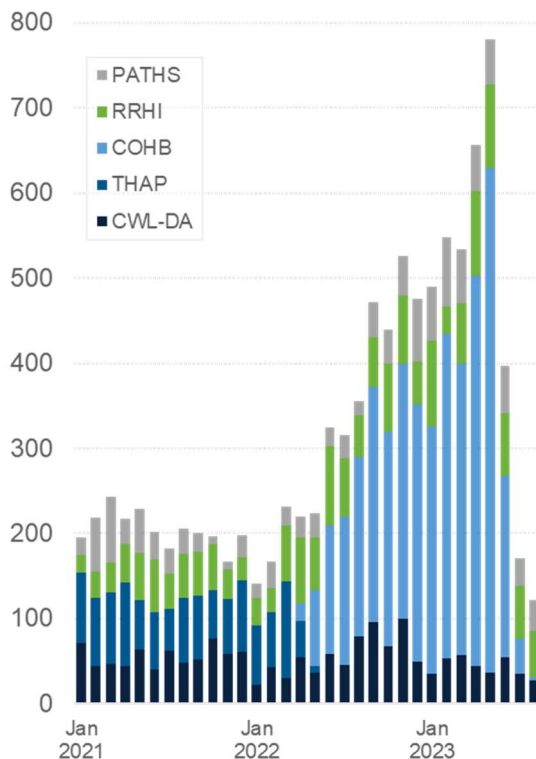


Figure 6: Total people moved from shelters to housing, shelter system flow data

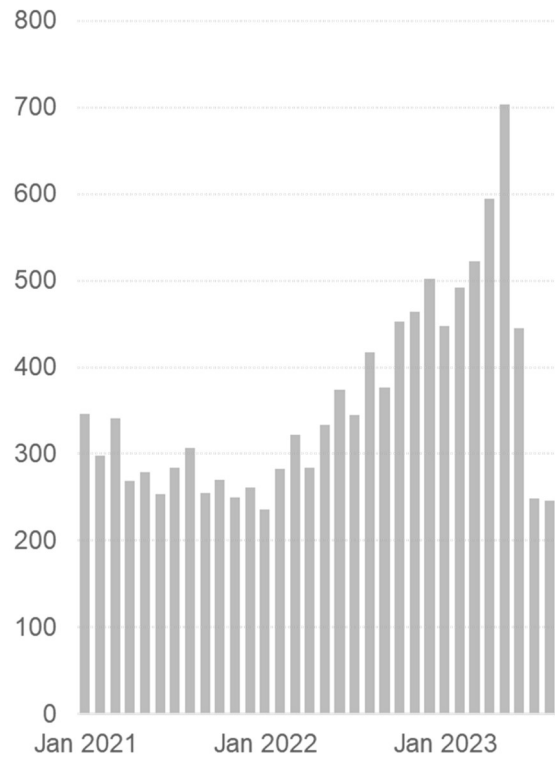
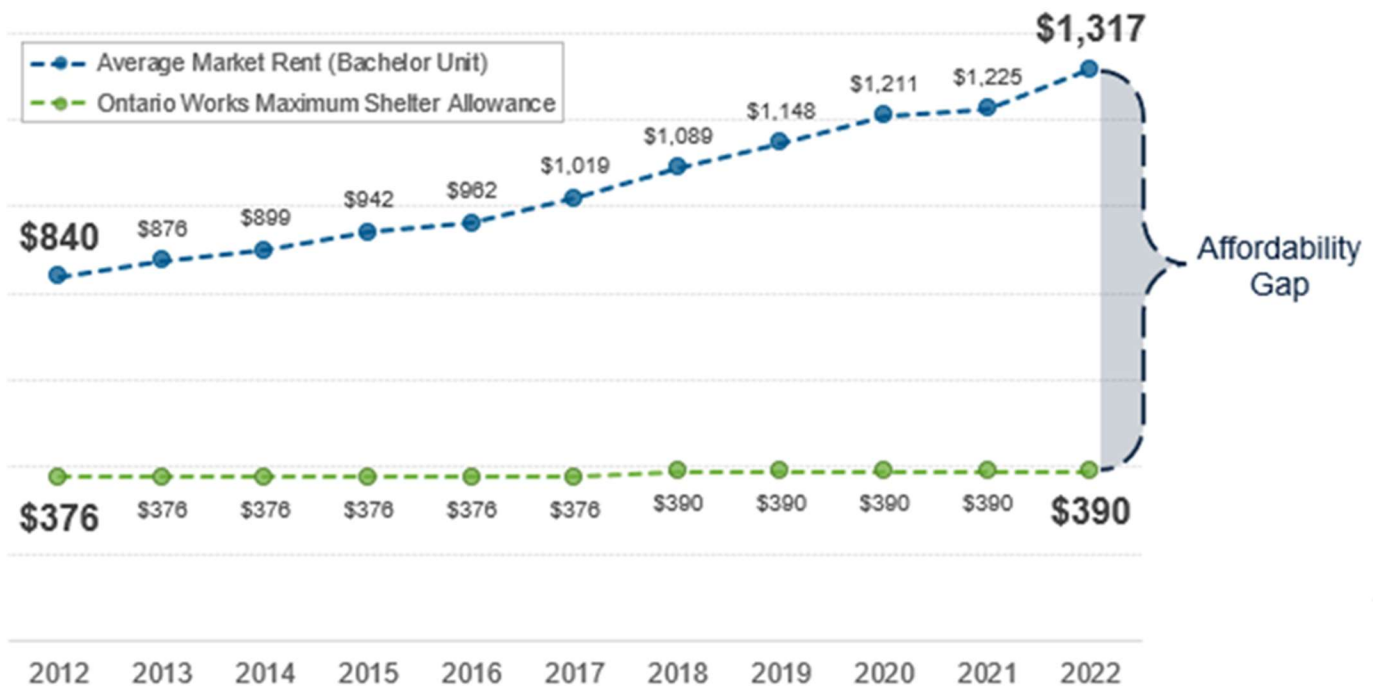


Figure 7. Ontario Works Maximum Shelter Allowance (1 person) and Average Market Rent (Bachelor Unit), Toronto, 2012-2022



In its third year, between April 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) quickly became the leading pathway for shelter residents from homelessness to permanent housing. In year three, 1,644 shelter residents received COHB through the Shelter Relief Stream, making up over 80% of all COHB applications. Of these, 64% were refugee and refugee claimant households. In addition, 300 Indigenous households received COHB, in keeping with commitments made in SSHA’s Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan. Finally, average monthly uptake increased continually throughout the program to 275 per month, and overall uptake exceeded the original Provincial allocation by more than 700 new applications.

COHB Year 4 began on April 1, 2023 and was exhausted within 41 days, by May 12, 2023. During this time, over 960 shelter residents received COHB through the Shelter Relief Stream making up over 90% of all COHB applications. Of these, 78% were refugee and refugee claimant households.

In July 2023, the Provincial Government committed a contribution of \$6.67 million to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. The City matched this provincial contribution through a one-time draw of \$6.67 million from the Tax Stabilization Reserve Fund. This combined effort is providing \$13.3 million in funding to help move upwards of 1,350 households to permanent housing.

In September 2023, the Provincial Government committed an additional \$42 million province-wide through the COHB program to assist approximately 4,000 new households in 2023-2024. Of the \$42 million, \$26.4 million has been allocated to the City of Toronto in 2023-2024 to help move refugee claimants into permanent housing. Of this, \$13 million is a new allocation that will help move another 1,300 or more

households to permanent housing. As part of the same announcement, the Provincial government has announced that they are investing another \$13.25 for settlement services, language training, and labour market integration supports for refugee claimants. While not directly related to housing, this additional investment will help refugee claimants settle, stabilize, and find employment across the province.

The additional COHB investment is welcome and needed. However, it is critical that this additional investment is not deducted from already committed future-year COHB funding for the City of Toronto. A sustainable and predictable COHB program funded by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada will contribute to relieving the pressure on the shelter system in Toronto by enabling people to quickly access housing.

The City continues to focus on landlord engagement to identify available rental units, with a COHB implementation plan in place based on the same program design and eligibility criteria as in Year 4. Modifications to eligibility criteria may be considered as required. In addition, uptake is being monitored closely, and allocations will be implemented as required to ensure an even and well-communicated program wind-down.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Gordon Tanner
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: List of confirmed Warming Centre sites

Type	Address	Status	Expected Opening	# of Clients	Councillor	City Ward
Warming Centre	136 Spadina Road	Confirmed	November 15, 2023	24	Saxe	University-Rosedale
Warming Centre	75 Elizabeth Street	Confirmed	November 15, 2023	64	Malik Saxe (Proximity) Moise (Proximity)	Spadina-Fort York University-Rosedale Toronto Centre
Warming Centre	15 Olive Avenue	Confirmed	November 15, 2023	34	Cheng	Willowdale
Warming Centre	885 Scarborough Golf Club	Confirmed	November 15, 2023	48	Ainslie	Scarborough-Guildwood
24-hour Winter Respite Site	At the time of report submission, details still being confirmed.	Board approval received. Signed agreement pending.	November 15, 2023	At the time of report submission, details still being confirmed.	At the time of report submission, details still being confirmed.	At the time of report submission, details still being confirmed.
Surge Space	At the time of report submission, details still being confirmed. However, as noted above, the City is prepared to be ready to activate up to 40 spaces in Alternative Space Programs (ASP) during extreme cold weather.					