

Development of a Shelter Safety Action Plan

Toronto Shelter and Support Services
September 23, 2024



Context

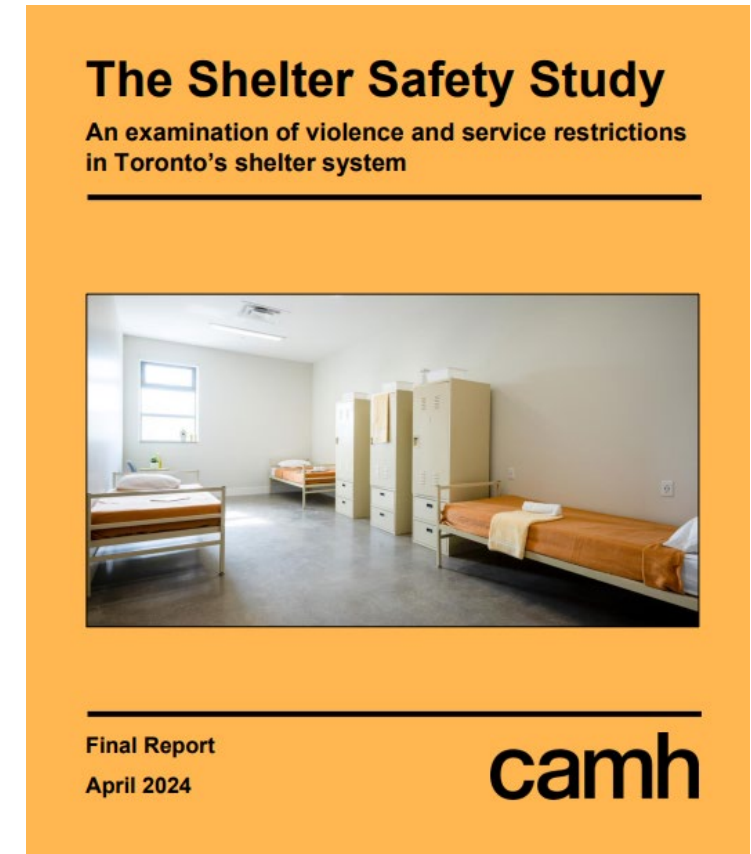
- On April 30, 2024, Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) adopted [EC12.13](#) requesting the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to report back to ECDC by Q4 2024 on the development a **Shelter Safety Action Plan** that responds to the CAMH Shelter Safety Study recommendations and is developed in consultation with people with lived experience and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee.

Today's Objectives

- To provide the Housing Rights Advisory Committee with an overview of the approach and steps in the development of the Shelter Safety Action Plan.
- To provide an overview of the partners/stakeholders that TSSS is engaging with as part of this process.
- To determine how best to consult with members of the Housing Rights Advisory Committee.

CAMH Shelter Safety Study

- In 2021, Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) reached out to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) for support in looking at the issue of safety in the shelter system and contributed funding to the study.
- This resulted in a two-year (2022-2024) study examining factors that contribute to physical and psychological safety in shelters for staff and service users with the goal of developing evidence and recommendations to support and guide continued improvements in Toronto's shelter system.
- CAMH's Final Report proposed 22 recommendations to advance safety in the shelter system. The report was endorsed by Economic and Community Development Committee on April 30, 2024.



CAMH Study Recommendations

1. Engage community partners providing mental health services in the shelter system to explore opportunities for enhancing crisis intervention
2. Implement more intensive mental health supports in the shelter system
3. Develop accessible, around-the-clock supports for people experiencing homelessness who use substances
4. Identify service users with the highest rates of critical incidents and service restrictions, and prioritize them for supportive housing and other health service linkages
5. Develop a specialized program to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions
6. Establish more supports for shelter staff following critical incidents and workplace violence
7. Develop and pilot a flexible, minimally demanding restorative justice intervention model framework for implementation in response to interpersonal conflict and shelter-based violence
8. Increase access to recreational, social, and physical activities for service users in the shelter system
9. Prioritize the reduction of crowdedness in shelters
10. Foster more collaboration and information sharing between shelters and with healthcare professionals who support service
11. Establish more consistent service restriction processes and decisions within and between shelter organizations
12. Prioritize use of multi-hour, non-bed loss service restrictions for escalating interpersonal conflict and verbal abuse
13. Expand the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in TSSS' committees and decision-making processes related to service delivery
14. Establish an accessible source (e.g., Central Intake) where service users can obtain information on any active service restrictions, including their lengths and appeal rights
15. Build capacity within TSSS to provide greater oversight and respond to issues pertaining to shelter based violence and service restrictions
16. Strengthen training for shelter staff on practices for supporting service users who use methamphetamine
17. Evaluate the extent to which the training competencies matrix, including the individual trainings, are meeting the needs of shelter staff
18. Develop a staff training program and educational resources focused on person-centred safety interventions adapted from the Safewards model
19. Develop performance indicators on shelter safety
20. Collect and analyze data on the role of race and ethnicity in service restrictions
21. Reduce the use of the "other" service restriction category in SMIS reports
22. Consider further study of shelter-based violence, service restrictions, and safety needs among families in the shelter system

Full report can be found here: <https://camh.ca/-/media/news-and-stories-files/shelter-safety-study-final-report-april-2024-sm-pdf.pdf>

Actions Taken To Date

Improving Safety for Staff

- TSSS is implementing the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System (BRASS) to increase workplace safety for all shelter providers
 - Increases information sharing across programs about clients with a history of violent behaviour, with the goal of supporting shelter staff in proactive safety planning.
 - The system will launch in the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) in 2024.
- Over the past two years, TSSS has implemented initiatives to improve staff mental health and wellbeing.
 - This includes coordinating debrief sessions for staff impacted after serious occurrence, developing a divisional Psychological Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and partnering with the Toronto Shelter Network to support grief and loss within the homelessness sector.

Improving Safety for Clients

- 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.
- 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.
 - These partnerships and initiatives have contributed to a decrease in suspected non-fatal overdoses at shelter locations over the last year.

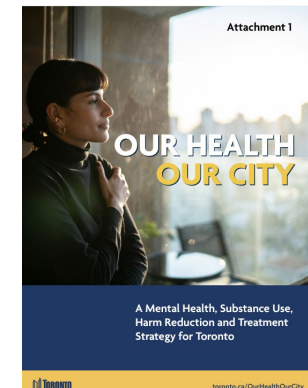
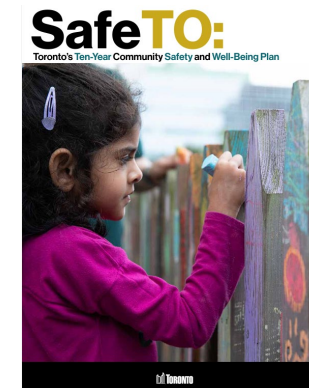
Actions Taken To Date

Building Sector Capacity

- The City has invested \$14 million to date 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.
- The City continues to work with sector and intergovernmental partners to facilitate health, mental health and harm reduction services across the homelessness service system partners.
- Unique and culturally-appropriate mental health supports are being provided for people accessing specific Indigenous-serving shelters.

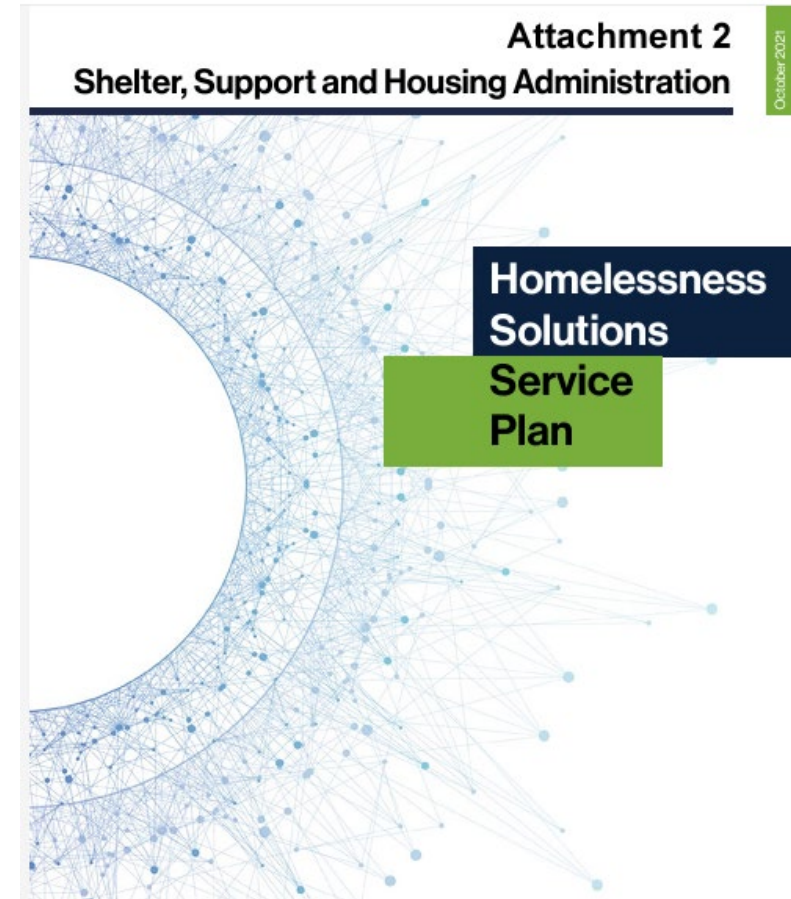
Building Safer Communities

- Alignment with:
 - Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy
 - SafeTO: Community Safety and Well-being Plan
 - Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto
 - Work of the Community Crisis Response Program



Addressing Safety in Toronto's Shelter System

- TSSS is committed to prioritizing and continuously improving shelter safety for staff and service users.
- The division has undertaken a number of initiatives to address safety in the shelter system.
- These actions and initiatives support the Council approved Homelessness Solutions Service Plan's key priority “enhance safety and quality” of shelters.
- TSSS recognizes the need for a Housing Rights approach to improving shelter safety.



Approach

- The recommendations and evidence from the CAMH Shelter Safety Study will inform the priorities and actions in TSSS' Shelter Safety Action Plan.
- The Shelter Safety Action Plan will be a key document outlining initiatives and areas of focus to promote and ensure safety for both staff and clients, recognizing that improving safety positively impacts all who work and access services within shelter settings.
- To further inform the development of the actions, TSSS is engaging with:
 - Shelter providers via the Toronto Shelter Network
 - People with lived experience residing in Toronto's shelter system
 - Mental health service providers
 - City divisions that provide services and supports to people experiencing homelessness, inclusive of crisis intervention and harm reduction services
 - Housing Rights Advisory Committee

Overview/Timelines

1. Plan and Coordinate

May – June 2024

- ✓ Review and analyze recommendations related to safety
- ✓ Outline scope and priorities
- ✓ Draft consultation approach

2. Consult

July – Sept 2024

- ☐ Engage people with lived/living experience of the shelter system
- ☐ Consult shelter providers
- ☐ Organize meetings with service delivery partners in the health and mental health sectors

3. Develop Action Plan

Oct-Nov 2024

- ☐ Develop implementation roadmap
- ☐ Continue work with partners
- ☐ Report back to ECDC Q4 2024

4. Implement and Monitor

Dec 2024 & Onward

- ☐ Implementation of actions
- ☐ Monitor implementation and progress

Consultation with HRAC Members

- TSSS would like to consult with members of the Housing Rights Advisory Group to inform the actions and roadmap for continuously improving shelter safety for staff and service users, including considering how to take a Housing Rights lens to the Shelter Safety Action Plan.
- Examples of questions we would like to engage HRAC members on:
 - What actions/interventions would you like to see prioritized to enhance safety for clients and/or staff?
 - What advice do you have for including a housing rights lens to the Shelter Safety Action Plan?

Thank you!