

Toronto's Multi-Divisional Response to the Needs of People Experiencing Homelessness

Date: September 8, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto continues to experience a housing and homelessness crisis driven by several complex and intersecting factors, including insufficient affordable and supportive housing supply, unmet health care needs, increased costs of living, and inadequate wage and income supports.

Key indicators such as the rise in the number of people sleeping outdoors and in public spaces, longer shelter stays, and challenges with mental health and substance use, underscore the urgent need for a coordinated, multi-sectoral, and intergovernmental approach across systems.

At the municipal level, City divisions supporting people experiencing homelessness have established coordinating tables to enhance service integration and program delivery. It is critical that the City continues to deepen these efforts through an All-of-City response that ensures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

This report provides an update on efforts towards this goal, including:

- A resource inventory of City-funded homelessness services which provides a foundational understanding of the local service delivery system (Attachment 1);
- An overview of current interdivisional initiatives that provide coordinated responses to homelessness; and
- An overview of next steps towards continuing an All-of City response to homelessness.

This report reflects an important first step in a broader, multi-phased effort to advance an All-of-City response to homelessness. Building on this foundation, further updates on this response will be provided as the City of Toronto continues to advance its work on a Five-Year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services recommends that:

1. Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no immediate financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

Any financial implications arising from initiatives noted in this report will be identified and submitted for consideration through a future staff report or through future budget processes.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

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, racialized people, refugee claimants, 2SLGBTQ+ people, women, and youth. Ensuring people experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping outdoors, in encampments or other public spaces, have access to safe, high-quality emergency shelter, adequate support services and to permanent housing opportunities are all important determinants of health and essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building healthy, sustainable communities.

DECISION HISTORY

At its July 23 and 24, 2025 meeting, City Council authorized the continued implementation and operation of the Downtown Community Outreach Response and Engagement (CORE) program to deliver integrated, low-barrier, mobile outreach and case management services for individuals experiencing homelessness and challenges with mental health and substance use in the Sankofa Square area.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.HL26.4>

On June 10, 2025, the Economic and Community Development Committee requested a report by October 28, 2025, with an inventory of initiatives, programs, and services offered by City divisions, agencies, and partners to support unhoused residents; and on governance options to enable a cross-divisional, city-wide response.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC21.6>

COMMENTS

Homelessness in Toronto

Homelessness is the result of multiple system failures, symptomatic of several complex and intersecting factors including the housing crisis, shelter demand that exceeds availability, increased cost of living, inadequate income supports, and other social crises such as the drug toxicity and mental health crises.

Additionally, there is limited coordination at the provincial and federal levels to support the continued arrival of refugee claimants seeking shelter, as well as the regular release of individuals from provincial institutions (e.g. health and correctional facilities) without adequate housing plans. This gap in coordination exacerbates pressures on the City's shelter and homelessness services.

Based on the 2024 [Street Needs Assessment \(SNA\)](#), on October 23, 2024, an estimated 15,418 people were experiencing homelessness in Toronto, including 1,615 people staying outdoors (including encampments) and 1,499 staying in provincially administered institutions. This number represents more than double the estimated number of the 2021 count. Consistent with previous findings, the 2024 SNA highlights the range of service gaps and unmet support needs that negatively impact the lives of people experiencing homelessness, increase pressure on the homelessness response system, and underscore the urgent need for enhanced coordination at the municipal and intergovernmental level.

Despite the year over year increase in the number of people served, the system remains overstretched. In the first seven months of 2025 (January to July) thousands of people have been supported across the system through the following homelessness response services:

- Central Intake offers referrals to emergency shelter and other overnight accommodation, as well as information about other homelessness services. Central Intake recorded 162,273 calls during this period;
- Emergency shelters, respites and warming centres offer immediate accommodation and supports. More than 16,355 people were served through these programs;
- Street outreach teams engage with people who stay outdoors, in encampments and in public spaces. There has been a total of 15,196 engagements with people sleeping outside resulting in 478 referrals to shelters, 218 people being referred to housing, and a reduction of 1284 encampments from parks;

- City-funded programs to support exits from homelessness: there are a number of programs that help connect people to permanent housing and housing stabilization supports. A total of 3,196 people experiencing homelessness have been supported to transition from shelters into permanent housing through City-funded programs, and of these 933 people were connected to housing stabilization supports.

The outcomes above could be scaled significantly with support and coordination with other service systems including income security and employment, health and mental health, corrections, child welfare, and immigration.

Resource Inventory of City-Funded Homelessness Services

To enhance coordination of service and program delivery for people experiencing homelessness, it is critical to have a comprehensive view of the local service landscape. Due to the scale and complexity of Toronto's homelessness response system, the Homelessness Services Resource Inventory represents the first step in a phased approach to develop a robust System Map that will include a broader range of stakeholders and a more fullsome spectrum of response interventions.

Phase I (the Resource Inventory, Attachment 1): includes a comprehensive listing of services, programs, and initiatives that are directly operated or funded by City divisions and agencies. There are 330 services, programs, initiatives included in this phase, ranging from shelters and street outreach programs, to EarlyON and youth employment programs, to encampment fire safety initiatives and community of practice initiatives. While criteria for inclusion in the inventory is having a mandate to address homelessness or serve people experiencing homelessness, many of the listed resources also provide supports to a wide range of Toronto residents in their catchment areas. The services, programs, and initiatives have been categorized into the following seven service areas: i) Indigenous-specific supports; ii) drop-in services; iii) emergency shelter and respites; v) employment and training; vi) housing and post-housing support services; and vii) support services (including health, harm reduction, mental health).

Phase II (System Map, to be developed in 2026): building on the Resource Inventory, the System Map will entail deeper engagement with the broader local network of community services that support people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, including those delivered or funded by a more comprehensive list of City divisions and agencies, provincial and federal orders of government, and other sector partners. These may include services/programs/initiatives that are a complement to another primary mandate (e.g., programs that serve low-income people, including but not exclusive to those experiencing homelessness) and may be under the purview of allied service systems such as child welfare, the Gender Based Violence sector, and justice, among others.

Combined, Phase I and Phase II will:

- offer insight into opportunities for more effective cross-divisional collaboration and service system planning;
- support the strategic operationalization of an All-of-City approach to addressing homelessness that is impactful and cohesive; and,
- inform appropriate governance and oversight approach(es) to support this work.

For an overview of City divisions, agencies, and partners included in each Phase, see Table 1.

Table 1

Phase I: Resource Inventory	Phase II: System Map (To Be Confirmed)
<p>City Divisions Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) Housing Secretariat (HS) Social Development (SD) Parks and Recreation Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) Toronto Paramedic Services Toronto Fire Services Children’s Services Seniors Services and Long-Term Care</p>	<p>City Divisions Economic Development and Culture (EDC) Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS) City Planning Toronto Emergency Management Transportation Services</p>
<p>City Agencies Toronto Public Health (TPH) Toronto Police Service (TPS) Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)</p>	<p>City Agencies Toronto Public Library (TPL)</p>
<p>City Partners n/a</p>	<p>City Partners Social services sector partners Provincial and Federal orders of government Allied sector partners (including but not limited to health, child welfare, Gender Based Violence service partners, etc.) Private sector partners</p>

Existing City-Initiatives that Provide Coordinated Responses to Homelessness

The attached resource inventory highlights individual programs, services and initiatives that support people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Several of these resources are delivered through coordinated approaches with a range of City divisions and key sector partners. Three examples are summarized below, including an overview of the supports they provide and the impact of those efforts. These successful initiatives can be leveraged to support the development of the Phase 2 System Map, including governance considerations for an All-of-City response to homelessness.

1. Streets to Homes and Interdivisional Encampment Responses

Work to connect those living outside with shelter, housing and support services through street outreach and encampment support is led by Toronto Shelter and Support Services in collaboration with staff from across the City and partner agencies. A shared goal is that the needs and well-being of people living outside and in encampments remain a priority and that people can participate, where possible, in decisions that directly impact them. Streets to Homes and partner agencies conduct outreach 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to build trusting relationships, help address immediate health and safety needs, develop housing plans, support people to move to indoor accommodations, and facilitate referrals to wrap-around supports.

To ensure a coordinated and effective response, outreach work is informed by the updated Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments (IDP), approved by City Council in [June 2024](#), and supported by key interdivisional groups including the Encampment Steering Committee and the Encampment Working Group. This multi-divisional approach has successfully supported the resolution of many encampments across the city, including at Allan Gardens, Little Norway Park, Bellevue Square, Lamport Stadium, Trinity Square, Clarence Square, Alexandra Park and St. James Park.

The impact of enhanced collaboration across City divisions and between outreach sector partners demonstrate the value of targeted, coordinated interventions and the need to leverage cross-sectoral expertise and resources. For the first seven months of 2025 (January to July) the following outcomes were achieved:

- Streets to Homes and its partner agencies made a total of 478 shelter referrals from encampment locations.
- A total of 218 people have been housed directly from outdoors, including encampments.
- A total of 1,284 encampments were reduced across 246 parks. Of those, 139 encampments were reduced through the Enhanced Outreach Model, and 158 parks remain encampment-free.

2. Downtown Community Outreach Response & Engagement (CORE)

In 2024, Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Police Service launched the Downtown Community Outreach Response and Engagement (CORE) program to address complex health and social service needs among individuals experiencing homelessness and challenges with mental health and substance use in the Sankofa Square area.

The program pairs public health nurses with police constables to deliver integrated, low-barrier, mobile outreach and case management services with the goal of connecting individuals to a range of services and supports. The Streets to Homes Program and Encampment Office collaborate regularly at various working groups that support the CORE team to ensure outreach is coordinated in the downtown core.

Between December 17, 2024 and August 10, 2025 the Downtown CORE team delivered a range of services including:

- 5,295 client engagements,
- 91 business engagements, and,
- 1,414 clinical and psychosocial support referrals.

3. Community Justice: Justice Centre Pilots

Led by the Ministry of the Attorney General in partnership with the Ontario Court of Justice, Toronto Police Service, the City of Toronto, and community organizations, Justice Centres are innovative community courts that integrate justice, health, and social services in one location. The Downtown East Justice Centre focuses on high-needs individuals at the intersection of poverty, homelessness, mental health challenges, and substance use issues. The City invests in specialized case management, life stabilization, and has dedicated Streets to Homes supports to the model.

- Since May 2021, the DTE centre has processed 2,700 cases with 98% of active participants identifying housing, mental health and/or substance use as needs.
- DTE accused individuals had a 98% recidivism rate prior to their First Appearance at the Justice Centre, compared to a 54% recidivism rate in the year after their Justice Centre First Appearance.

4. Establishing a Downtown HART Hub

Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs are provincially funded initiatives that aim to connect people who use drugs to treatment and recovery services, housing supports, social services, mental health and health care.

The City of Toronto will open a Downtown HART Hub and is working to establish a permanent location and finalize service plans. Toronto Public Health has convened a HART Hub operations working group of City divisions and community partners to develop the service model for the new Hub, including a coordinated approach to

referrals and case management across services. This working group aligns with broader efforts under the All-of-Toronto response to homelessness outlined in this report.

In the interim, the Downtown HART Hub is operating as a disaggregated model with services offered across multiple locations, and through outreach efforts. Some services became available on April 1, 2025, with more coming throughout the year.

Next Steps Towards an All-of-City Response to Homelessness

The City is in the process of developing a Five-Year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness, which will provide a city-wide framework to guide how the City, community partners, and other orders of government respond to homelessness in Toronto over the next five years. The plan will outline broad goals to make homelessness in Toronto rare, brief and non-recurring by strengthening prevention, improving access and quality of services, and expanding pathways to housing.

Several City divisions have been engaged in the planning process to provide perspectives on the challenges of homelessness and opportunities for a more coordinated response. These include: Toronto Children's Services; Economic Development and Culture; Parks and Recreation; Toronto Shelter and Support Services; Social Development; Seniors Services and Long-Term Care; Toronto Employment and Social Services; Toronto Public Health; Toronto Paramedic Services; Municipal Licensing and Standards; People and Equity; City Planning; Toronto Emergency Management; Transportation Services; and the Housing Secretariat. Together with input from community partners, people with lived experience and other governments, their contributions ensure that operational impacts, coordination gaps, and opportunities for policy and program improvement are meaningfully reflected in the plan.

Grounded in equity, reconciliation, and inclusion, the plan will envision improved service quality, modernized shelter infrastructure, and stronger collaboration across housing, health and income systems. The intended impact will be a more coordinated, housing-focused, and person-centred system that not only responds to immediate needs but also strengthens long-term pathways out of homelessness. The plan will set out intended outcomes, including reducing new and repeat entries into homelessness, shortening the length of time people remain homeless, and improving stability for those exiting to housing.

To assess progress, the plan will establish a performance framework in collaboration with community partners and people with lived experience. This will include identifying key indicators linked to the plan's priorities and establishing mechanisms for regular reporting. The intent is to promote transparency, accountability, and opportunities for continuous improvement, while ensuring that Council, partners, and the public can monitor how actions contribute to reducing homelessness over time.

Building on insights from the Resource Inventory and forthcoming System Map (Phase II), governance structures will be designed to ensure that all organizations and service providers, including provincially administered and complementary services, are engaged within a cohesive framework.

Key elements will include: clearly defined roles and responsibilities, interdivisional steering and partnership committees, shared planning and reporting mechanisms, and formal engagement of people with lived experience. These structures will promote shared responsibility, align efforts across sectors, and evidence-informed decision-making to maximize impact and improve outcomes.

Timelines for delivery:

- Early 2026: Complete Phase II System Map
- Early 2026: Draft governance framework development - the governance approach for the Strategic Plan, including proposed roles, committees, and reporting mechanisms, will be drafted throughout 2026, through engaging City divisions, community partners, and other orders of government.

Summary

The City is committed to the continued implementation of cross-sectoral and intergovernmental efforts to better support people experiencing homelessness, including those living in shelters, outdoors and in encampments, and those with complex health and mental health needs.

Through coordinated interventions, such as those highlighted in this report, the City will continue to explore ways to enhance coordination and deliver comprehensive, streamlined services, in partnership with health and other system partners, to improve access to services and supports.

Effective governance is critical to ensuring a coordinated, All-of-City response to homelessness. While there are several examples of City-led coordination efforts, as noted in this report, the number of initiatives that engage with and support people experiencing homelessness in Toronto is significant. This provides an opportunity to examine the potential for a more comprehensive and effective governance approach that offers improved strategic planning and oversight. As noted, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, in collaboration with several City divisions, is leading the development of a Five-Year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. This plan provides an opportunity to establish a strengthened governance approach that will guide a coordinated, city-wide response to homelessness in Toronto.

CONTACT

Joseph Stalteri, Director, Service Planning and Integrity, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, 416-397-1275, Joseph.Stalteri@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Gordon Tanner
General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Resource Inventory (Phase I)