

Shelter Safety Action Plan and Contract Amendments related to Lodging for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, and Community Safety Team Services

Date: November 12, 2024
To: Economic and Community Development Committee
From: General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services; Executive Director, Housing Secretariat; and Chief Procurement Officer
Wards: All

SUMMARY

The City is committed to prioritizing and continuously improving shelter safety for staff and clients. On April 30, 2024, the Economic and Community Development Committee adopted the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Shelter Safety Study and directed Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) to report back on the development of a Shelter Safety Action Plan in consultation with people with lived experience and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee ([2024.EC12.13](#)). This report outlines the Shelter Safety Action Plan, which advances the recommendations from the CAMH Shelter Safety Study, and builds on the expertise and guidance from people with lived experience, shelter providers, health and mental health partners, and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee, and sets out an implementation roadmap to support staff and client safety in the shelter system. To continue supporting people experiencing homelessness and living in encampments, including people with complex health and mental health needs, the City requires ongoing commitment, investment, and collaboration with all orders of government, community organizations and sector partners.

TSSS continues to implement the City's 10-year Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, which aims to make physical shelter infrastructure accessible, safer, and better aligned to respond to the diverse needs of shelter clients, staff, and the surrounding community. In response to [2024.EC9.4](#), City staff have been working to review and improve community safety efforts in and around shelter sites in collaboration with existing community safety services. This includes continued collaboration with Toronto Police Service, Business Improvement Areas, City Divisions, community organizations and institutions, partnership tables, and local networks. In addition, this report seeks City Council authority to amend competitive blanket contracts 47025287 and 47025624 for Community Safety Team Services that enhance safety in shelter for

staff and clients, and support two Toronto Community Housing Corporation social housing buildings with a concentration of tenants with complex needs.

A report back is provided based on an evidence-informed needs assessment supported by Toronto Public Health to continue overdose prevention at large temporary shelter hotels. The City aims to maintain and expand lifesaving supports available in large shelter hotel sites, which may be particularly important considering proposed provincial legislation which, if passed, may lead to a significant decrease in the availability of overdose prevention services across the city.

With the ongoing arrival of refugee claimants to Toronto since September 2021, the City requires the support of all orders of government, community organizations, and sector partners. In follow up to the Council request ([2024.EC11.7](#)), this report seeks City Council authority to provide reimbursement to churches and community organizations, many Black-led, for eligible expenses incurred while providing temporary emergency shelter and support to hundreds of refugee claimants who arrived in Toronto in 2023. It also seeks City Council authority to amend and extend non-competitive blanket contract 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society to continue providing temporary lodging services for refugees until December 31, 2025. Refugees continue to arrive in Toronto and require services beyond what the purpose-built shelter system can currently provide, as Toronto Shelter and Support Services gradually transitions from temporary shelter hotel sites as part of its Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy.

These continued efforts are important measures to support people experiencing homelessness in need of immediate support. The City is committed to long-term solutions to homelessness including affordable housing and supportive housing, which, with adequate income support, remain the most important factors to end homelessness and to build safe and secure communities for the people we serve and all residents of Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, Executive Director, Housing Secretariat and Chief Procurement Officer recommend that:

1. City Council adopt the Shelter Safety Action Plan, a 36-month plan to continue to advance safety within the shelter system for staff and clients, in Attachment 1.
2. City Council re-iterate its request to the Government of Ontario to:
 - a. Protect community health, well-being and safety by continuing to fund all currently operating Supervised Consumption Services and Consumption and Treatment Services Sites beyond March 31, 2025.
 - b. Consider the inclusion of Supervised Consumption Services in new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment program proposals that demonstrate outcomes for life-saving medical services, primary care, and increased

pathways to treatment services and that include mandatory neighbourhood and operational safety plans.

3. City Council request the Government of Ontario provide ongoing and sustainable funding to ensure that appropriate primary health care, mental health and crisis intervention services are available to adequately support individuals experiencing homelessness and sleeping outdoors in Toronto, and that provincial investment in new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment programs do not result in the overall reduction in service and a corresponding negative outcome for vulnerable people in the City of Toronto.

4. City Council authorize the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, to reimburse up to \$3,475,332 to churches and community organizations for their eligible expenses towards providing temporary shelter to refugee claimants incurred until December 31, 2023.

5. City Council authorize the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to develop and implement the Shelter Management Information System file notifications for incidents of anti-Black racism within the homelessness sector and the use of the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool custom solution to track and manage incidents of anti-Black racism in City operated shelters and units, subject to completion of a Privacy Impact Assessment and confirmation by the City Clerk that the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool custom solution and associated operations comply with all requirements of the Municipal Freedom and Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

6. City Council authorize the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, in consultation with Purchasing and Materials Management, in accordance with Section 71-11.1.C of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 71, Financial Control, to enter into the necessary amending agreements on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor to increase the value of the following contracts to maintain service levels in the winter and early spring:

a. Non-Competitive Blanket Contract 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society for lodging services for asylum seekers and refugees by an amount of \$13,957,712 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$14,203,368 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries), increasing the contract value from \$60,137,629 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$61,196,051 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) to \$74,095,341 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$75,399,419 net of Harmonizes Sales Tax recoveries) and extending the term to December 31, 2025.

b. Competitive Blanket Contract 47025287 with 2756732 Ontario Inc O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services by a total amount (including all option years) of \$8,102,600 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$8,245,206 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries), increasing the total contract value (including all option years) from \$10,818,272 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$11,008,673 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) to \$18,920,872 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$19,253,880 net of Harmonizes Sales Tax recoveries).

7. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, in consultation with Purchasing and Materials Management, in accordance with Section 71-11.1.C of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 71, Financial Control, to enter into the necessary amending agreements on terms and conditions satisfactory to the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor to increase the value and extend the term, of the following contract:

a. Competitive Blanket Contract 47025624 with 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services by a total amount (including all option years) of \$300,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$305,280 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries), increasing the total contract value (including all option years) from \$300,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$305,280 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) to \$600,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$610,560 net of Harmonizes Sales Tax recoveries).

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations included in this report include reimbursement up to \$3,475,332 to churches and community organizations for their eligible expenses towards providing temporary shelter to refugee claimants incurred until December 31, 2023. These costs are eligible under the Federal Interim Housing Assistance Program. Through the Operating Variance Report for the Year-Ended December 31, 2023 ([2024.EX16.11](#)) Council approved expenditure authority to ensure that the remaining 2023 reimbursement payments to approved churches and community organizations will be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve up to \$4.5 million to the extent that the costs will not result in a net pressure to the City in 2024 if federal funding is not sufficient to cover these costs.

Shelter Safety Action Plan

Toronto Shelter and Support Services has developed a 36-month Shelter Safety Action Plan to advance safety within the shelter system, as outlined in Attachment 1. To support the Shelter Safety Action Plan, additional funding of \$1.207 million in 2025 is required. New and enhanced funding requirements for the implementation of the Plan have been included in the 2025 Operating and Capital Budget Submission for Toronto Shelter and Support Services for consideration along with other City priorities, subject to the City's financial and resource capacity against other critical City-wide operating impacts. See Table 1 for additional details.

Table 1: 2025 Funding Requirements for Initiatives in the Shelter Safety Action Plan

| Initiatives (\$ millions) | | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Specialized program to support people with complex needs | Operating | \$0.300 | \$0.300 | \$0.300 |

| Initiatives (\$ millions) | | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Crystal Meth Training for City of Toronto Shelter Staff | Operating | \$0.020 | \$0.020 | \$0.020 |
| Employee & Client Wellbeing | Operating | \$0.480 | \$0.480 | \$0.480 |
| Confronting-anti-Black racism programs | Operating | \$0.032 | \$0.251 | \$0.245 |
| | Capital | \$0.375 | \$0.375 | |
| Total Additional Funding Requirements | | \$1.207 | \$1.426 | \$1.045 |

Future financial impacts beyond 2025 will be considered in future year Budget processes.

Reimbursement for Churches and Community Organizations Supporting Refugee Claimants

The cost to reimburse churches and community organizations for their eligible expenses towards providing temporary shelter to refugee claimants incurred from October 1 until December 31, 2023, is \$3,475,332. These costs are eligible under the Federal Interim Housing Assistance Program. However, if federal funding is not sufficient to cover these costs, funding of up to \$4.5 million can be drawn from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve to ensure that the remaining 2023 reimbursement payments to approved churches and community organizations will not result in a net pressure to the City in 2024. This funding was allocated through the Council approved Operating Variance Report for the Year-Ended December 31, 2023 ([2024.EX16.11](#)).

Lodging Services and Community Safety Services Contracts Supporting Clients in Shelter System

The total potential amount for amending one (1) non-competitive blanket contract with Canadian Red Cross Society for lodging services for asylum seekers & refugees and two (2) competitive blanket contracts with 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services, including option years, is \$22,360,313 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$22,753,854 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries).

Funding in the amount of \$34,460,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$35,066,496 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) is included in the 2024 Operating Budget for Toronto Shelter and Support Services. Funding in the amount of \$18,778,003 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$19,108,496 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) is included in the 2025 Operating Budget Submission for Toronto Shelter and Support Services. See Tables 2 and 3 for additional details.

Should the City choose to exercise its option to renew applicable contracts for additional terms beyond 2025 and up to December 31, 2027, then appropriate funding, if needed, will be included in the 2026 and future annual Operating Budget Submissions for Toronto Shelter and Support Services. Funding details for future years are noted in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Financial Impact Summary of Recommended Amendment to Non-Competitive Contract 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society for Lodging Services for Asylum Seekers and Refugees for Toronto Shelter and Support Services, Net of Harmonized Sales Tax Recoveries

| Cost Centre: F00052, F00060 Cost Element: 5130 | Approved Contract Value (Net of HST Recoveries) | Recommended Amendment (Net of HST Recoveries) | Total (Net of HST Recoveries) |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Previous Term from April 25, 2022, to December 31, 2024 | \$30,668,051 | \$0 | \$30,668,051 |
| Current Term from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024 | \$30,528,000 | \$0 | \$30,528,000 |
| Next Term from January 1 to December 31, 2025 | \$0 | \$14,203,368 | \$14,203,368 |
| Total Contract Amendments from April 25, 2022, to December 31, 2025 | \$61,196,051 | \$14,203,368 | \$75,399,419 |

Table 3: Financial Impact Summary of Recommended Amendment to Competitive Contract 47025287 with 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services for Toronto Shelter and Support Services, Net of Harmonized Sales Tax Recoveries

| Cost Centre: HS100X, FH5350, F03705, F03026 Cost Element: 2999, 4995 | Approved Contract Value (Net of HST Recoveries) | Recommended Amendment (Net of HST Recoveries) | Total (Net of HST Recoveries) |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Current Term from January 1 to December 31, 2024 | \$4,334,976 | \$203,520 | \$4,538,496 |

| Cost Centre: HS100X, FH5350, F03705, F03026 Cost Element: 2999, 4995 | Approved Contract Value (Net of HST Recoveries) | Recommended Amendment (Net of HST Recoveries) | Total (Net of HST Recoveries) |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Option Year Period from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025 | \$2,159,144 | \$2,745,984 | \$4,905,128 |
| Option Year Period from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2026 | \$2,223,918 | \$2,681,210 | \$4,905,128 |
| Option Year Period from January 1, 2027, to December 31, 2027 | \$2,290,636 | \$2,614,492 | \$4,905,128 |
| Total Contract Amendments from November 6, 2023, to December 31, 2027 | | \$8,245,206 | \$19,253,880 |

Community Safety Services Contracts Supporting Tenants at Toronto Community Housing Corporation

Additionally, the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat is requesting funds to provide Community Safety Teams at two high-needs Toronto Community Housing Corporation buildings at 4175-4205 Lawrence Avenue East, where there is a high concentration of tenants with complex needs.

Funding in the amount of \$200,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$203,520 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) is included in the 2024 Operating Budget for Housing Secretariat. Funding in the amount of \$200,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$203,520 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) is included in the 2025 Operating Budget Submission for Housing Secretariat. Funding in the amount of \$100,000 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$101,760 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) for the 2026 contract term will be included in the 2026 Operating Budget Submission for Housing Secretariat. See Table 4 for additional details.

Table 4: Financial Impact Summary of Recommended Amendment to Competitive Contract 47025624 with 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services for Housing Secretariat, Net of Harmonized Sales Tax Recoveries

| Cost Centre: FH5709 Cost Element: 4439 | Approved Contract Value (Net of HST Recoveries) | Recommended Amendment (Net of HST Recoveries) | | Total (Net of HST Recoveries) |
|---|--|---|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Current Term from August 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025 | \$305,280 | \$0 | | \$305,280 |
| Next Term from August 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026 | \$0 | August 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025 | \$203,520 | \$305,280 |
| | | January 1, 2026, to March 31, 2026 | \$101,760 | |
| Total Contract Amendments from August 1, 2024, to March 31, 2026 | \$305,280 | \$305,280 | | \$610,560 |

The target value of all blanket contracts is non-committed and will be expensed at time of commitment to allow the City to continue to pay the vendor. The actual spending against contracts 47024284 and 47025287 will be limited to the Toronto Shelter and Support Services Operating Budget. The actual spending against contract 47025624 will be limited to the Housing Secretariat Operating Budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with this program to be considered along with other priorities in future budget processes.

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, refugee claimants, 2SLGBTQ+ people, women, and youth. Efforts to address safety must consider the needs of the people most negatively affected and the systems or structures that impose harms on people. Understanding how poverty, racism and other structural inequities impact risk and protective factors associated with safety and well-being can help prioritize the actions that will have the most impact and will have a positive equity impact on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities. Ensuring people experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping outdoors and in encampments,

have access to safe, high-quality emergency shelter, and access to permanent housing opportunities and income supports is an important determinant of health and improves the social and economic status of an individual.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on July 24, 2024, City Council approved the one-time withdrawal of COVID-19 backstop funding from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve to offset 2023 operating year-end variances, including up to \$4,500,000 to support additional reimbursements to churches and other community organizations supporting refugee claimants ([2024.EX16.11](#)).

At its meeting on June 26, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to develop and implement key actions for people who are living outdoors and report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee in the third quarter of 2024. Council also directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, to report back on the costs for up to three (3) concurrent 24/7 Community Safety Teams for large encampments ([2024.EC13.8](#)).

At its meeting on May 22, 2024, City Council adopted GG12.14 "New Non-Competitive Contracts and Amendments to Various Competitive and Non-Competitive Blanket Contracts to Maintain Shelter Services," including authority to amend and extend Non-Competitive Contract 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society to add 250 temporary shelter beds for refugees requested in MM8.29 ([GG12.14](#)).

At its meeting on April 30, 2024, the Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) requested the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to report back to ECDC by the fourth quarter of 2024 on the development of a Shelter Safety Action Plan that responds to the CAMH Shelter Safety Study recommendations ([2024.EC12.13](#)).

At its meeting on April 17, 2024, City Council authorized the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to explore options for one-time extension of reimbursement to churches and community organizations selected by General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services for eligible expenses incurred towards providing temporary shelter to refugee claimants and update City Council in the third quarter of 2024 ([2024.EC11.7](#)).

At its meeting on February 6 and 7, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, to report back to the Economic and Community Development Council in Q3 2024 with recommendations to expand substance use and overdose prevention programming at all temporary shelter hotel locations with a large client population. Council also directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to consult with the local Toronto Police Service to review community safety efforts and opportunities for improvement, and to implement measures for the duration of the required lease extension, subject to available resources. Council also directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to immediately increase community safety

supports in the neighbourhood surrounding 2035 Kennedy Road (Delta Hotel), in Agincourt Village and the Village Green community ([2024.EC9.4](#)).

At its meeting on November 8, 2023, City Council adopted EC7.7 "Shelter Infrastructure Plan and the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy," as the guiding Strategy for capital infrastructure spending decisions from 2024-2033 across the City of Toronto's shelter system. This plan includes the gradual transition from temporary shelter hotel sites into housing or shelter space within the base shelter system ([2023.EC7.7](#)).

At its meeting on October 18, 2023, the Bid Award Panel adopted BA50.5 "Award of Ariba Document Number 3380382780 to Northwest Protection Services Ltd., The West Egg Group Security Services and 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services as Required at Various City of Toronto Shelters for Shelter Support and Housing Administration," awarding a total contract value, including all option years, of \$10,618,272 net of Harmonized Sales Tax (\$11,998,647 net of Harmonized Sales Tax recoveries) to 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions ([BA50.5](#)).

At its meeting on July 19, 2023, City Council adopted GG5.4 "Amendment to Non-Competitive Blanket Contract Number 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society," granting authority to amend the non-competitive blanket contract to continue supporting the response to Ukrainian arrivals ([2023.GG5.4](#)).

At its meeting on May 10, 11 and 12, 2023, City Council authorized the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Unity Health Toronto and Inner City Health Associates for the Connecting Home Initiative feasibility assessment to assess the legal, privacy, and technical viability of developing a shared platform to improve health and housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and the Director, Strategic Partnerships, City Manager's Office, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor. City Council also requested staff to report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee on September 21, 2023, on the implementation of the above-noted MOU ([2023.EC3.16](#)).

At its meeting on February 7, 2023, City Council adopted EC1.5 "COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023," granting authorities required for lease/licence extensions at temporary shelter sites and services through April 30, 2024. The plan includes a commitment to ensure that clients have uninterrupted access to primary care, mental health case management, harm reduction and peer support services where a site is closing ([2023.EC1.5](#)).

COMMENTS

1. Background and Context

Shelter system pressures

Toronto's shelter system is the largest in Canada, providing more beds per capita than any other Canadian city. The City continues to experience unprecedented demand and pressure for shelter services. Demand for shelter services has increased significantly over the past few years, leading City Council to declare a homelessness emergency in the City of Toronto in May 2023. As of October 1, 2024, the City is accommodating 12,225 individuals. This includes 9,556 people in the shelter system, as well as 2,669 people (in families) who are in bridging hotels, awaiting a space in the shelter system. On average, 233 callers to Central Intake are not matched to a shelter space each day. With many people unable to access shelter beds each night, there are increased people sleeping outdoors and in encampments. This shelter demand is projected to continue in 2024 and into 2025 for many reasons including, but not limited to, insufficient affordable housing supply, insufficient supportive housing for people who have complex needs, increased costs of living, inadequate wage and income supports, as well as a lack of access to those supports, and continued new arrivals to the city who are in need of immediate shelter.

Shelter system transformation

Toronto's shelter system underwent dramatic transformation to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Toronto Shelter and Support Services opened temporary shelter hotels as part of its COVID-19 response to support enhanced physical distancing standards and to provide spaces for people to move indoors from encampments. As a result, thousands of people moved into new shelter spaces in a matter of months.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, shelter system pressures have been compounded by the complex health and mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness and the ongoing drug toxicity crisis. While the shelter system has expanded over 30 percent since the start of the pandemic, a similar expansion in health care has not occurred in the provincially funded health system, including for increased access to mental health services and supports, crisis beds, withdrawal management services, and treatment programs for people experiencing homelessness.

Recently announced provincial policy changes that propose to close some supervised consumption service sites are expected to place further strain on remaining resources, including the shelter system and emergency rooms, with significant impact on the lives of people experiencing homelessness who use substances.

2. Safety in the Shelter System

Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) is committed to maintaining and continuously improving safety for staff and clients in the shelter system. Safety is a key priority in the Council-approved [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#), and TSSS regularly updates the Toronto Shelter Standards and 24-Hour Respite Site Standards to strengthen health and safety in shelter settings.

In 2021, TSSS reached out to researchers at CAMH to seek their support and lead research that provides evidence and recommendations to help improve shelter safety in Toronto's shelter system. This resulted in a two-year (2022-2024) study examining factors that contribute to physical and psychological safety in shelters for staff and clients. The CAMH Shelter Safety Study was conducted in partnership with the City of Toronto and several community homelessness service providers.

The [CAMH Shelter Safety Study](#) proposes 22 recommendations to advance safety in the shelter system. This report was adopted by the Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) on April 30, 2024, and aligns with work currently underway to prioritize shelter safety. ECDC directed TSSS to report back on the development of this Shelter Safety Action Plan by Q4 2024, which responds to the CAMH Shelter Safety report and is developed in consultation with people with lived experience and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee.

Shelter Safety Action Plan

TSSS has developed a 36-month Shelter Safety Action Plan to advance safety within the shelter system, as outlined in Attachment 1. The purpose of the Shelter Safety Action Plan is to provide a roadmap for prioritizing and continuously improving shelter safety for staff and clients. The Plan is scoped to address safety within shelter settings, with a focus on addressing safety for both staff and clients, recognizing that enhancing safety positively impacts all who work and access services within shelter settings. The Shelter Safety Action Plan focuses on three key action areas: 1) supporting staff safety, 2) supporting client safety, and 3) enhancing system-wide oversight on safety. This includes identifying 14 actions to be taken over 36-months, many of which, once implemented, are intended to be ongoing.

The Shelter Safety Action Plan was developed and informed by expert advice and evidence, in addition to a key set of consultations completed between July and October 2024. A summary of the consultations can be found in the Shelter Safety Action Plan.

The Shelter Safety Action Plan aligns with other key City strategies and plans including the [Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy](#), [Our Health, Our City: Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto](#), [SafeTO: Toronto's Ten-Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#).

Safety in Shelter Infrastructure

In alignment with the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, a comprehensive lens to address safety-focused infrastructure needs will be applied to

enhance shelter safety for clients and staff across the City's shelter system. This process includes using design methodologies such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as recommended in the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines, to enhance safety through the management of the built form and natural environment. In alignment with the Shelter Infrastructure Safety Plan, TSSS' State of Good Repair Plan provides an asset management lens to address shelter safety across City-operated shelters. The State of Good Repair Plan is aligned with the Corporate Real Estate Management's Corporate Security Plan and directive to enhance and standardize safety infrastructure across City-operated shelters.

Shelter Management Information System Anti-Black Racism Notification and Reporting Tool

The Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) Anti-Black Racism Notification Tool will function as an embedded incident management feature in SMIS by highlighting client files engaged in anti-Black racism. SMIS file notifications will be activated in cases where anti-Black racism is directed towards Black staff or Black clients. Notifications will be sector-wide and remain active on client files for 90 days with the possibility of extension for a total period 120 days (four months) in line with other TSSS health and safety notification systems. The SMIS Anti-Black Racism Notification Tool should not create service barriers or be used to deny individuals access to shelter programs. Rather, the SMIS Anti-Black Racism Notification Tool will:

- Notify staff in real-time to enact safety plans to support and prevent further incidents of anti-Black racism;
- Encourage the use of educational materials for clients, reducing the frequency and severity of anti-Black racism;
- Promote a preventative approach in organizational strategies to mitigate incidents of anti-Black racism and racist behaviours in the shelter sector;
- Assist in improving long-term interventions to address incidents of anti-Black racism;
- Ensure staff awareness of anti-Black Racism and its impact on other staff and clients;
- Support the divisional commitment to confronting anti-Black racism by creating a safer, more inclusive, and supportive environment for Black clients and Black staff.

The Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool is an incident management application that will document and track staff experiences of anti-Black racism in place of QuatroSafety where incidents of racism directed towards Black staff were previously reported. While this tool will be used as an enterprise-wide incident management system available to all City staff, the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool will be used by Toronto Shelter and Support Services to track and manage incidents of anti-Black racism in City shelters. The Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool will:

- Support requirements around incident reporting to promote health and safety;
- Acquire data on anti-Black racism in the shelter system;
- Notify shelter management staff for immediate intervention;
- Enhance the divisional response to anti-Black racism;
- Identify clients who are engaging in anti-Black racism;

- Ensure interventions and resources are in place to support Black staff;
- Act as a system to report anti-Black racism incidents that escalate to workplace violence;
- Reinforce the need for staff training ensuring staff awareness of anti-Black racism and its impact in the shelter system;
- Support Black clients impacted by anti-Black racism to ensure clients feel safe and remain empowered to continue engaging in case management activities and programs.

3. Safety Efforts and Opportunities Across the Shelter System

In response to the evolving landscape observed across the City's shelter system, Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) continues to review community safety efforts across shelters in the city. Since 2020, several initiatives to address safety priorities at shelters have launched and since been expanded. This includes Community Safety Teams (CST), Shelter Security Guards, Safety – Threat, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessments, State of Good Repair Initiatives, and enhanced training for safety personnel operating at shelter sites. These safety measures continue to be monitored and reviewed with the intention of continued operations as needed for the duration of lease extensions for each temporary program. TSSS is also working to explore opportunities to further enhance coordination efforts across key stakeholders and community partners. This includes continued collaboration with Toronto Police Service, Business Improvement Areas, City Divisions, community organizations and institutions, partnership tables, and local networks.

Community Safety Teams

Community Safety Teams (CST) currently operate in designated areas surrounding select shelters city-wide to support increased safety efforts. CSTs are frontline staff contracted by the City to engage with shelter clients, local businesses and community members, to provide a visible and proactive presence in the community, to collaborate with shelter staff and security partners to address local safety concerns, and to remove biohazardous materials in a defined geographic area. Shelter staff, City Councillors, Toronto Police Services and community members have highlighted that Community Safety Teams have been effective in responding to community safety concerns and supporting the operational successes of temporary hotel programs.

CSTs also provide support to larger encampments in City parks. Previously, CST services were provided at Allan Gardens and continue to be provided at Clarence Square. CST operations at Clarence Square Park (and previously at Allan Gardens) is part of the City's Enhanced Service Model to large encampment sites that include dedicated resources to support an effective encampment response. CSTs provide emergency reporting, overdose prevention, sharps/paraphernalia collection and new encampment reporting services required for the Enhanced Service Model. Based on the success of CSTs, in June 2024 City Council asked staff to report back through the 2025 Budget process on the costs for up to three concurrent 24/7 CSTs for large encampments.

Amendment to Competitive Contract 47025287 with 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions for Community Safety Team Services

Currently, CSTs provide services required for the Enhanced Service Model at two large encampment sites for 16 hours per day. To meet the growing demand for these services, an increase in this contract value would allow 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions to provide Community Safety Teams at up to four large encampment sites on a 24/7 basis.

Additionally, the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat is requesting the purchasing authority to continue providing CST services beyond an initial one-year contract that expires July 31, 2025, at two high-needs Toronto Community Housing Corporation buildings at 4175-4205 Lawrence Avenue East, where there is a high concentration of tenants with complex needs. The CSTs are part of the Anchor Agency Services and Supports project being piloted at that location until March 31, 2026.

The original contract for CST services was awarded to three vendors - 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions, The West Egg Group Security Services, and Northwest Protection Services Ltd. Of these vendors, only 2756732 Ontario Inc. O/A One Community Solutions has demonstrated the ability to meet the City's requirements at locations requiring the most intensive support. The West Egg Group Security Services currently provides community safety teams at several smaller locations requiring fewer intensive supports and can continue to do so without amendments to the existing agreement. Northwest Protection Services Ltd was not able to meet the City's requirements and is not currently providing services at any location.

4. Harm reduction and overdose prevention in the shelter system

Harm reduction refers to an approach that aims to reduce drug-related harm experienced by individuals and communities without necessarily reducing drug consumption. Individuals experiencing homelessness and those living in the shelter system are disproportionately impacted by the drug toxicity crisis. Drug toxicity remains the leading cause of death of people experiencing homelessness and rates of non-fatal and fatal opioid poisoning continue to be high. The City employs a Housing First approach in its shelter system, premised on the evidence that stable housing is the primary need for someone experiencing homelessness and that issues such as substance use, or mental health can be better addressed once this need is satisfied. Harm reduction efforts in shelters are focused on working with clients to try to ensure the use of a substance is not a barrier to obtaining housing.

Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) has implemented a range of evidence-driven and responsive initiatives to reduce the risk of overdose for people using substances across the shelter system, including in shelter hotels. In December 2020, TSSS launched the Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (iPHARE) in partnership with Toronto Public Health, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, The Neighbourhood Group and LOFT Community Services, with the goal of reducing fatal opioid and other drug-related incidents and improving shelter safety for

people using substances in sites with high incidences of overdose. TSSS has also integrated clear expectations and guidelines for harm reduction in the Toronto Shelter Standards and Toronto 24-Hour Respite Standards.

City-funded shelter programs offers a continuum of harm reduction supports and services to clients, which may include wellness checks, peer-based supports, enhanced overdose response measures, including the use of oxygen and supervised consumption services, and referrals to substance use treatment programs, as well as abstinence-based programs. All shelter staff are trained in overdose prevention and response, including Naloxone administration. TSSS has also established a Harm Reduction Advisory Committee, comprised of people with lived/living experience of homelessness and substance use who provide expert advice to the City and contribute to the review and implementation of key strategies, policies and programs impacting shelter clients who use substances.

Evidence supports that increased access to harm reduction and lifesaving overdose prevention and response measures is a critical part of an effective response to the drug toxicity crisis that reduces drug-related deaths. Over the period of 2022-2023, non-fatal overdoses at shelter sites decreased by 11%, based on data from Toronto Paramedic Services, and the number of fatal overdoses at shelter sites decreased by 22%. There have been no drug-related deaths at a supervised consumption service site in Toronto.

Overdose and Substance Use Supports in Large Shelter Hotels

Large temporary shelter hotels pose unique service delivery opportunities and challenges, with clients living in individual rooms spread across multiple floors and, at times, multiple towers. Staff have communicated challenges with working with large client populations in these settings. While individual rooms are associated with increased privacy and sense of dignity and agency over personal space and belongings, large shelter hotels have also had some of the highest rates of non-fatal overdoses across the shelter system, in part, due to clients using substances alone in their rooms.

At its meeting on February 6, 2024, Council directed the General Manager of Toronto Shelter and Support Services, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, to report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with recommendations to expand substance use and overdose prevention programming and support at all temporary shelter hotel locations with a large client population ([2024.EC9.4](#)). In its direction to staff, Council defined large shelter hotels “as temporary shelter hotel locations with the largest (i.e., more than 200) single adult and chronically homeless populations.”

Using [Shelter Occupancy Data](#), TSSS identified four temporary shelter hotels to focus on in the report back. Sites were identified that have: (1) a capacity of around or over 200 clients; (2) a large population of single adults; and (3) consistently high incidences of non-fatal overdoses, based on calls to Toronto Paramedic Services. Table 1 summarizes the four temporary shelter hotels identified in this scoping and sector and capacity as of October 1, 2024.

Table 1 - Summary Information on Large Temporary Shelter Hotels

| 1 | Delta Hotel – Scarborough Hotel Program | Homes First Society | 2035 Kennedy Road | 376 clients |
|---|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 2 | Edward Hotel – Uptown Hotel | Fred Victor | 185 Yorkland Blvd | 278 clients |
| 3 | Toronto Plaza – North York West Hotel Program | City of Toronto | 1677 Wilson Avenue | 175 clients |
| 4 | Toronto Shelter and Support Services – Isolation and Recovery Site | City of Toronto | Address not publicly shared | 187 clients |

In line with direction from Council, TSSS consulted with Toronto Public Health (TPH) to inform its report back to Council. With support from TPH, TSSS undertook a situational needs assessment to better understand the availability and efficacy of existing substance use and overdose prevention programming at target sites and how they could be improved and expanded. Staff compiled and analyzed the data collected through engagement to identify site-specific and general findings from the large shelter hotels and to ensure the advice aligns with the strategic goals and actions in [Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto](#) and recommendations from the [Ten Point Plan for Harm Reduction in Shelter Programs](#).

Based on the available evidence, staff have identified good practices in overdose prevention for continuation and targeted enhancement in large shelter hotels in the areas of increased staffing, training/capacity building, grief and loss support, safety planning, peer programming and employment, access to harm reduction supplies, overdose detection technologies and supportive spaces. These measures focus on shorter-term interventions most appropriate in the context of shelter hotels with fixed/medium term leases. They aim to ensure that life-saving measures are in place, and that services, supports and spaces promote the well-being of all residents, including those who use substances. Additional information is provided in Attachment 2.

Through the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, the City will take longer-term steps to enhance overdose prevention measures in new permanent or long-term shelters, ensuring that spaces are thoughtfully designed to enhance dignity and safety and that they are well-integrated into the surrounding community. Purpose-built shelter sites provide an important opportunity to support the co-location of health, mental health, harm reduction and substance use services in shelter sites and to ensure appropriate physical spaces for these services. This is aligned with priorities identified in

TPH's Our Health, Our City Strategy, which outlines key strategic goals and actions to reduce harms associated with substance use and improve health and wellbeing across the city. The strategy includes recommended action items to support those affected by the drug toxicity crisis, improve access to housing, and expand access to the full continuum of evidence-based services to address mental health and substance use issues, including prevention, harm reduction and treatment.

Homelessness Health Services Framework

Sustained delivery and access to harm reduction services is a key component of the Homelessness Health Services Framework, which outlines the strategic approach for TSSS, homelessness service providers, health system planners and service providers to provide health, mental health and harm reduction services across all homelessness service settings. The Framework is co-led by TSSS and Ontario Health Toronto Region and is delivered in partnership with a network of health service providers.

Continued provincial investment through ongoing and sustainable funding is needed to ensure that appropriate primary health care, mental health and crisis intervention services are available to adequately support people experiencing homelessness and sleeping outdoors in Toronto. This is particularly important in the context of recent provincial announcements that intend to significantly decrease the availability of supervised consumption services. It is important to ensure that provincial changes, including investments in new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment program, do not result in the overall reduction in service and a corresponding negative outcome for vulnerable people in the city of Toronto. Supervised consumption services and other harm reduction supports are widely used by Toronto residents experiencing homelessness, and a harm reduction approach is complimentary to the City's commitment to Housing First.

5. Supporting the Safety and Well-Being of People Living Outdoors

Supporting people living outdoors and in encampments requires a coordinated, multi-divisional, and cross-sectoral approach. In June 2024, City Council adopted the City's Encampment Approach and Strategy, along with the updated [Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto \(2024.EC13.8\)](#). A key principle is a commitment to providing a range of service models tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals living in encampments, including those with complex needs. Collaboration with various sectors, including mental health, primary healthcare, and harm reduction is essential to create a coordinated and integrated service response that supports the vulnerable people in encampments in our community.

Multi-Sectoral Mental Health Outreach and Case Management

In June, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager of Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS), to report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with recommendations for a pilot program of enhanced, multi-sectoral case management support for people living outdoors with complex and mental and physical health needs, including working in partnership with the Medical Officer of Health,

Gerstein Crisis Centre, Family Service Toronto, and other organizations, hospitals and community agencies.

TSSS provides focused supports to people living in encampments who face complex mental health challenges, substance use issues and/or those repeatedly refusing services. The Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (M-DOT), funded by TSSS through Streets to Homes, works in partnership with LOFT Community Services, CAMH, and Inner City Health Associates (ICHA), and works with people who are street homeless, including people living in encampments who have not been able to achieve successful housing outcomes through all other service models.

The M-DOT comprises a team with diverse expertise, including two psychiatrists, one nurse, and five case managers. The team conducts weekly outreach to encampments, providing mental health, general health and housing case management supports to people with complex psychiatric and/or concurrent disorders. The aim of the M-DOT is to provide low barrier service that meets individuals where they are at and assists in stabilizing their health, mental health and substance use, and connects them to housing and community follow up supports that meet the level of need required for each individual to live successfully in the community. TSSS also provides funding to the M-DOT for an additional three case managers and one nurse to conduct outreach and offer support to individuals experiencing homelessness on Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) property.

Additionally, the M-DOT works collaboratively with Toronto Public Health, Gerstein Crisis Centre, Family Service Toronto, hospitals and other health organizations to deliver more comprehensive mental health services. From January 1, 2024, to September 12, 2024, the M-DOT assisted 29 people living outdoors with complex health and mental health needs secure housing.

TSSS also partners with another Inner City Health Associates program called the Street Clinical Outreach for Unsheltered Torontonians. The program offers low barrier, patient-centred, trauma-informed, and harm reduction focused clinical care, and is highly responsive and accessible. The team is comprised of two nurses, a case manager (LOFT Community Services) and a family doctor specializing in mental health and addictions care. They conduct weekly partnered outreach visits with Streets to Homes to meet with patients and collaborate on case coordination and to ensure people living in encampments are aware of their services.

In addition to these services, TSSS works closely with Ontario Health, which flows funding from the Ministry of Health to various services to support vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and living in encampments. This includes mobile health services that provide varying services such as primary care, harm reduction, peer support, case management, etc. Provincial funding also supports Mobile Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinics where individuals can receive access to addiction and mental health supports. Individuals are also able to access different drop-in sites across the city that provide health services.

TSSS is committed to ongoing collaboration with multi-sector outreach partners and other referral organizations to support people living in encampments with complex

health and mental health needs. Through this coordinated effort, TSSS continues to address the unique challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness, facilitating access to health and mental health services, housing and other supports services. TSSS continues to explore ways to enhance the coordination and delivery of comprehensive services, in partnership with mental health, health care, public health and hospital partners, to ensure people living in encampments with complex health and mental health needs receive the necessary services and supports that they need.

6. Supporting Refugees Experiencing Homelessness

There continues to be growing demand from refugee claimants requiring shelter across the country, with a particularly acute need in Toronto. As of October 1, 2024, the City is providing support to 6,454 refugee claimants, with more than 4,661 people inside the shelter system, accounting for approximately half of all the total shelter population. The remaining clients are supported in bridging/triage hotel programs.

Amendment to Non-Competitive Contract 47024284 with Canadian Red Cross Society for Lodging Services for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

In April 2022, the City issued emergency Non-Competitive Contract 47024284 to Canadian Red Cross Society for the provision of emergency services to Ukrainians at a hotel site near Toronto Pearson Airport, including emergency lodging, staff and volunteers to conduct initial contact, assessment and service delivery, and subcontractor costs for security. In July 2023, following City Council's adoption of [MM8.29](#), the City asked Canadian Red Cross Society to add two new hotel sites to provide additional shelter services to refugees from any country of origin.

Services for refugees at hotel sites operated by Canadian Red Cross Society are gradually ramping down, in accordance with the City's plan to transition to more cost-effective programs. It is anticipated that operations at two of the three current hotel sites will conclude by the end of 2024. One hotel site will continue to operate into 2025. As the City transitions out of these large-scale hotel operations, service agreements are being established with refugee houses, as small, cost-effective shelter sites that better meet the needs of refugees. A regional approach to supporting refugees, including a Regional Reception Centre in Peel Region, continues to develop and will further support the City's transition out of refugee hotel operations in 2025.

Reimbursement to Churches and Other Community Organizations for Expenses Incurred Providing Temporary Shelter to Refugee Claimants

The unexpected and unprecedented surge in the number of refugee claimants arriving in Toronto in 2023 placed significant strain on the City's shelter and other systems. From mid- to late-2023, these pressures far exceeded the City's capacity to respond. Churches and community organizations, many Black-led, provided emergency shelter and supports to hundreds of refugee claimants who were arriving in Toronto requiring accommodation and shelter.

In late summer 2023, the City provided \$150,000 to each of three churches that were providing significant supports to refugees. In September 2023, City Council authorized

Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) to reimburse up to \$750,000 to churches and community organizations for eligible expenses incurred towards providing temporary shelter to refugee claimants. Churches and other community organizations were invited to submit applications for reimbursement and outline their eligible expenses incurred between July 17 and September 30, 2023. The City received 25 applications for this funding. After a review, 21 applications were deemed eligible, with a total eligible reimbursement request of \$2,190,401. The Council-approved reimbursement budget covered 34 percent of this total, leaving \$1,440,401 in unreimbursed expenses borne by community partners. In April 2024, City Council authorized TSSS to reimburse the outstanding \$1,440,401 and to explore options for a one-time extension to reimburse churches and community organizations for eligible expenses incurred until December 31, 2023.

In summer 2024, the application for reimbursement re-opened allowing churches and other community organizations to submit expenses for the extended time. Twenty-nine applicants submitted a total reimbursement request of \$3,475,332. All requests for reimbursement are being reviewed for eligibility. Eligible expenses include staff, volunteer transportation, contracted services (e.g., laundry), food and beverage (e.g., groceries and catering), supplies directly related to providing shelter services (e.g., cleaning supplies, bedding, personal hygiene supplies, and medication and health supplies), transportation (e.g., gas, Uber, and public transit), and building occupancy and maintenance (e.g., minor repair and additional utilities). Expenses must have been incurred during the eligible time (i.e., July 17 – December 31, 2023) and must be supported by invoices, receipts or paystubs when requested.

7. Collaboration with Community Partners

Connecting Home Initiative

The City is taking steps to strengthen our collaboration with health systems partners to support data-driven improvements in shelter and housing services, health care, and system planning.

In May 2023, City Council authorized the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Unity Health Toronto and Inner City Health Associates for the Connecting Home Initiative feasibility assessment and to report back on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding.

The Connecting Home Initiative is a proposal to create a real-time, e-integrated platform using client data from Unity Health Toronto, Inner City Health Associates, and the City's Shelter Management Information System. Through this work, clients experiencing homelessness could enable their health service providers to access their information to help better support their health-related support needs. Creating an e-integrated database could also support improved service delivery and system planning. The first phase of the initiative is a feasibility assessment to assess the legal, privacy, and technical viability of developing a shared platform to improve health and housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Funding for the feasibility assessment phase of the Connecting Home initiative is being provided by Unity Health Toronto.

The Memorandum of Understanding for the feasibility assessment phase of the initiative was executed by all three parties on June 1, 2023, which outlines the purpose and scope of the initiative, governance, responsibilities of all parties, as well as other standard terms. Since its execution, a Steering Committee has been established with representatives of all three parties and two community representatives with lived experience of homelessness. Work is underway to identify consultants to deliver the legal, privacy, and technical feasibility assessments. The City expects to receive feasibility reports for this project by May 2025.

Conclusion

Permanent, adequate, affordable, and supportive housing is the solution to homelessness. Shelter is not a long-term solution to homelessness – but until adequate housing solutions and income supports are in place and there are more people being housed than entering homelessness, it is crucial to invest in safe, adequate shelter space for people in immediate crises. Shelters are vital to addressing the varied and ongoing reasons individuals require emergency shelter and to support people in their transition toward permanent housing.

Increasing Permanent Housing Opportunities

For people to successfully exit the shelter system, there is the critical need for permanent deeply affordable and supportive housing with a range of supports, including adequate income support. Ongoing collaboration is needed across all levels of government to increase permanent housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness, particularly those with complex needs, including mental health and substance use.

Over the past several years, housing outcomes have increased, driven by the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit and increased capital and operating funding to create and operate more permanent supportive homes. A range of supportive housing programs (such as [Rapid-Re-housing Initiative](#), [Modular Housing Initiative](#), and Rapid Housing Initiative) have created over 3,000 new supportive housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness since 2020.

In 2023, Toronto and Ontario's top-up to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit supported even stronger housing outcomes, but in 2024, housing outcomes decreased when Year 4 Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit funding was exhausted on March 31, 2024. Toronto Shelter and Support Services continues to prioritize a Housing First model and permanent housing solution, and to work hard to connect shelter users to housing, but shelter users have few options to leave the shelter system without housing subsidies.

On September 26, 2024, the City of Toronto received an allocation letter from the Province identifying a Year 5 funding allocation for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit of \$19.75M to support a target maximum of 1,700 households. This is an important and positive investment to assist people experiencing homelessness to exit the shelter system to permanent housing, however regular and ongoing provincial and federal investment in the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program, as well as adequate

income supports are needed to ensure people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness can find and maintain housing. This is particularly challenging in a city such as Toronto, with a tight housing market with high housing costs and low vacancy rates, and where income supports including social assistance, seniors' benefits and minimum wage have not kept pace with inflation and the cost of housing. Significant investment from provincial and federal governments are required to create more supportive housing and to maintain and build new affordable housing.

Need for Multi-Sectoral Approach and Intergovernmental Support

Toronto Shelter and Support Services continues to engage in cross-sectoral and intergovernmental dialogue to better support people experiencing homelessness, including those in shelters and encampments with complex needs. This is a multi-faceted issue that requires a multi-divisional and multi-sectoral approach and the commitment of all levels of government, community, and other stakeholders to invest in comprehensive social, health and mental health-related supports. There is a need for provincial investment in primary health care, mental health care and harm reduction and substance use supports. It is essential that existing overdose prevention and response supports are maintained and that there is coordination across all levels of government and engagement with experts, community and people with lived/living experience.

The City will continue to deliver on the actions and priorities of the HousingTO Plan and the Housing Action Plan to address the ongoing and severe housing and homelessness crisis in Toronto. However, despite progress made to date in providing a variety of services and supports to people experiencing homelessness and connecting people to housing, the City cannot address these crises alone. Sustained commitments, and ongoing investments from all levels of governments in areas such as affordable and supportive housing, poverty reduction, harm reduction, and mental health, are urgently needed. These actions are critical to enabling a housing rights approach to safe shelters and facilitating the City's efforts to support people experiencing homelessness.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Shelter Safety Action Plan

Attachment 2 - Key Findings: Strengthening Overdose Prevention and Response in Large Shelter Hotels

Attachment 2:

Key Findings: Strengthening Overdose Prevention and Response in Large Shelter Hotels

Toronto Shelter and Support Services worked with Toronto Public Health on a situational needs assessment to examine the existing overdose prevention programming at large shelter hotel sites, and to determine potential areas for improvement. Information is provided below on actions that may strengthen overdose prevention and response services, based on available evidence and engagement findings with staff and clients.

a) Supports for Staff

Embedded Harm Reduction Partnerships

Engagement with staff and clients highlighted the challenges of supporting clients with complex mental health and substance use needs in large shelter hotel settings. Data on the frequency of overdose and other critical incidents over time can identify peak periods where support needs are highest. To address this need, Toronto Shelter and Support Services is working with partners in the City's Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (iPHARE) including, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and The Neighbourhood Group to use data and evidence to schedule embedded harm reduction staff during peak periods, with the goal of increasing capacity when the risk of overdose and other critical incidents are highest. This approach has been successful in supporting overdose prevention and response capacity. Importantly, iPHARE partners are equipped to use oxygen when responding to overdoses, which is a proven best practice. Funding to maintain the current iPHARE partnerships have been built into the Toronto Shelter and Support Services 2025 Operating Budget.

Training and Capacity Building

The City is taking steps to enhance staff capacity to prevent and respond to overdoses and support clients who use substances. A key part of this is ensuring the implementation of existing training and identifying potential additional training that responds to emerging issues and needs.

In Q4 2024, the City is implementing a training pilot for shift leaders and program supervisors on individual and group crisis intervention. The pilot is being implemented at select City shelters with over 200 clients, including two large temporary shelter hotels. The training aims to provide staff with enhanced skills to de-escalate and support clients in crisis. It builds on existing mandatory and recommended trainings for City-operated shelter staff, including Overdose Prevention, Recognition and Response, Harm Reduction for the Homelessness Sector, Mental Health in the Workplace and Psychological First Aid.

In response to gaps identified by the shelter sector and aligned with a recommendation in the CAMH Shelter Safety Study, the City is exploring training on practices to support clients who use methamphetamine for shelter staff sector wide. The proposed training

model employs a peer-led approach and is intended for both City operated shelters and community shelter providers. Toronto Shelter and Support Services has identified the resources needed for this training and is building it into the 2025 Budget process.

A key theme heard during the engagement is the need to promote trauma-informed approaches and combat stigma and discrimination towards people who use substances and other marginalized groups within the shelter system. This supports evidence and promising practices that focus on establishing positive relationships between staff and clients as the core to effective delivery of harm reduction, overdose prevention, substance use and other services. One promising practice to promote positive relationships and address stigma and discrimination is peer-led training for staff. Reducing stigma and discrimination towards people who use substances can assist clients to have a positive relationship built upon trust, which helps to facilitate seeking services and supports. Peer-led training that focuses on trauma-informed relationship-building is a critical first step in helping clients to overcome feelings of mistrust and connect them with a continuum of health services. To implement this recommendation, staff will explore the resources required for training delivery and will look to leverage existing partnerships.

Grief and Loss Support

Toronto Shelter and Support Services continues to increase access to trauma and grief supports for staff who have been impacted by the drug toxicity crisis. Increasing resilience and well-being among shelter staff is required to support positive outcomes among shelter clients. In 2023, Toronto Shelter and Support Services worked with the Toronto Shelter Network to develop a [Grief and Loss Program Report](#), which outlines a service model for supporting grief across the homelessness sector. The City has also contracted external therapists and counsellors to be deployed to debrief with staff following overdoses or other critical incidents at City shelters. This builds upon the mental health and critical incident support provided by Telus Health, the City's Employee Assistance Program.

In 2024, Toronto Shelter and Support Services created an internal Employee and Client Well-being Unit to help enhance staff well-being across the division by improving divisional culture, improving service delivery models, and developing and implementing additional mental health and well-being tools, resources, and supports. Leveraging this unit, the City will continue to pursue measures that provide additional health and well-being supports to staff at City-run shelters, including exploring a dedicated staff support team to provide enhanced crisis and mental health supports for staff after critical incidents. Toronto Shelter and Support Services has identified the resources required for enhanced staff supports and the request is being considered through the division's 2025 Budget process.

b) Supports for Clients Who Use Substances

In partnership with shelter providers and community health partners, Toronto Shelter and Support Services has embedded harm reduction services into shelters, respites and shelter hotels to increase access to low-barrier harm reduction and overdose prevention and response services for clients who use substances. Engagement with

staff and clients has demonstrated what works well and where additional or enhanced services are required. Toronto Shelter and Support Services will continue to advance its commitment to harm reduction in the homelessness services sector, including planning to update the Harm Reduction Framework in 2025 to support implementation of evidence-driven and needs-based substance use, harm reduction and overdose prevention measures across shelter, 24-hour respite and drop-in sites.

Individualized Safety Planning

Individualized safety planning is an important component of a comprehensive overdose prevention and response strategy. As scoped in the Toronto Shelter Standards, wellness checks are one component of a safety plan, providing an important touchpoint for staff to assess client safety and well-being at a point in time, connect with clients with the goal of relationship building and communicate important information. Effective safety planning is of particular importance in hotel settings where clients who use substances may face a heightened risk of overdose resulting from increased use of substances alone in private rooms.

During engagement with shelter staff and clients who use substances, the City heard that a more consistent approach to safety planning across sites may support better client outcomes. This is supported by findings from MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions' [Evaluation of Embedded Harm Reduction \(EmbHR\) Services in Toronto Shelters](#), which highlights that effective safety plans must be developed collaboratively between counsellors and clients through an iterative and trauma-informed approach, and that they must be updated regularly. Best practices also suggest that individualized safety plans should include information on clients' substance of choice, current substance use patterns, client preferences around timing and frequency of wellness checks and other overdose detection measures being employed, including the buddy system and phone- or app-based measures.

To achieve more effective and consistent individualized safety planning across shelter hotel supports, Toronto Shelter and Support Services will work with its Harm Reduction Advisory Committee to develop an enhanced safety planning tool for shelter staff, along with detailed guidance on how to use the tool, leveraging existing resources. Toronto Shelter and Support Services will support and monitor the implementation of individualized safety planning tools through ongoing communication and capacity building of relevant staff in collaboration with a range of partners.

Peer Programming and Employment

Through the Safe Spot program, the Neighbourhood Group has delivered peer programming for shelter clients who use substances at select shelter sites. In this program, peers are trained and employed on a short-term basis to deliver peer-to-peer harm reduction supports and counselling and enhanced overdose response capacity, including during peak periods. Engagement findings highlighted the importance of peer employment as opportunities for capacity building, increased financial stability, building employment skills, increased confidence, and a sense of purpose among participants.

Building on the success of existing peer employment programming and aligned with recommendations from the CAMH Shelter Safety Study and the Our Health, Our City Strategy and the Ten Point Plan, staff are exploring an expansion of peer employment programs to support delivery across large shelter hotel sites addressed in this report. This would advance the City's harm reduction approach and increase access to overdose prevention and substance use supports for clients.

Access to Harm Reduction Supplies and Naloxone

Across large temporary shelter hotel sites, clients highlighted 24-hour access to low- or no-barrier harm reduction supplies as a best practice. Direct access to supplies, including safer substance use equipment and safer sex supplies minimizes barriers and reduces perceived risks of stigma associated with having to ask staff for harm reduction supplies. Similarly, Naloxone was reported to be widely available at all large temporary shelter hotel sites, with kits generally available in common areas and on each floor. No-barrier access to Naloxone kits throughout large shelter hotel sites can increase the speed of overdose response. Requirements regarding the availability of and access to these supports are outlined in the Toronto Shelter Standards.

Supporting Clients to Participate in Overdose Response

Clients frequently play an important role in overdose response in shelter settings. They are often first on the scene and reverse a significant number of overdoses. During the engagement, clients indicated a need for additional capacity building on the proper use of Naloxone, identifying an opioid overdose and other overdose prevention measures including using a buddy system, direction on who to notify if an overdose is occurring and legal protections under the federal [Good Samaritan Act](#). Helping shelter clients to identify and initiate appropriate overdose response measures is a key component of a comprehensive overdose prevention and response strategy. To support this, the City will continue to work with shelter operators and harm reduction partners at large shelter hotel sites to support client capacity building in overdose response through key channels, including on-site harm reduction counsellors and peer workers.

Overdose Detection Technology

Overdose detection technologies reduce the risk of solitary drug use and can enable rapid detection and response to overdose events. Overdose detection technologies can be [categorized](#) as fixed location devices installed in a specific space (i.e., units or rooms), mobile applications and hotlines, and wearable technology. In addition to speeding up overdose response times, these technologies can increase a user's control over their overdose planning and privacy. During engagement, clients indicated a preference for integrating overdose detection technology into their personalized safety plans. Some reported that they regularly used hotlines and apps, which are publicly available to those with phone access.

Toronto Shelter and Support Services has taken steps to explore the viability of different overdose detection technologies in shelter settings. Currently, harm reduction partners are piloting overdose detection technologies to establish options that best fit shelter hotel settings. The City will continue to collaborate with partners on these pilots and

take steps to support implementation of overdose detection technologies following the evidence gathering phase.

Access to Supportive Spaces for Clients Who Use Substances

The CAMH Shelter Safety Study and MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions' Evaluation of Embedded Harm Reduction Services both found that shelter clients who use substances are at a heightened risk of shelter-based violence, and that shelter safety can be enhanced through the establishment of distinct spaces for clients who use substances. Some of the large temporary shelter hotel sites have established supportive spaces where clients who use substances can connect with a full continuum of health and social supports including harm reduction, treatment options, and other community-based and case management services, and connections to primary care and peers.

During engagement, clients highlighted the importance of safe low-barrier spaces in hotel settings for community-building, relationship building, and overall well-being. Conversely a lack of low-barrier spaces was seen to increase isolation, a key risk factor for overdose. Good examples of supportive spaces can be taken from community-based safe consumption sites, as well as from less formal spaces for clients to connect and build community, such as the courtyard of a large shelter hotel. However, a challenge reported during the engagement was that many of these spaces and supports are only accessible during specific hours, which do not always correspond with client needs. This can result in clients seeking out alternative locations to use substances or facing isolation in hotel rooms – both risk factors for overdose. The City will work with shelter providers, iPHARE partners and clients who use substances to explore where there are opportunities in large shelter hotels for supportive spaces that are accessible 24-hours and that are inclusive of and friendly to clients who use substances. This is aligned with best practices from the Ten Point Plan and recommendations from the CAMH Shelter Safety Study.

Through the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, the City will ensure new shelters are permanent or long-term spaces that are proactively acquired and thoughtfully designed to enhance dignity and safety while ensuring that they are well-integrated into the surrounding community. In alignment with recommendations included in the Our Health Our City Strategy, purpose-built shelter sites will provide an important opportunity to support the colocation of health, mental health, harm reduction and substance use services in shelter sites. Establishing supportive spaces that are accessible and inclusive of clients who use substances will be a consideration in the design of purpose-built shelters under Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy. Purpose-built sites will also consider the establishment of safe inhalation spaces and required Health Canada exemptions.

Dedicated Spaces for Women and Gender-diverse People

Findings from several reports, including the MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions' Evaluation of Embedded Harm Reduction Services, speak to the need for dedicated harm reduction spaces for women and gender-diverse people in shelters. Engagement found that women and gender-diverse people who use substances may face additional

barriers to accessing substance use, overdose prevention, and harm reduction supports, and, at the same time, are [disproportionately impacted by intimate partner violence](#) and other forms of gender-based violence. Harm reduction services or spaces that exclusively serve this community can increase safety and well-being.

The City is working to incorporate a gender equity lens through the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy to ensure physical spaces for harm reduction and mental health supports are built into shelters and with consideration for supportive spaces and models for women and gender-diverse clients.

c) Support for Communities and Neighbourhoods

The drug toxicity crisis impacts people experiencing homelessness inside and outside of the shelter settings, as well as the wider community.

In line with the Toronto Shelter Standards, City-funded shelters have policies and procedures, including community liaison committees, to engage, communicate and work with surrounding communities. Shelters are responsible for working with partners to ensure safety in and immediately around the site and the safety of staff and clients. Shelters also rely on partners who play a key role, which includes other City agencies and divisions including Social Development, Finance and Administration, Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Police Service.

Currently, Toronto Public Health Social Development, Finance and Administration, and Solid Waste Management Services support large shelter hotels and surrounding communities. Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Public Health support effective trauma-informed engagement with people experiencing homelessness in areas surrounding large shelter hotels through outreach teams and Community Crisis Response Program teams. Further exploration of options for the installation of sharps kiosks in areas surrounding large shelter hotels, where there is demonstrated need, is a best practice measure for the proper disposal of needles and harm reduction supplies and a well-documented public health practice that can keep people and Toronto neighbourhoods safe.

It is critical that the City take a coordinated inter-divisional approach to establishing community development plans and engaging communities through Community Development Tables. These tables have potential to clarify each party's role in community safety, while strengthening communication with communities and providing a forum to constructively address community concerns. Tables need to be coordinated, to set priorities, to establish plans and to ensure investment for resources that are informed by community feedback and clients.