

Air Conditioner Pilot Program for Low-Income Seniors

Date: May 6, 2025

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division, Interim
Executive Director, Social Development.

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto is increasingly experiencing the effects of climate change, including more frequent, prolonged and extreme heat events. Excessive indoor temperatures are a significant concern for many, including residents in multi-unit residential buildings without air conditioning, with the potential for a significant impact on seniors and individuals with health conditions (e.g. chronic heat and lung conditions, asthma, cancer).

In response, the City is launching a pilot program for summer 2025 to provide portable air conditioners to low-income seniors living in multi-unit residential buildings who have a self-identified medical need made worse by extreme heat. The pilot program prioritizes simplicity, equity, and integration with existing City services, using a one-window intake system and a randomized draw to allocate approximately 300 to 400 air conditioning units, with outreach support from community partners.

This initiative is a Mayoral priority that received funding in Budget 2025, aligns with broader climate change resilience efforts and complements existing supports, such as the City's Hardship Fund.

This report provides an overview of the proposed pilot design and seeks authorization to formally establish the program, which was not granted through prior budget process approval. Staff are intending to utilize existing City contracts to procure air-conditioners, but also exploring alternate procurement options and authorities to ensure these units can be procured as soon as possible. This request is time-sensitive to enable immediate program implementation, with application intake targeted for late May 2025 to support the distribution of air conditioner units in advance of the summer months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division and the Executive Director, Social Development recommend that:

1. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry and the Executive Director, Social Development Division, or their designates, to develop and implement a pilot program, ahead of summer 2025, aimed at expanding access to air conditioning for low-income seniors living in multi-unit residential buildings in Toronto, with the pilot program to include the following:

- program eligibility criteria;
- collection of personal information for the purpose of determining eligibility;
- administration of air conditioner benefits; and
- evaluation framework.

2. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division and the Executive Director, Social Development and Chief Procurement Officer to negotiate and enter into any necessary agreements, including non-competitive agreements, to secure air conditioning units for eligible residents.

3. City Council direct that, where possible, existing City contracts will be leveraged to expedite the acquisition of air conditioner units.

4. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division and the Executive Director, Social Development, through the Chief Procurement Officer, to proceed with the Non-Competitive Procurement, in accordance with the City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 195, Procurement, and associated policies and procedures, if leveraging existing contracts is not a viable option.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

As part of the approved 2025 operating budget for Environment Climate and Forestry Division, \$200,000 was allocated to implement the new pilot program.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 11, 2025, City Council adopted the 2025 Operating and Capital Budget. The budget for the Environment Climate and Forestry Division included a new/enhanced service priority to expand access to air conditioning in advance of summer 2025. However, this approval did not grant the Division the authority to establish the program.

[Agenda Item History - 2025.MPB27.1](#)

COMMENTS

Background & Context

Toronto is increasingly experiencing the effects of climate change, including more frequent, prolonged and extreme heat events. Excessive indoor temperatures are a significant concern for many, including residents in multi-unit residential buildings without air conditioning, with the potential for a significant impact on seniors and individuals with health conditions (e.g. chronic heat and lung conditions, asthma, cancer).

To address this issue, the City is developing a policy framework to mitigate excessive indoor temperatures in leased residential premises, including multi-unit residential buildings. The policy framework endorsed a maximum indoor temperature standard of 26°C to protect tenant health from excessive heat, with implementation considerations and next steps to be outlined in a staff report expected in Q4 2025. These efforts align with the City's broader climate resilience initiatives and complement existing strategies, such as the Heat Relief Strategy.

The City currently provides financial assistance of \$300 per household for air conditioner purchases to Social Assistance clients and income-qualified individuals through the [Hardship Fund](#). In 2024, the City issued approximately 650 subsidies.

The [Mayor's Budget Memo](#) proposed additional funding for heat relief through a pilot program aimed at providing air conditioners to vulnerable residents ahead of summer 2025.

Air Conditioner Pilot Program - Guiding Principles

Informed by the Mayor's Budget direction and feedback from community groups, the development of the pilot program will be guided by the following principles:

1. *Prioritize Seniors in Need:* Supporting those who are most vulnerable to extreme heat, with a focus on low-income seniors residing in multi-unit residential buildings who also have a medical need for cooling. This approach ensures limited resources are directed to residents at high risk of heat-related illness.

2. *Simplify the Process:* Delivering a straightforward, barrier-free application process to ensure accessibility for all. The objective is to minimize documentation and submittals, simplify verification processes to ensure seniors and their caregivers can easily apply and receive air conditioners, while maintaining an appropriate level of oversight of public funds.

3. *Utilize Existing City Resources:* Integrating with and leveraging existing City systems and processes to streamline delivery and reduce overhead by coordinating with relevant City Divisions, namely Social Development and Strategic Public and Employee Communications.

4. *Partner with Community Groups:* Engaging community partners to assist with outreach, application support, and implementation. These groups can bridge gaps in communication, amplify promotions to their constituencies, and assist with access to the program.

Proposed Eligibility Criteria

The proposed eligibility criteria for residents to qualify for the pilot program are as follows:

1. Be 65 years of age or older as of December 31, 2025.
2. Reside in a multi-unit residential building (three or more storeys) located in Toronto.
3. Belong to a low-income household, as determined by the Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM).
4. Do not currently have access to an air conditioning unit or in-suite cooling.
5. Have a self-identified medical need for air conditioning.

A key barrier the pilot program aims to address is the potential exclusion of residents who are not under the active care of a doctor or nurse practitioner and cannot obtain a medical note to verify their medical need. To overcome this, applicants will be allowed to self-identify medical need for air conditioning without having to provide a medical note to the City.

One-window Application Intake

A simple application process will be developed, allowing seniors or their caregivers to complete it on their behalf, either online, by phone or in-person. The online application can be translated in multiple languages, and live interpretation will be provided for telephone applicants upon request.

Personal information collected through the application will be limited to what is necessary to determine eligibility and managed in accordance with the City's privacy and data protection policies. Efforts will be made to minimize information collection, with only the information needed to verify applicant identity and income. No medical documentation will be required or collected for verification.

Depending on the applicant's profile and circumstance, the intake process may redirect them to other relevant City programs - such as the Hardship Fund or Social Assistance - to access additional air conditioner benefits. For example, applicants already receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits will be referred to their caseworker to assess eligibility for a subsidy through those existing assistance programs, instead of applying to the new pilot program.

This one-window intake ensures that residents are guided to the most appropriate support options based on their needs, helping to streamline access and optimize the available funding across all City programs.

Administration of Air Conditioner Benefits

City staff are currently evaluating options for the purchase and distribution of air conditioners to qualified recipients.

The preferred procurement approach is for the City to procure units from a supplier and arrange for delivery to recipient's building or suite. This approach leverages the City's purchasing power to reduce costs, ensures the units reach those in need, and provides greater convenience to recipients, compared to a cash subsidy.

The City is intending to utilize an existing supplier contract that may meet the program's equipment and delivery requirements. Recognizing the extremely tight timelines associated with the delivery of the program, staff are exploring additional and reasonable procurement options necessary to ensure product can be secured and delivered to qualified beneficiaries.

Depending on the pricing and cost of shipping, it is estimated that between 300 - 400 air conditioners units may be provided through the initial pilot program.

Demand for the pilot program is expected to exceed the available funding of \$200,000. To ensure a fair and equitable distribution, City staff propose using a randomized draw to allocate air conditioners, rather than a first-come, first-served basis, which can favour applicants with greater access to technology or support.

To ensure geographic equity across the city, staff also recommend allocating the funding envelope based on the weighted distribution of seniors living in multi-unit apartment buildings within each Community Council area. This way, benefits would be proportionally distributed to where need is greatest across the City.

Air conditioners eligible under the pilot are portable units. Window hung models are ineligible due to safety risks. Units are to meet specifications for energy efficiency and utilize refrigerants with a low global warming potential. Any additional costs related to installation or electricity to operate the units are the responsibility of the recipients.

Promotions & Outreach

City staff are developing a communications strategy to raise awareness of the new pilot program among its core audience while recognizing the challenges related to language barriers and access to information. It will also be important to communicate the limitations of the program, as the demand for air conditioners will likely far exceed the numbers available in the pilot program.

Staff are also mindful of opportunities to align and integrate messaging with broader City communications on adequate indoor temperature and heat relief strategies in the lead-up to the summer.

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SIGNATURE

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