



Date: Monday, July 7, 2025

Dear Chair Councillor Bravo and Members of the Committee,

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.

I am the Training and Engagement Coordinator at The Toronto Drop-In Network (TDIN). We are an active member-based coalition of over 50 organizations that run at least 56 diverse drop-in centres across the city of Toronto. Our members work with people who are unhoused, living with mental health and/or substance use issues, and experiencing social isolation. The barriers that our drop-in participants experience, such as lack of funding for vital resources and difficulty accessing services, is the reason why we are here to advocate in support of solutions – solutions that will not only positively impact their lives but will create opportunities for them to grow and make positive contributions to the broader community.

The reality in Toronto is such:

- There are over 10,000 people unhoused on any given night in this city
- The shelter system is beyond capacity and turns away hundreds of people each day
- The rent-geared-to-income wait list is between 8 – 15 years
- OW and ODSP amounts don't come close to covering the amount of the average rent in Toronto and rising costs of living

These numbers represent real people, each with potential, with dreams, with the right to live in safety and dignity.

The City's proposal to open new shelters is a necessary relief to the bursting shelter system. Recognizing that homelessness and poverty are results of systemic failures and not individual mis-steps; we have an obligation and collective responsibility to support systems changes that right these wrongs. Shelters and drop-ins are community hubs. Shelters belong in all our backyards – they are an integral part of our community. We all belong. Everything starts with housing.

The shelter programs being proposed have evolved far from traditional shelter models; they are enhanced wellness hubs, built with purpose and wrap-around supports. Shelters are 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.

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, 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 and there should not be a hierarchy of humanity. We are all deserving.

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. If not now, when? If not here, where?

I leave you with one question: Where are people to go?

Sincerely,

Marianne Kozinets

Coordinator, Training and Engagement
Toronto Drop-In Network