

# SHELTER SAFETY ACTION PLAN



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## About the Shelter Safety Action Plan

The City of Toronto's Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) division is committed to enhancing the safety and quality of homelessness services. To guide the sector's work in this area, TSSS has developed a 36-month Shelter Safety Action Plan (SSAP) to continue to improve safety within the shelter system for both staff and clients.

The plan aligns with the Council-approved [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#), and other key City strategies and plans including the [Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy](#), the [Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy](#), and the [SafeTO: Community Safety & Well-Being Plan](#).

The Shelter Safety Action Plan provides a roadmap for prioritizing and continuously improving shelter safety for staff and clients across Toronto's shelter system. To maintain, advance, and enhance safety, the plan identifies 14 actions to be undertaken over 36-months, many of which, once implemented, will be ongoing. The plan also provides an overview of existing initiatives underway to maintain safety, progress made to date in key action areas, and proposes additional initiatives to enhance shelter safety.

Given the wide-ranging nature of factors and contributors to address shelter safety, the plan focuses on three key action areas:



The Shelter Safety Action Plan is scoped to address safety within shelter settings with a focus on safety for both staff and clients, recognizing that enhancing safety positively impacts all who work and access services within shelter settings.

## Context of Toronto's Shelter System and Shelter Safety

Toronto's shelter system is the largest in Canada, providing more beds per capita than any other Canadian city. The system accommodates more than 12,000 people experiencing homelessness nightly. People accessing shelter services have varying life circumstances - some are experiencing all or a combination of crisis, complex mental health and substance use challenges, cognitive, developmental, or acquired disabilities. These, in combination with potential barriers in the shelter environment, the stresses of poverty, housing insecurity, unmet health and mental health needs and lack of social supports, can contribute to the escalation of violence within shelter settings.

Safety is one of the most frequent concerns raised about the shelter system. To better understand factors that contribute to psychological and physical safety and the areas in which shelter safety can be improved, TSSS reached out to researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to lead research investigating the area of shelter safety in Toronto's shelter system. The intent was to develop evidence and recommendations that would support the City of Toronto to make improvements 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 study was conducted in partnership with the City of Toronto and several community homelessness service providers. The study involved original data collection, secondary analysis of administrative data from the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS), and a literature review. Data was collected through an online survey of shelter staff, qualitative interviews with shelter staff, key informants and people experiencing homelessness, including those with experiences of service restrictions, and a scan of shelter innovations and promising practices for improving safety.

The study concluded that violence and service restrictions are serious issues in Toronto's shelter system on which more action is needed. These problems interact with other critical social issues, including the rise in unsheltered homelessness, the affordable housing crisis, inadequate social assistance rates, a worsening toxic drug supply, and an insufficient supply of mental health, substance use and addiction treatment services and housing-based supports.

The [CAMH Shelter Safety Study](#) proposed 22 recommendations to advance safety in the shelter system. Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) endorsed this report on April 30, 2024, which aligns with work currently underway across the homelessness service sector to enhance shelter safety. ECDC ([EC12.13](#)) requested TSSS to develop a Shelter Safety Action Plan to respond to the CAMH Shelter Safety report in

consultation with people with lived experience and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee.

## **Note on Shelter Safety**

Shelter safety is a broad term referring to various aspects of an individual's sense and perception of both physical and psychological safety. It is recognized that peoples' experiences and identities shape their outlook on safety, their frame of reference for it, and informs the contexts in which they feel safe.

Shelter-based violence is complex, often occurring due to a range of interconnected factors and circumstances. People accessing shelter services are some of the Toronto's most vulnerable residents and may be experiencing multiple and complex unmet needs. There is a wide variation of experiences across the shelter system, and each shelter site has its own unique environment which may impact the sense of safety for both staff and clients.

## **Development of the Shelter Safety Action Plan**

The Shelter Safety Action Plan was developed and informed by expert advice and evidence, and recommendations made in the CAMH Shelter Safety Study. Additional consultations were also held between July and October 2024 with:

- Shelter providers via the Toronto Shelter Network
- People with lived experience residing in Toronto's shelter system
- Housing Rights Advisory Committee
- Roundtable on Safety and Mental Health Supports in Shelters and for People Living Outdoors with health and mental health service providers and City divisions that provide services and supports to people experiencing homelessness, inclusive of crisis intervention and harm reduction services

The consultations focused on understanding initiatives and best practices that support with de-escalating incidents, what additional health and mental health services are needed to support clients in crisis, which safety initiatives should be prioritized to advance staff safety, what safety features and infrastructure are beneficial in shelters, and where gaps exist to enhance shelter safety.

## What We Heard

Consultations with key stakeholders informed the actions outlined the plan. TSSS will continue to engage with stakeholders and partners to inform implementation.

### *Shelter Providers*

Shelter providers were engaged on the topic of safety across the shelter system. With support from the Toronto Shelter Network (TSN), a two-hour facilitated discussion was organized with TSN members. Key insights included:

- Need for greater access to mobile mental health teams and addictions services that meet clients where they are at, with specific suggestions for greater connections from each shelter program to its nearest health network.
- Importance of using a trauma-informed approach and recognizing that power differences between staff and clients may cause tension and escalations. This aligned with the use of person-centred approaches, mediation, and conflict resolution when interpersonal conflict arises.
- Prioritizing the creation of safety plans with clients upon admission, with the goal of identifying client triggers to prevent escalations and involving clients in the process of identifying solutions to create a supportive environment.
- Importance of utilizing de-escalation tools to prevent incidents or shelter-based violence, for example the use of the 'take a walk' approach.
- Varied views on the need for and use of security personnel in shelters, with some providers viewing this as a positive contributor to safety and others viewing it as not necessary and feeling that security personnel signals a notion that shelters are inherently unsafe.
- Ensuring staff are trained on-site and have an ability to support crisis intervention and de-escalation, as well as creating ways to systemize debriefs following incidents.

### *People with Lived Experience Residing in Toronto's Shelter System*

A focus group was held with peer ambassadors that have lived or living experience residing in the shelter system, and experience as peer-workers within shelter settings and members of Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness' People with Lived Experience caucus.

Key insights included:

- Importance of a trauma-informed approach, building rapport with clients, and using de-escalation tools as a first line approach, and avoiding calls to police whenever possible.

- Critical need for staff to have ongoing training on de-escalation, and model training (i.e. modeling after staff who are best skilled at de-escalation).
- Need for better access to mental health services and supports, with a suggestion for each shelter site to have a mental health nurse or professional available to support in addressing the escalations and underlying trauma.
- A wide recognition that inconsistencies in application of shelter policies, staff biases, and rigid and inflexible rules lead to frustration of shelter clients which may lead to escalations.

### *Housing Rights Advisory Committee*

TSSS presented to the Housing Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC) at the September 23, 2024 meeting, providing an overview and offering an opportunity to consult on the development of the Shelter Safety Action Plan ([HS3.5](#)). On October 7, 2024, TSSS staff consulted with the Housing Rights Advisory Committee's *Supporting People who are Unhoused* working group. HRAC's working group provided TSSS with a [feedback document](#). Highlights from the feedback included:

- Non-discrimination as a core element of the human right to adequate housing.
- Need for improvement of the complaints process, and strategies to improve accountability and transparency throughout the complaints process.
- Improving guidelines for service restrictions, guided by a human rights analysis.
- Ensuring shelter staff and personnel receive adequate, actionable, and ongoing training on applying both a trauma-informed and human rights-based approach.
- Looking to non-profit housing providers for best practices in data collection to better support shelter residents, which can be incorporated into City-operated shelters.
- Placements in shelters should consider the capacity and acute needs of rights holders transitioning from sleeping outdoors to shelter beds, which may involve exploring the use of more specific supports in certain shelters (e.g. mental health supports or supports for those who use substances).

### *Roundtable on Safety and Mental Health Supports in Shelters and for People Living Outdoors*

The CAMH Shelter Safety Study reported that there is an insufficient supply of mental health supports available to shelter clients. The report made recommendations to engage with community partners and mental health providers to enhance opportunities for crisis intervention and intensive team-based mental health supports.

On September 11, 2024, TSSS hosted a roundtable on Safety and Mental Health Supports in Shelters and for People Living Outdoors, which brought together key City of Toronto

divisions and health and mental health service providers to discuss the increasingly complex mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness. TSSS highlighted that the division and homelessness sector has become increasingly aware of the ongoing, complex, and changing health and mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness, the limited ability of shelter and outreach providers to appropriately support people with complex and/or escalating behaviours, and gaps in timely, on-site, intensive mental health supports and crisis intervention for clients in shelter and living outdoors.

The discussion identified existing supports and service gaps for shelter clients and what level of mental health service is needed in shelters, what partnerships would enable these supports, and what an improved future state would look like. Key insights included:

- Recognition that the most critical need is supportive and affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- Clarifying who completes medical, mental health, developmental, and behavioural assessments to support with identifying needs at the earliest stage of a client's time in shelter.
- Input on what should be included as mental health services at shelters, including safer supply and harm reduction services, health care navigation, infrastructure that supports privacy and choice, mobile supports that meet clients where they are at, shared case management models between sector partners, and ensuring continuity of services.
- Importance of mitigating staff burnout through increased training, benefits, and mental health supports.
- Need to strengthen coordination between systems, including the Violence Against Women sector, justice system, health care system and the shelter system.

TSSS will continue to have discussions with key health and mental health service providers to explore opportunities to enhance partnerships and ensure alignment with other City strategic initiatives on health and homelessness including the Homelessness Health Services Framework.





# 1.0 Supporting Staff Safety

## What Do We Want to Achieve?

Building a resilient, resourced, and well-supported homelessness service sector where staff feel safe, supported, and empowered is critical to support people experiencing homelessness to feel the same. TSSS' [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#) identifies 'investing in staff and sector capacity' as a key divisional priority. Advancing actions and initiatives to prevent and address shelter-based and workplace violence are core to maintaining a resilient and adaptable workforce.

Staff supporting people experiencing homelessness may experience a unique set of challenges that may impact their own mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. The CAMH Shelter Safety Study found the majority of staff they surveyed reported direct exposure to screaming, verbal abuse/threats to physical safety, verbal abuse/threats involving racism, and overdose on a weekly or more frequent basis. More than one-third (36%) of staff indicated that they felt very unsafe or somewhat unsafe in the workplace and 43% of Indigenous and Black shelter staff reported experiencing daily verbal abuse involving racism.

Actions in this area include continuing to establish and promote measures that protect the physical and psychological well-being and safety of staff, with a focus on what additional measures can be taken to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ staff. There is also a focus on reviewing, monitoring and strengthening training, including identifying how the training competencies matrix is meeting the needs of shelter staff, monitoring compliance of safety-related trainings, and proposing additional training in targeted areas such as supporting clients who use methamphetamines.

### 1.0 Actions to Support Staff Safety

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|-------------------|--|
| <b>Action 1.1</b> | Continue to establish and promote measures to protect the physical and psychological well-being and safety of staff, with a focus on what additional measures can be taken to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ staff |
| <b>Action 1.2</b> | Evaluate the extent to which the training competencies matrix is meeting the needs of shelter staff and update the Toronto Shelter Standards accordingly   |

<b>Action 1.3</b>	Monitor compliance of safety-related trainings for shelter staff as per the Toronto Shelter Standards
<b>Action 1.4</b>	Strengthen training for shelter staff on practices for supporting clients who use methamphetamines
<b>Action 1.5</b>	Establish enhanced supports for City staff following serious occurrences and share best practices with the sector

## What Progress Has Been Made So Far?

As the Service System Manager of Toronto’s shelter system, TSSS is both the funder of community operated emergency shelter services as well as the employer of City-operated shelter services. This dual role translates to differing degrees of responsibility and accountability as it relates to worker safety in shelter settings. Wherever possible, the City works with City-funded non-profit shelter operators to advance staff safety in the shelter system.

- To address the painful issue of grief and loss across the shelter sector, TSSS provided funding to the Toronto Shelter Network to develop the [Grief & Loss Program Report](#), which outlines a service model for supporting staff with grief within homelessness sector.
- TSSS has formed a divisional Psychological Health and Well-Being Strategy to work towards establishing wellness supports, creating a care-based and trauma-informed culture, and improving operational process to improve the daily work experience of staff working in City-operated shelters.
- The division has mobilized a Confronting Anti-Black Racism team to support TSSS with creating safer spaces for Black staff working in City-operated sites, support with improving equitable service delivery for Black clients, support with intra-divisional efforts to address anti-Black racism, and form external partnerships to facilitate knowledge exchange and consultations.
- In alignment with the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, TSSS is working to improve safety infrastructure of shelter to meet security standards required by Corporate Security. This includes the implementation of Safety – Threat, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessments which evaluates the site’s security systems, safety policies and procedures, access control, perimeter security, emergency response, community safety, and risk mitigation strategies.
- The City is planning to invest \$70 million over the next 10-years in non-profit shelter providers to address the wage and benefit gap between community and City operations. Additional funds assist with staff retention, training, service levels and stability.

## What is Planned for the Short and Medium Term?



### Short Term (2025-2026)

- Implement the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool (ABRRT) as an incident management application that will document and track City staff experiences of anti-Black racism in place of the City's QuatroSafety system. The ABRRT will support with documenting incidents of racism and ensure that management teams can intervene and provide supports to Black staff.
- The addition of an Anti-Black racism notification tool as an embedded incident management feature in the Shelter Management Information System by highlighting client files that have engaged in anti-Black racism. This tool will allow for notifications to be activated in cases where anti-Black racism is directed towards Black staff or Black clients.
- Pilot enhanced crisis intervention training at select City shelter sites with the highest number of incidents and evaluate impact and effectiveness.
- Evaluate the efficacy of current training requirements outlined in Toronto Shelter Standards for frontline shelter staff, with a focus on the impact and effect of trauma-informed trainings and improve training matrices to meet the needs of the workforce.
- Create a new tool to assess training competencies as part of quality assurance processes completed with shelter sites.
- Ensure all existing and new harm reduction resources are inclusive of tools and aids on how to support clients using methamphetamines.



### Medium Term (2026-2028)

- Train City staff and the homelessness sector on the use of the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool and SMIS' Anti-Black racism notification tool, ensuring that staff are equipped to responsibly utilize and monitor tools.
- Deploy a developed staff support team model to respond to critical incidents in City-operated shelters and share best practices and learnings with the community-operated shelter sector.
- Update training matrices and requirements for frontline shelter staff and make updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards accordingly.

- Roll out assessments to shelter sites for compliance with Toronto Shelter Standards training competencies.
- Strengthen and update available harm reduction trainings to ensure they are inclusive of information that supports services users who use methamphetamines.



- Continue to host mental health trainings and webinars for City staff to support increasing staff awareness, knowledge and capacity.
- Continue to use data to plan and prioritize the delivery of enhanced harm reduction and overdose prevention supports and trainings to shelter sites, to support staff with upskilling, improving responses, and debriefing overdose events.

### How Will We Measure Our Performance?

Identify key indicators to monitor the following outcomes:

- Enhanced supports for City staff following serious occurrences and share best practices with the sector with additional measures to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ staff and clients.
- Updated training standards and competencies matrix.
- Compliance with Toronto Shelter Standards.



## 2.0 Supporting Client Safety

### What Do We Want to Achieve?

Toronto's shelter and support services is rooted in a person-centred, human rights, equity-based and Housing First approach. In alignment with these core values, the City is committed to keeping everyone staying and working in the shelter system safe from violence. Maintaining an environment where health and safety is protected and promoted, and all individuals are accepted and respected is essential to ensuring shelter system safety. To support client safety, the homelessness service sector strives to place the individual at the core of service and ensure that each person is treated with respect and dignity; as a result, staffs' role in creating a supportive and positive environment is key to enhancing sense of safety for clients.

It is recognized that there is a wide variation of experiences across the shelter system and what one person needs to feel safe may differ from another. The CAMH Shelter Safety Study identified five client groups that were perceived to be at a heightened risk of shelter-based violence. They include people with mental illness and cognitive impairment, people who use substances, gender diverse individuals, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC), and women. Services users whose identity intersects with more than one of these groups may be at an increased risk of victimization. Aligned with findings from the CAMH study, the MAP Center for Urban Health Solutions' [Evaluation of Embedded Harm Reduction Supports](#) found that people who use substances face distinct forms of stigma and barriers to accessing services that can reduce shelter safety for this group.

The CAMH Shelter Safety Study also reported that a small group of clients account for a sizeable number of critical incidents in the shelter system and similarly, there were a small group of clients that made up 6.5% of all service restrictions. There was a high degree of overlap between the two groups (i.e. clients who had a high number of critical incidents were also frequently service restricted). Key informants and shelter staff in the study perceived few supports for clients with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions, leading to cyclical patterns of shelter use with perpetual risk of violence and service restrictions. Further, some study participants felt that existing shelter programs did not have the capacity to provide the supports needed for these individuals. The key findings point to the importance of meaningfully including people with lived experience in the development and implementation of new and enhanced services and supports for clients.

The City is working to coordinate with health partners to have appropriate and timely supports, including mental health and crisis intervention, and specialized supports for people with extensive histories of violence. Actions in this area are to work with partners to facilitate and expand access to health care, mental health supports, crisis intervention and enhanced harm reduction services to meet the needs of clients, identify clients with high rates of incidents and service restrictions for service linkages including appropriate housing that best meet their needs, goals and preferences, and develop enhanced interventions such as a specialized program or model to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions.

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## **2.0 Actions to Support Client Safety**

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<b>Action 2.1</b>	Work with partners to facilitate and expand access to health, mental health and disability supports, crisis intervention and enhanced harm reduction services to meet the needs of clients
<b>Action 2.2</b>	Enhance access to 24/7 supportive spaces within shelter sites for people who use drugs and advocate for accessible, around-the-clock supports for people experiencing homelessness who use drugs
<b>Action 2.3</b>	Identify clients with high rate of incidents and service restrictions for service and appropriate housing linkages that best meet their needs, goals and preferences
<b>Action 2.4</b>	Develop enhanced interventions such as a specialized program/model to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions

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### **What Progress Has Been Made So Far?**

TSSS continues to prioritize initiatives that improve safety and well-being for clients. This work is embedded in and aligned with strategic initiatives supported by TSSS and other City divisions including the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, the Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy, and the SafeTO: Community Safety & Well-Being Plan.

- In 2023, TSSS released an update to the Toronto Shelter Standards, and introduced new mandatory Standards for Confronting Anti-Black Racism to improve the experiences and remove barriers to services that may exist for Black people accessing the shelter system.
- The City has made progress in facilitating access to health, mental health and harm reduction services across the homelessness service system (e.g. shelters, 24-hour respites, street outreach, drop-ins) through partnership with key health partners, including developing the Homelessness Health Services Framework, to

ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive sustained access to health care services that are timely, equitable, and meet the unique needs of each individual.

- TSSS will continue to strengthen harm reduction supports in shelters, in response to the drug toxicity crisis and in accordance with provincial guidance and legislation on harm reduction, in partnership with Toronto Public Health, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, The Neighbourhood Group, shelter providers and people with lived experience of homelessness and substance use.
- Actively working to ensure there is alignment with TSSS' other key service planning work which includes improvements to case management approaches in shelters, and mobile supports for people living outdoors with complex mental and physical health needs.

## What is Planned for the Short and Medium Term?



### Short Term (2025-2026)

- Conduct a jurisdictional scan and literature review of shelter program models that support high-need clients and researching restorative justice approaches and frameworks to address interpersonal conflict at the site-level.
- Conduct a system-wide gap analysis of where there are gaps in health, mental health and harm reduction services and work with health sector partners to deploy enhanced supports to high-need shelter and encampment sites.
- Expand and enhance use of individualized safety planning tools to support people who use drugs.
- Build and expand upon relationships with mental health service delivery partners, as well as build pathways to support for people with disabilities, working to align City initiatives on health and homelessness; advocate to provincial and federal governments on the need for a comprehensive response to substance use, inclusive of the need for ongoing harm reduction interventions (i.e. supervised consumption sites), treatment and detox services, and other addictions services, and for increased access to intensive mental health and disability supports, and interventions to meet the needs of the highest need clients.
- Explore and improve the connections between appropriate housing and clients with histories of high frequencies of incidents and service restrictions in shelters.
- Explore funding for a pilot program that focuses on a mobile and/or centralized case management model for clients that have elevated rates of service restrictions, violent incidents, and other complex factors.

- Identify key elements of a program model, based on evidence, to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions.



### Medium Term (2026-2028)

- Expand intensive mental health services in high-incident shelter sites with the goal of improved prevention, intervention, and postventions.
- Explore opportunities to expand access to harm reduction and substance use supports within shelter sites that are available around the clock.
- Work with community health and harm reduction partners to increase access to overdose detection technologies for shelter clients who use drugs.
- Work with community health and harm reduction partners to expand access to supportive spaces at shelter sites for people who use drugs.
- Explore the possibility of leveraging existing partnerships with health, mental health and disability supports providers to deliver supports across the shelter system.
- Fund and evaluate a program model that provides targeted supports and intervention for people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions.



### Ongoing

- Continue to partner with the health sector to provide health services and supports within shelter settings.

## How Would We Measure Our Performance?

Identify key indicators to monitor the following outcomes:

- Access to harm reduction, mental health, and crisis interventions supports.
- Adequate, timely, and specialized supports available for people with extensive histories of violence.
- Clients with high rates of incidents and service restrictions supported with linkages to appropriate housing.





## 3.0 Enhancing System-Wide Oversight on Safety

### What Do We Want to Achieve?

As the Service System Manager of Toronto's shelter system, TSSS plays an important role in outlining a clear set of expectations, guidelines, and minimum requirements that City-operated and community operated shelters and 24-hour respites are expected to follow through the administration of the Toronto Shelter Standards and 24-Hour Respite Site Standards. This is with the goal of ensuring service quality across the shelter system, outlining clients' rights and responsibilities and a staff code of conduct, detailing recommended steps for filing formal complaints, as well as guidance and requirements for administering service restrictions.

TSSS is responsible for ensuring that shelter sites are in compliance with the Toronto Shelter Standards as well as developing policies that improve the shelter system's efficiency and capacity to generate positive outcomes for all stakeholders. In addition to administering and updating the standards, the City plays a role in dissemination of data through open data sources, creating policy guidance where appropriate, and facilitating opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices across the sector. In this capacity, the City, in collaboration with community providers, health sector partners, and social service delivery partners, is committed to improving system-wide oversight of shelter safety.

As highlighted by the CAMH Shelter Safety Study, the use and application of service restrictions across the shelter system varies widely. Service restrictions refer to temporary restrictions of an individual from an organization or program, such as shelters and 24-hour respite sites, and are meant to be issued as a method of last resort. In the event of shelter-based violence, or when there is fear of safety for either staff or other residents, a service restriction may be issued. Service restrictions can have unintended consequences. Through actions outlined in this plan, the City intends to improve policy guidance on the use of service restrictions and processes for clients to access information about their active service restrictions. The goal of this is to enhance transparency and consistency of service restriction use and increase the accountability of shelter providers.

Actions in this area seek to improve oversight and safety in several ways. This includes actions to improve policy guidance for the shelter sector on the use and consistency of service restrictions, clarify and improve the process for clients to access information on

their service restrictions, as well as complaint resolution processes, and monitor the implementation of the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System which increases information sharing about clients with histories of violent behaviour. TSSS will also continue to monitor compliance and make updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards to improve the creation of safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous and Black clients.

**3.0 Actions to Improve System-Wide Oversight on Safety**

<b>Action 3.1</b>	Improve policy guidance for the shelter sector on the use of service restrictions
<b>Action 3.2</b>	Clarify and improve the process for clients to access information on their service restrictions, as well as complaint resolution processes
<b>Action 3.3</b>	Monitor the implementation of the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System which allows for increased information sharing about clients with histories of violent behaviour
<b>Action 3.4</b>	Develop performance indicators on shelter safety to further monitor trends including informing appropriate interventions
<b>Action 3.5</b>	Continue to monitor compliance to, update, and streamline the Toronto Shelter Standards to improve creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous and Black clients

**What Progress Has Been Made So Far?**

- Over the period of 2020-2024, TSSS updated the Toronto Shelter Standards in key areas that directly and indirectly address both physical and psychological safety of clients, including but not limited to standards regarding Health and Safety, Confronting Anti-Black Racism, Health and Mental Health Services, Harm Reduction, Specialized Program Requirements (i.e. requirements for Indigenous clients, 2SLGBTQ+ clients, and clients with disabilities), Discharges and Service Restrictions, and Complaints and Appeal.
- In May 2024, the City launched the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System (BRASS) which allows for increased information sharing across programs using SMIS about clients with a history of violent behaviour with the goal of supporting all shelter staff in proactive safety planning. Proactive safety planning promotes overall shelter safety for clients and residents.
- TSSS is monitoring the application of service restrictions to outline gaps and areas for improvement and has formed an internal service restriction table to coordinate work necessary to improve policy guidance on service restrictions.

## What is Planned for the Short and Medium Term?



### Short Term (2025-2026)

- Develop person-centered and equity-based policy guidance on use of service restrictions and alternatives to service restrictions.
- Identify and implement a streamlined and easy to access way for clients to access information about their active service restrictions and complaints resolution processes.
- Develop a framework for reporting on shelter safety indicators.
- Update the Toronto Shelter Standards with a 2SLGBTQ+ lens and make changes to SMIS to support creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ clients



### Medium Term (2026-2028)

- Implement guidance, best practices and resources for the shelter sector on the use of service restrictions with the goal of increasing consistent implementation.
- Determine appropriate platform for reporting on shelter safety indicators.
- Begin quality assurance and compliance assessments for updates made to the Toronto Shelter Standards to better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients.



### Ongoing

- Continue to monitor for compliance of the Toronto Shelter Standards.
- Continue to oversee TSSS' Compliments, Complaints, and Appeals process.
- Continue to provide information to shelter sites about individuals with a history of violence to enable proactive safety planning through the implementation of BRASS.

## How Would We Measure Our Performance?

Identify key indicators to monitor the following outcomes:

- Improved consistency in the application of service restrictions across the shelter sector
- Improved complaints resolution process
- Improved compliance with Toronto Shelter Standards
- Increased information sharing through BRASS alerts to support proactive safety planning.

## Conclusion

Improving safety across the shelter system is a priority for the homelessness service sector. Maintaining high-quality, safe and adequate shelters is critical for supporting people to access emergency shelter services and find permanent housing.

The Shelter Safety Action Plan outlines actions to continue to support staff and clients in the shelter system. The plan provides an implementation roadmap to improving safety across the shelter system, with initiatives that range from addressing the specialized needs of clients with complex needs, to training commitments and policy guidance that improve safety through enhanced system oversight. Advancements made in key areas will support improved outcomes for staff and clients.

Addressing the issue of safety for people experiencing homelessness is a multi-faceted issue that requires action and commitment from government, community, sector partners and other stakeholders. The City of Toronto will continue to provide a variety of services and supports to people experiencing homelessness, and also emphasizes that sustained 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.

# Shelter Safety Action Plan Tracker



In Progress



Upcoming

## 1.0 Actions to Support Staff Safety

#	Action	Progress Status	Progress-To-Date	Short, Medium-Term & Ongoing Objectives
1.1	Continue to establish and promote measures to protect the physical and psychological well-being and safety of staff, with a focus on what additional measures can be taken to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ staff		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided funding for the Toronto Shelter Network to develop the <a href="#">Grief &amp; Loss Program Report</a>, which outlines a service model for supporting staff with grief within the homelessness sector.</li> <li>• Invested \$21 million to date, to non-profit shelter providers to address the wage and benefit gap between community and City operations.</li> <li>• Formed a divisional Psychological Health and Well-being Strategy to work towards establishing wellness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short Term (2025-2026):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot enhanced crisis intervention training at City-operated sites with the highest number of incidents and evaluate impact and effectiveness.</li> <li>• Implement the Anti-Black Racism Reporting Tool (ABRRT) for City staff.</li> </ul> <p><b>Medium Term (2026-2028):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) to provide the ability to document incidents of racial harassment and anti-Black racism from clients towards staff.</li> <li>• Develop guidelines, job aids and e-learning module to support implementation of ABRRT and SMIS' Anti-Black racism notification tool.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ongoing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to implement, monitor and improve health and safety initiatives across the shelter system.</li> </ul>

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supports for City operated shelters.

- Mobilized a Confronting Anti-Black Racism team to support with creating safer spaces for Black staff working in City-operated sites.
- Continuing to improve the safety infrastructure of City-operated sites is an ongoing effort, with TSSS working to bolster security measures to meet standards required by Corporate Security.

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**1.2** Evaluate the extent to which the training competencies matrix is meeting the needs of shelter staff and make updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards (TSS) accordingly



- Workplan drafted to evaluate efficacy and consult on TSS training competencies.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Evaluate the efficacy of current training requirements for frontline staff, as outlined in the Toronto Shelter Standards, with a focus on the impact and effect of trauma-informed trainings and improve training matrices to meet the needs of the workforce.
- Create a new tool to assess training competencies as part of quality assurance processes completed on shelter sites.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Update training matrices and requirements for frontline shelter staff and make updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards accordingly.

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- Roll out assessments to shelter sites for compliance with TSS training competencies.

**Ongoing:**

- Regularly review and update TSS as needed.
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**1.3** Monitor compliance of safety-related trainings for shelter staff as per the TSS



- Workplan drafted to monitor training compliance across the shelter system.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Develop new tool for assessing training competencies, beginning with safety-related trainings.
- Establish and communicate quality assurance assessment schedule.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Initiate and monitor TSS compliance assessments.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue audits of TSS compliance
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**1.4** Strengthen training for shelter staff on practices for supporting clients who use methamphetamines



- TSS has been updated to require all shelter staff on each shift to be trained on overdose prevention, recognition and response, including the administration of Naloxone in accordance with Toronto Public Health's Guidance for Harm Reduction

**Short Term: (2025-2026):**

- Ensure all existing and new harm reduction resources are inclusive of tools and aids on how to support clients using methamphetamines.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Strengthen and update available harm reduction trainings to ensure they are inclusive of information supporting clients who use methamphetamines.
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Shelter Programs: 10 Point Plan.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to use data to plan and prioritize the delivery of enhanced harm reduction and overdose prevention supports, resources and trainings to sites, to support staff with upskilling, improving responses, and debriefing overdose events.

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**1.5** Establish enhanced supports for City staff following serious occurrences and share best practices with shelter sector



- Established the Employee and Client Wellbeing Unit within TSSS, with the mandate of supporting and enhancing staff wellbeing across the division.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Determine the best model for a staff support team to provide critical supports to City staff after serious incidents.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**


- Deploy developed staff support team model to respond to critical incidents in City-operated shelters and share best practices and learnings with community-operated shelter sector.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to host mental health trainings and webinars for City staff to support increasing staff awareness, knowledge and capacity.
- Offer formal debrief supports for City staff following a loss of team members.
- Send out wellbeing resources to shelter sector partners following the death of shelter residents.



## 2.0 Actions to Support Client Safety

#	Action	Progress Status	Progress-To-Date	Short, Medium-Term & Ongoing Objectives
2.1	<p>Work with partners to facilitate and expand access to health and disability supports, mental health supports, crisis intervention and enhanced harm reduction services to meet the needs of clients</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuously working with partners to expand access to health, mental health and harm reduction services across the homelessness service system (e.g. shelters, respites, street outreach, drop-ins). Services include: access to primary care and psychiatric services (in-person and virtual), mobile and community-embedded mental health and harm reduction services, as well evidence-driven overdose prevention and response supports.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short Term (2025-2026):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a system-wide gap analysis of where there are gaps in health, mental health and harm reduction services and work with health sector partners to deploy enhanced supports to high-need sites.</li> <li>Build and expand upon relationships with mental health service delivery partners, working to align City strategic health initiatives on health and homelessness.</li> <li>Advocate to provincial and federal levels of government on the need for a comprehensive response to substance use, inclusive of the need for ongoing harm reduction interventions (i.e. Supervised consumption sites); treatment and detox services, and other addictions services; and for increased access to intensive mental health supports and disability supports and interventions for the highest need clients</li> </ul> <p><b>Medium Term (2026-2028):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore options and partnerships for intensive mental health services in high-incident shelter sites with the goal of improved prevention, intervention and postventions.</li> </ul>

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- Explore the possibility of leveraging existing partnerships with health, mental health and disability supports providers to deliver supports across the shelter system.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to work with health partners to expand access to health care services and supports within shelter settings.

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**2.2** Enhance access to 24/7 supportive spaces in shelter sites for people who use drugs and advocate for accessible, around-the-clock supports for people experiencing homelessness who use drugs



- TSSS continues to strengthen harm reduction supports in shelters, in response to the drug toxicity crisis, in partnership with Toronto Public Health, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, The Neighbourhood Group, shelter providers and people with lived experience of homelessness and substance use

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Expand and enhance use of individualized safety planning tools to support people who use drugs.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Work with community health and harm reduction partners to expand access to supportive spaces at shelter sites for people who use drugs.
- Explore opportunities to expand access to harm reduction and substance use supports within shelter sites that are available around the clock.
- Work with community health and harm reduction partners to increase access to overdose detection technologies for shelter clients who use drugs.

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**Ongoing:**

- Continue to work with health and harm reduction partners to engage peers in the delivery of harm reduction services, including overdose prevention and response.

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**2.3** Identify clients with high rate of incidents and service restrictions for supports and appropriate housing linkages that best meet their needs, goals and preferences



- Workplan drafted to determine methodology for identifying clients for supports and appropriate housing linkages.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Review data to understand factors associated with high rates of incidents and service restrictions to inform planning for shelter level interventions and referral pathways to appropriate housing and health services.
- Identify opportunities to leverage existing programs and partnerships that support health connections, case management supports and care conferencing for individuals with complex service needs.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Work with partner agencies and people with lived experience to build out referral pathways and program models to better meet client needs in shelter and identify appropriate housing and supports that will best meet their needs, goals and preferences.

**Ongoing:**

- Ongoing analysis of service restriction cohort to understand population specific needs and align service opportunities.

**2.4** Develop enhanced interventions such as a specialized program/model to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions



- Actively working to ensure there is alignment with TSSSS' other key service planning work which includes improvements to case management approaches in shelters, and mobile supports for people living outdoors with complex mental and physical health needs.
- Conducted a jurisdictional scan and literature review of shelter program models that service high-need clients and researching restorative justice approaches and frameworks to address interpersonal conflict at the site-level.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Explore funding for a pilot program that focuses on a mobile and/or centralized case management model for clients that have high rates of service restrictions, violent incidents, and other complex challenges.
- Identify key elements of a program model, based on evidence, to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Fund and evaluate a program model that provides targeted supports and intervention for people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions.

**3.0 Actions to Improve System-Wide Oversight on Safety**

#	Action	Progress Status	Progress-To-Date	Short, Medium-Term & Ongoing Objectives
3.1	Improve policy guidance for the shelter sector on the use of service restrictions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TSSSS has begun work to conduct a current state analysis on application of service restriction to outline gaps and areas for</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short Term (2025-2026):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop person-centered equity-based policy guidance on use of service restrictions and alternatives to service restrictions.</li> <li>• Analyze the role of race in service restriction rates.</li> </ul>



improvement and formed an internal service restriction table to coordinate work.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Roll-out guidance, best practices and resources for the shelter sector on use of service restrictions with the goal of increasing consistence use.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to monitor service restriction oversight as outlined in the TSS, supporting sites where needed.

**3.2** Clarify and improve the process for clients to access information on their service restrictions, as well as complaint resolution processes



- Templates drafted for City-operated service providers, to support them with providing info to clients who were service restricted, ensuring compliance with TSS.
- Workplan drafted to identify best source for clients to receive information on their service restrictions.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Implement a streamlined and easy way for clients to access information about service restrictions and complaints resolution processes.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Work with service providers to measure and evaluate the impact of tools, resources and guidance to support transparency and accessibility

**Ongoing:**

- Provide tools for shelter sites to ensure compliance with TSS – in relation to standards set on service restrictions.
- Analyze service restriction complaint resolution data to ensure clients are being provided with a resolution within the specified time-frame.

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**3.3** Monitor the implementation of the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System which allows for increased information sharing about clients with histories of violent behaviour



- Launched the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System (BRASS) which allows for increased information sharing across programs using SMIS about clients with a history of violent behaviour with the goal of supporting all shelter staff in proactive safety planning.

**Short Term (2025-2026)**

- Continue roll out of training to shelter staff across the system on navigating and responsibly using BRASS.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to provide information to shelter sites about individuals with a history of violence to enable proactive safety planning.
- Continue monitoring and quality control of BRASS.

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**3.4** Develop performance indicators on shelter safety to further monitor trends including informing appropriate interventions



- Workplan drafted to develop a framework to identify and monitor appropriate indicators on shelter safety.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Create a Dashboard Framework to monitor and report frequency of incidents related to individual, interpersonal and environmental factors related to shelter safety.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Continue data quality monitoring and development of internal data benchmarking and data quality improvement initiatives for dashboard reporting on the frequency of shelter safety incidents and the impact on shelter staff and clients.

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**3.5** Continue to monitor compliance to, update, and streamline the Toronto Shelter Standards to improve creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous and Black clients



- Over the course of 2020-2024, TSSS updated the Toronto Shelter Standards in key areas that directly and indirectly address both physical and psychological safety of clients including but not limited to standards regarding Health and Safety, Confronting Anti-Black Racism, Health and Mental Health Services, Harm Reduction, Specialized Program Requirements (i.e. requirements for 2SLGBTQ+ clients, Indigenous clients and clients with disabilities), Discharges and Service Restrictions, and Complaints and Appeal.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue to invest in data and technology enhancements to meet current and future reporting needs.

**Short Term (2025-2026):**

- Update TSS with a 2SLGBTQ+ lens and make changes to SMIS to support creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ clients.
- Support with implementation of resources for new TSS CABR standards.

**Medium Term (2026-2028):**

- Update and implement standards compliance assessment tools.

**Ongoing:**

- Continue compliance monitoring on the implementation of Confronting-Anti Black Racism standards in TSS.