

Health & Homelessness Working Table

Board of Health
January 20, 2025

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Background

- As directed by the Board of Health, Toronto Public Health convened a Health & Homelessness Working Table (HHWT) comprised of **experts, service providers, and people with lived and living experience of homelessness** to discuss the intersection of health and homelessness.
- The HHWT discussed a range of topics including **chronic disease management, healthy environments, and mental health and substance use.**
- The HHWT's main recommendation was the establishment of an **intergovernmental collaborative group to address the needs of those experiencing homelessness.**

The City of Toronto's work to address homelessness

HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan

- Strategic framework for housing and homelessness
- November 2023: Target to approve 65,000 rent-controlled homes by 2030

Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS)

- Largest shelter system in Canada
- Emergency shelters, 24-hour respite, drop-ins, street outreach
- Shelter demand exceeds availability; system at capacity

Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments

- Actions to increase access to safe housing for those living outdoors
- Case management for complex mental/physical health needs
- Advocacy for crisis stabilization spaces funded by Ontario

Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy

- 10-year strategy to replace temporary shelters
- Plan to build 20 purpose-built shelter sites
- Focus on families, youth, Black and Indigenous-led spaces

Advocacy for Provincial/Federal Funding

- Funding to deliver HousingTO Plan
- Funding for 18,000 supportive homes, operating funds for services
- Enhanced investment in Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)

Toronto Public Health's role in responding to homelessness

Toronto Public Health Advocacy

- Advocates for sustainable, affordable, and appropriate housing as a key social determinant of health
- Supports City's initiatives like HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan
- Board of Health advocates for increased provincial funding for shelters and federal support for refugees

TPH Services & Programs Supporting Homeless Population

- Dental clinics, prenatal/parenting programs, immunizations
- Harm reduction programs, some embedded in City-run shelters
- Participation in working groups and committees on shelters, refugees, and asylum claimants
- Contribution to extreme weather response efforts

Data Collection & Reporting

- Tracks and reports data related to homelessness
- Annual reporting on deaths of people experiencing homelessness

Health and Homelessness Working Table



HHWT feedback (1/3)

Healthy environments:

- Environmental conditions (air quality, extreme heat/cold) significantly impact health
- People experiencing homelessness face higher risks (e.g., hypothermia, heat stroke, worsened health conditions)
- Need for coordinated efforts during extreme weather responses with clear communication
- Need for public transportation to warming centres and cooling spaces

Service delivery, communication, and accessibility:

- Need for walk-in availability, mobile services, and integration of multiple services in one space
- Clear, accessible communication helps connect individuals to services
- Emphasis on trauma-informed services to create safe, supportive environments
- Highlighted value of peer-based programs like St. Michael's Navigator Program
- Embedded services in City-run shelters recognized as beneficial
- Importance of continuity of care when individuals transition from homelessness to housing

HHWT feedback (2/3)

Collaboration across sectors and the continuum of care:

- Lack of collaboration across sectors (healthcare, social services, housing, justice system, community organizations) may lead to gaps in addressing the health needs of people experiencing homelessness
- Coordinated efforts needed for more consistent support during transitions
- Increased coordination could lead to reduction in duplication of efforts, minimize care gaps, and reduced reliance on emergency rooms

Refugees and asylum claimants:

- Precarious living situations negatively impact physical and mental health and well-being
- Call for a targeted health action plan for refugees and asylum claimants experiencing homelessness
- Plan should address unique health needs, including access to culturally appropriate care
- Coordinated care environments or hubs to help navigate transitions and find stability

HHWT feedback (3/3)

Mental health and substance use:

- Mental health and substance use issues are closely linked and often worsened by homelessness
- Call for a provincial review of mental health and substance use services, assessing effectiveness, accessibility, and identify gaps in care
- Need for increased funding for supervised consumption sites and detox facilities
- Focus on harm reduction and connection to recovery programs

Health across the lifespan:

- *Pregnant individuals:* Need access to prenatal and postnatal care
- *Children & Youth:* Stability, educational support, non-clinical interventions
- *Seniors & Older Adults:* Access to geriatric, long-term, and palliative care
- Increase social assistance and coordinated care environments to ensure access to necessary services

Next steps

Informed by the feedback of the Health and Homelessness Working Table, Toronto Public Health will continue its work to address the health of those experiencing homelessness through the following next steps:

- Review TPH services to assess accessibility, walk-in availability and need, and adapt capacity as appropriate.
- Assess TPH services and implement training and resources to ensure a trauma-informed approach across the organization.
- Connect and collaborate with other City divisions to share and support the implementation of other recommendations shared by the Health and Homelessness Working Table.