

## **MPB4.1. Open Letter to Members of Toronto City Council**

### **Torontonians need a budget that will prevent homelessness from increasing, slow the loss of affordable housing, and ensure that all Torontonians can access basic shelter**

February 14, 2023

Mayor Tory and Toronto City Council,

We are writing out of concern for the future of Toronto and its residents. The proposed budget is a cruel budget. It abandons the city's most vulnerable to the whims of the provincial and federal government and guarantees that Toronto's affordable housing and homelessness crises will get much worse. We think it's a budget that makes Torontonians less safe: it makes renters less safe, it makes people without any housing less safe, it makes every Torontonian who worries that they may not be able to find anywhere to live that they can afford less safe.

People are struggling and homelessness continues to grow, yet there is no money in this budget to increase shelter spaces or help people get out of the cold, and there is little in it to prevent the situation from getting much worse. We cannot rely on federal and provincial money to materialize; although these levels of government have a responsibility, we do not get to shirk our own despite their lack of commitment.

We need to increase funding for programs to ensure that people can access shelter and respite from the elements and are supported in accessing housing. The shelter system is so full that each day the City turns away 100-200 people who are desperately looking for an indoor space because there is no room. And even when there are beds, strict shelter system rules and requirements make many people unable to access them. As a result, unhoused people with nowhere else to go end up sheltering in public parks, emergency rooms, the TTC, and libraries—public services that are not designed or equipped for this purpose. We need more shelter beds and low-barrier, 24/7 walk-in spaces for people who need to be able to get in out of the cold but who are unable to access a shelter space. Only when we get to the point where shelters are at 90% occupancy, as per the Toronto Shelter Standards, can we afford to think about reducing the size of the shelter system. We also need more rent supplements – a much cheaper option than a shelter space – to help people with low-incomes access housing and hold onto it.

We need to increase funding to essential neighbourhood-based programs like daytime drop-ins that provide basic necessities like meals and showers and offer people a safe and dignified space to build the relationships that enable them to access healthcare, housing, employment and maintain their housing. The need for these services is higher than ever, yet these critically important programs are not only chronically underfunded, but are now having to cut staff, hours, and programs due to inadequate funding.

Additional funding is especially urgent given that the rollout of [MyAccessToHousingTO](#), the City's new entirely online process for accessing subsidized housing and Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits, has meant vulnerable and marginalized people who need these supports the most are unable to access housing because they lack access to the internet and the ability to navigate the online system on their own. Neighbourhood-based programs can help fill this gap and provide access to both computers and support workers, but only if we fund them adequately.

A key reason that homelessness is growing is that we don't invest enough in programs and services that help tenants remain housed. When tenants are evicted or are forced to move out, landlords raise the rent and once-affordable housing is lost. Toronto loses affordable housing *fourteen times* faster than it builds it: for the past ten years, each year Toronto has lost an average of [7,309](#) private market affordable rental units while only creating an average of [509](#) new affordable units. Unless we do significantly more to stem this loss, we will never increase the city's supply of affordable housing and homelessness will continue to grow—not from refugees or people coming from other cities, but from local people who are forced out of their homes by landlords and developers looking to make bigger profits and who can't find anywhere to live that they can afford.

While the budget increases funding to the EPIC program that helps people receiving social assistance stay housed, the programs that help all other renters from being evicted aren't seeing an increase, even though the need for support is growing substantially. People who are behind in their rent and are at risk of eviction can access support through the [Toronto Rent Bank](#). However, the program doesn't have sufficient funds to help everyone who needs it and program restrictions mean that many people aren't eligible to access help at all. The program needs to be better

funded and eligibility criteria needs to be changed so that people who are unemployed can get support and people who don't live alone are more likely to meet income eligibility requirements.

The Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition program (MURA) puts money in the hands of non-profit organizations to quickly purchase existing privately owned rental buildings so that the tenants aren't evicted and rents stay affordable for the long term. Because purchasing an existing affordable unit is much faster and a fraction of the cost of building a new one, MURA is the most efficient and cost-effective affordable housing program the city has. This budget proposes a total of \$10 million for MURA and sets a target of acquiring 120 rooms/units with that money, even though that amount is likely only enough to preserve 60. 60 rooms/units is not nearly enough when 7,309 will likely be lost this year. MURA needs to be considered an essential component of the city's efforts to grow the city's affordable housing supply and be funded accordingly. The supply of affordable housing can't grow without preserving what we have.

We, the undersigned, call on you to create a 2023 budget that will make Toronto safer by preventing homelessness from increasing, slowing the loss of affordable housing & ensuring that all Torontonians can access basic shelter by:

1. Adding 1,000 more beds to the singles sector of the shelter system (without crowding more people into existing shelters) to address current and future needs.
2. Reinstating 24/7 low-barrier respite spaces to give people a place to go besides the ER and TTC.
3. Keeping warming centres open every day through the winter.
4. Doubling Rent Bank funding to prevent more people from losing their homes.
5. Increasing funding for housing benefits and housing help so that vulnerable people can access and maintain their housing.
6. Increasing funding to neighbourhood-based community programs to not only cover rising operating costs, but to allow them to expand hours and services and provide support for access to subsidized housing.
7. Increasing MURA funding to \$25 million so that 170 homes will remain affordable in perpetuity.

Signed,

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

Agincourt Community Services

All Saints Church - Community Centre

Anglican Diocese of Toronto

BGC East Scarborough

Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre

Black CAP (The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention)

Bloordale United Church

Breakaway Community Services

The Cabbagetown BIA

Canadian Centre for Housing Rights

Centre for Independent Living in Toronto

Christ Church St James Anglican Church

Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre

Church of St Stephen-in-the-Fields  
Church of the Holy Trinity  
ClimateFast  
The Dale Ministries  
Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre  
DDADH: the Dispossessed Disabled Artists Demanding Housing  
Dixon Hall  
Federation of South Toronto Residents Associations (FoSTRA)  
Fontbonne Ministries  
Fred Victor Centre  
Housing Committee, Christ Church St. James Anglican Church  
Housing Ontario University Students Equitably  
Income Security Advocacy Centre  
Inner City Health Associates  
Kensington Market Community Land Trust  
Knox Presbyterian Church  
Les Communications Mary Kelly Communications Services @AstuteCitizen  
Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project  
Maytree  
Mentor/Mentee Canada  
The Neighbourhood Group Community Services  
North York Harvest Food Bank  
The Parkdale Activity - Recreation Centre  
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre  
Parkdale Community Legal Services  
POWER IN COMMUNITY fighting for affordable homes  
Regent Park Community Health Centre  
Regent Park Community Ministry

Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto

Scarborough Civic Action Network

Sistering

Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough (SACS)

Social Planning Toronto

South Riverdale Community Health Centre

St Felix Centre

Street Health Overdose Prevention Site

Toronto & York Region Labour Council

Toronto ACORN

Toronto Community Benefits Network

Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

Toronto Drop-in Network

Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

Toronto350

TTCriders

Ve'ahavta

Voices of Scarborough

West Neighbourhood House

Weston King Neighbourhood Centre

West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre

Working for Change.ca

YMCA of Greater Toronto

York Affordable Housing Committee (AHC)

York Community Housing Association

York University Graduate Students' Association