

Presentation to The Housing Rights Advisory Committee



The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) and The GTA Disability Coalition

Introduction of Presenters

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The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) and The GTA Disability Coalition



Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) is a community-based resource centre run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities. CILT works from the **Independent Living (IL) Philosophy** which views people with disabilities as consumers with the right to examine choices, make decisions and live independently with social and economic equity.

The GTA Disability Coalition is a cross-disability network of organizations that advances the rights, priorities and voices of people with disabilities and Deaf people in the GTA. The coalition is administered by CILT as a program funded by United WayGT.

Highlights of some data on disability and housing

- The population of people with disabilities in Toronto is over 720,000.
- People with disabilities are reported to experience twice as much core housing need as the general population.
- CILT's ASAC wait list for supportive housing and attendant services is currently over 700 applicants
- Inquiries on finding accessible and affordable housing is by far the highest CILT's Service Navigation Program receives.
- People with disabilities are reported to be homeless at 4 times the rate of the general population.

Areas where the city can make bold progress

- **The City must commit to realizing a right to accessible housing** reflecting its commitments under Toronto's Housing Charter, National Housing Strategy, Ontario Human Rights Code and UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.
- Despite being one of the city's populations with the most housing precarity, residents with disabilities remain deprioritized in the city's housing and shelter strategies, plans, policies and investments.
- We have chosen to speak on 3 area where the city can make tangible progress on the right to accessible housing and shelter, now.

Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)

The Accessible Housing Working Group is a housing group that reports to City council. Co-led by staff of the Toronto's Housing Secretariat and representatives from about 6 disability and seniors' rights organizations, including CILT, its first meeting as an expanded group was in October of 2021.

With council approval of a motion by then Mayor John Tory, the group was tasked with reviewing the city's accessible housing needs and producing a report for council with recommendations for increasing the city's supply of accessible affordable housing.

Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)

- Between October 2021 and August 2024, the AHWG reviewed existing data on universal design housing models and developments and consulted with diverse accessibility experts, architects and housing builders experienced in Universal Design housing. In 2024, group reached a consensus on recommending that 100 percent of unit in the city's housing plan be built using universal design principles, as a human right.
- In October of 2024, City Council approved all 7 recommendations in the AHWG's report. One stated that 100 percent of future city supported and led units be built with universal design principles that optimize unit accessibility and adaptability. 43 accessibility features aligned with industry standards were included in the report.

Positive future impacts from the City implementing these accessibility recommendations

- Far more residents will realize their right to adequate housing that fits their housing accessibility needs.
- As our population ages, significantly more people with disabilities and seniors will be able to age in place, in their homes and communities.
- Far fewer people will lose their right to independence and well-being as there will be fewer admissions to supportive housing and long-term care institutions.
- The burden on the city shelter system and the TCHC housing wait list will be reduced over time as more universal design units are built
- The City and the province will benefit from considerable cost savings.

Accessible Housing Working Group's Next Steps

- We are concerned that for an entire year, the AHWG has not met and progress on its work to influence implementation of the report's recommendations has been delayed. Its representatives from community continually requested the return of its work. In August of this year, the secretariat finally advised that the group will resume meetings from this September.
- CILT and GTADC respectfully asks that HRAC request that the Secretariat resume the group's work now and provide an update on the status of its next phases.

Accessibility plan for the City of Toronto's 6 new shelter sites

- We strongly commend City Council for approving the building of six new City owned and operated shelter sites. This is one bold step towards realizing the shelter rights of unhoused city residents.
- We however call on the city to make shelter accessibility one of the pillars in its capital plan throughout all phases, starting with the design process.
- We also recommend that applicable universal design features provided in the AHWG's report be applied to all new shelter sites.
- We would also appreciate if TSSS are asked to report to HRAC on their plans to ensure that the new shelters meet high accessibility standards.

Accessibility Audit of City of Toronto Shelters

In 2017 Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) conducted an accessibility audit of about a third of the shelters in its portfolio. The report on this audit showed that no shelter met all 8 accessibility criteria assessed and that none met most of them.

Highlights

- There was a clear need for major improvements to meet the accessibility needs of people experiencing homelessness
- Many shelters required significant capital repairs to become accessible.
- Accessibility for many kinds of disabilities was lacking.
- The city required additional funding and to develop plans to make most of its sites fully accessible.

Update on Status of Accessibility Audit

- TSSS planned to perform another round of accessibility audits of additional shelters, but we are unaware of the status of that plan or its implementation.
- We strongly recommend that TSSS prioritize completion of its shelter audit process and provide an update on its status.
- We would welcome TSSS being asked to present an update to the HRAC, including any capital plans for the modification of any existing shelters meant to improve their accessibility and adaptability.
- We view it as essential that the city undertake this task in compliance with its shelter obligations to unhoused residents with disabilities while the approved new shelter sites are being constructed over several years.

Many thanks to the HRAC for inviting us to present!

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