

Re: Expanding Emergency Shelter Infrastructure in Toronto

From: West Scarborough Community Legal Services

Date:

Dear Mayor Chow,

I am writing today in strong support of the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the urgent development of new, purpose-built shelter spaces across Toronto.

As a legal centre we are committed to safe and affordable housing. We continue to advocate for solutions that prioritize housing stability and protect the most vulnerable members of society. Unfortunately due to the rising cost of rent a number of our clients are at increased risk of homelessness now more than ever.

Unfortunately, as emphasized below, with homelessness comes a spiral of legal issues that our clients are subjected to including loss of shelter benefits, to increased risk of criminalization, loss of employment and mental/physical health deterioration.

When someone has a safe place to sleep, everything begins to shift. The body can rest. The nervous system can regulate. People start to think beyond surviving the next hour and begin to imagine the next day, the next week, the future. Shelter is often the first step toward physical recovery, mental health stabilization, reconnecting with family, and accessing income support or employment. It's also where people can finally access basic health care, harm reduction services, and trauma-informed supports without fear of displacement or criminalization.

The ripple effects of housing reach far beyond the individual. When someone is housed, communities become stronger. Hospitals see fewer emergency visits. Streets become safer. Families are reunited. Children are able to thrive in school. Entire neighbourhoods become more vibrant, stable, and connected. Housing is not a burden on a city nor on neighbourhoods, it is the infrastructure of care that makes everything else possible.

And yet, thousands of our neighbours are left without access to these most basic needs. The City's own data shows that nearly 300 people are turned away from shelters each night, and over 280 encampments remain across the city. These numbers represent real people, each with potential, with dreams, with the right to live in safety and dignity.

The proposed 1,600 new shelter spaces are not just timely, they are essential. These must be developed in collaboration with people with lived and living experience, designed with flexibility for future conversion to permanent housing, and operated with

integrated supports including harm reduction, mental health care, and client-centred case management.

As outlined by previous submissions from community agencies have called for, this moment calls for:

- Purpose-built, smaller shelters that are community-integrated and dignity-focused
- An equitable distribution of shelter services across all wards
- A long-term view that links emergency response with the broader HousingTO 2020–2030 Action Plan
- Sector-wide funding parity and multi-year operational stability

Toronto must also remain open to creative, interim solutions such as micro-shelters and modular housing, particularly as we face urgent encampment displacement. Barriers such as zoning and land access are real, but so is the urgency to act.

Housing is a human right. But it's also a catalyst. It's where community care and change begins. Where people return to themselves. Where possibilities re-emerge.

Please move forward swiftly with the implementation of new shelter sites and long-term housing solutions. Let this be the moment we choose care over complacency—and possibility over postponement.

In solidarity,

West Scarborough Community Legal Services