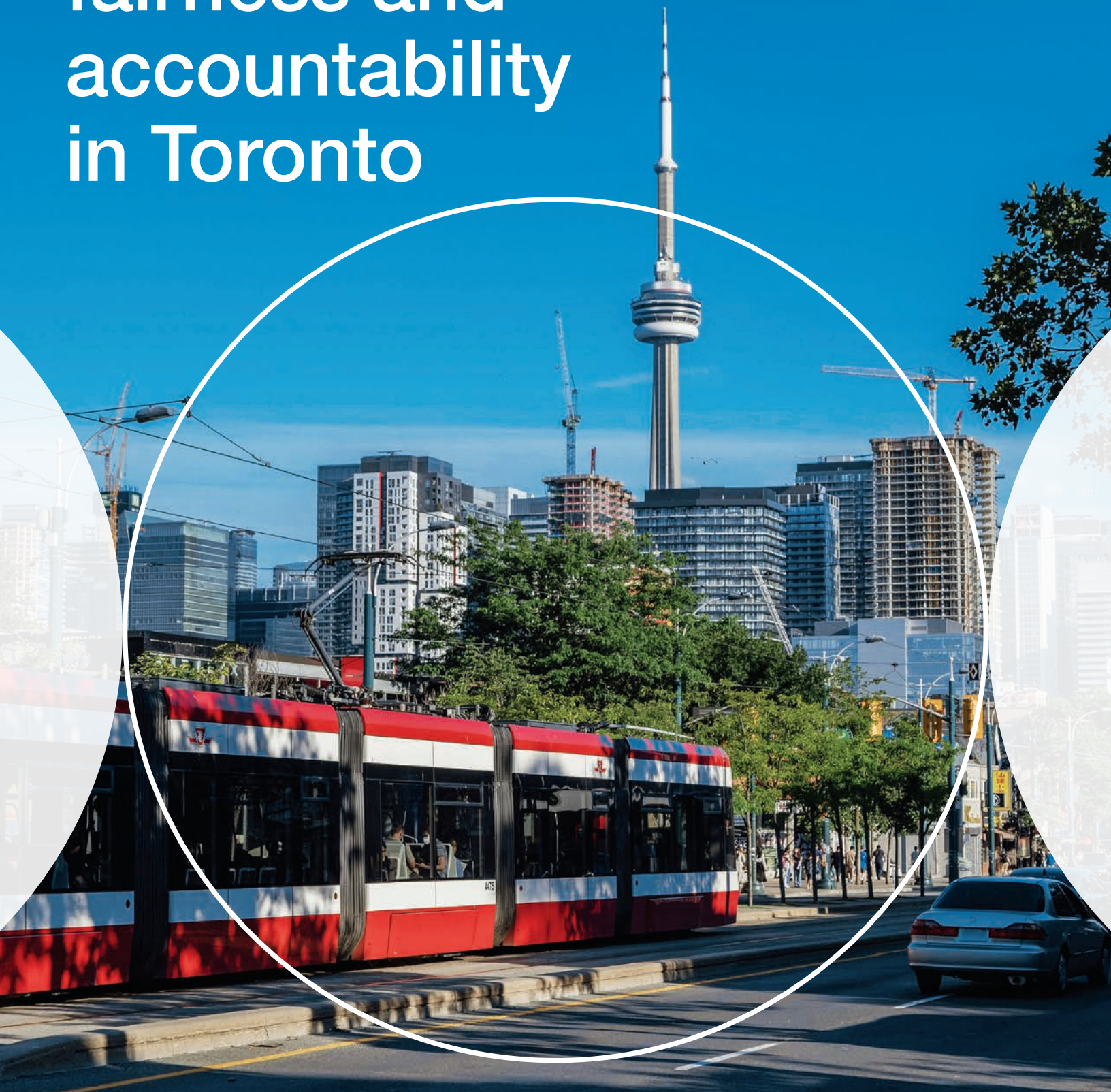


Strengthening fairness and accountability in Toronto



2025 Annual Report

ombudsmantoronto.ca



Ombudsman
Toronto



Land acknowledgement

Ombudsman Toronto acknowledges that we're on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat Peoples, and that this land is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

We're here because this land has been colonized, and we recognize the ongoing harm done to Indigenous communities by this colonial system, including the effects of broken treaty covenants. We value Indigenous knowledge and are committed to learning from Indigenous experiences. In the context of our colonial history, we're deepening our understanding of accountability and fairness towards Indigenous Peoples.



African ancestral acknowledgement

Ombudsman Toronto is committed to continually acting in support of and in solidarity with Black communities seeking freedom and reparative justice in light of the history and ongoing legacy of slavery that continues to impact Black communities in Canada. As part of this commitment, we recognize that not all people came to these lands as migrants and settlers. Specifically, we wish to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.





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What is an ombudsman?

(AHM-budz-muhn)

At Ombudsman Toronto, we hold the City of Toronto accountable to the people it serves—you. We:

- **listen** to people and review their complaints
- **help** resolve disputes and identify systemic barriers
- **recommend** meaningful improvements to City services

**“I appreciate the work you do
in standing up for fairness
when people feel unheard.”**

Member of the public



Letter from the Ombudsman

2025 was a difficult year for many in our city. From Scarborough to Etobicoke, North York to the downtown core, people told us they were struggling to keep up. Rising costs driven by inflation, global instability and new trade pressures made affordability one of the defining challenges of 2025. These pressures fell hardest on those already stretched thin.

We saw this reality reflected in our work. In 2025, our office handled over 4,000 cases, a 78 per cent increase since 2020. Behind every number was a person seeking fair treatment and a chance to be heard. Many people shared that they experience multiple stressors at once: financial strain, housing insecurity and mental health challenges, to name a few.

When City actions fall short, people already facing the greatest pressures are hit the hardest. This understanding guides our work. We focus our efforts on where they can make the greatest difference for those most affected by unfairness.

We strive to resolve issues early and efficiently wherever possible, creating meaningful change without always needing to resort to formal investigations, which require significant time and resources. By intentionally prioritizing equity—focusing on those who face the greatest barriers—we aim to deliver the greatest positive impact for the greatest number of people.

Responding to rising demand

Housing remains one of Toronto's most urgent challenges: families facing evictions, tenants waiting for repairs and residents navigating services from multiple City divisions. In its second full year, our Housing Unit continued to play a crucial role in making sure the City meets its commitments to realizing housing as a human right. In 2025, that included advocating to the federal government to maintain critical funding so the City can adequately shelter refugees in Toronto. Learn more on page 22.

As demand for our services grows and City budgets remain constrained, our staff focuses on solving problems as efficiently as possible. Case stories on page 27 show how our involvement led to meaningful results. Where quick resolutions weren't possible, we conducted formal investigations with recommendations to strengthen services and accountability.

Unfortunately, funding has not kept pace with the continued growth in demand or the increasing complexity of our work. This is limiting our ability to deliver timely, effective oversight. It has lengthened response times, stretched staff capacity and forced us to make difficult choices about where to focus our efforts. Without adequate investment, there is a growing risk the public will not get the consistency, timeliness and effectiveness of service it deserves and expects from us. This impact is greatest for those who face the most barriers and rely on our office to be heard.



**“Behind every number
is a person seeking
fair treatment and a
chance to be heard.”**

Investigations that drove change

Our investigations help improve City services by identifying systemic issues and recommending practical, fair solutions. In 2025, we investigated how the City responded when heat, hot water and power were cut off after a rooming house fire, leaving 11 tenants without vital services through the winter. We found the City failed the tenants and we made recommendations so that the City’s actions in the future are consistent with its commitments to adequate housing for all. Learn more on page 45.

Another investigation looked at how the City handled a resident’s social assistance overpayments. Our findings held the City accountable for treating her unfairly, and the City agreed with our recommendations to strengthen its processes. Once implemented, these changes will improve fairness for many others, especially given the City serves over 150,000 social assistance clients each year. Learn more on page 48.

My office doesn’t engage in criticism for its own sake. We identify gaps and then propose fair, equitable solutions that prioritize the needs of the people of Toronto. City staff take our work seriously because we have a strong track record of uncovering systemic issues and driving recommendations for meaningful, widespread change. We’re grateful to work with City staff, and appreciate their commitment to fairness and accountability.

Preparing for the future

In 2025, we launched a strategic planning process to make sure our office remains agile and effective as we move toward the end of my term as Ombudsman in 2028. Our strategic priorities include safeguarding our independence, which is essential to our mandate, while also building partnerships with City staff so they see us as both an accountability check and a resource they can rely on. Learn more at stratplan.ombudsmantoronto.ca.

We continued to focus our engagement strategies on reaching communities who face the greatest obstacles to City services. By meeting people where they are and listening carefully, we're hearing from people who don't usually come to us through traditional channels. We've been deepening our office's capacity to serve First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples who feel they've been treated unfairly by the City of Toronto. Working with an Indigenous facilitator, we're prioritizing dialogue, reducing access barriers and further embedding reconciliation in our work.

A shared commitment

Finally, I want to thank the people of Toronto, City staff and my colleagues.

To the people of Toronto: your trust, stories and persistence guide our work. You remind us that every person deserves a public service that strives to do better. Thank you for continuing to turn to us.

To City staff: thank you for working with us to strengthen public services for everyone. Your collaboration helps support better outcomes for the people of Toronto.

To my colleagues at Ombudsman Toronto: your professionalism and commitment to helping the people of Toronto reflect the true spirit of public service. Thank you for the care and integrity you bring to your work every day.

In the year ahead, we'll continue to stand up for fairness, equity and accountability, helping to foster a city where everyone can thrive.

Sincerely,



Kwame Addo
Ombudsman

Our team



Across complaints and investigations, research and policy, administration and communications, the dedicated staff at Ombudsman Toronto are committed to fair, equitable and accountable municipal government.



About Ombudsman Toronto



“I was at a complete loss if there even was a ‘next level,’ which is why I turned to the ombuds office.”

Member of the public



Our foundations

In 2025, we refreshed our vision, mission and values to reflect how Ombudsman Toronto works today and where we're going next.

Our vision

The City of Toronto administration treats all people fairly.

Our mission

Ombudsman Toronto is an independent voice for fairness, equity and accountability at the City of Toronto. We listen to people with empathy and curiosity, and recommend practical improvements that help City staff make Toronto a fairer place for all people.

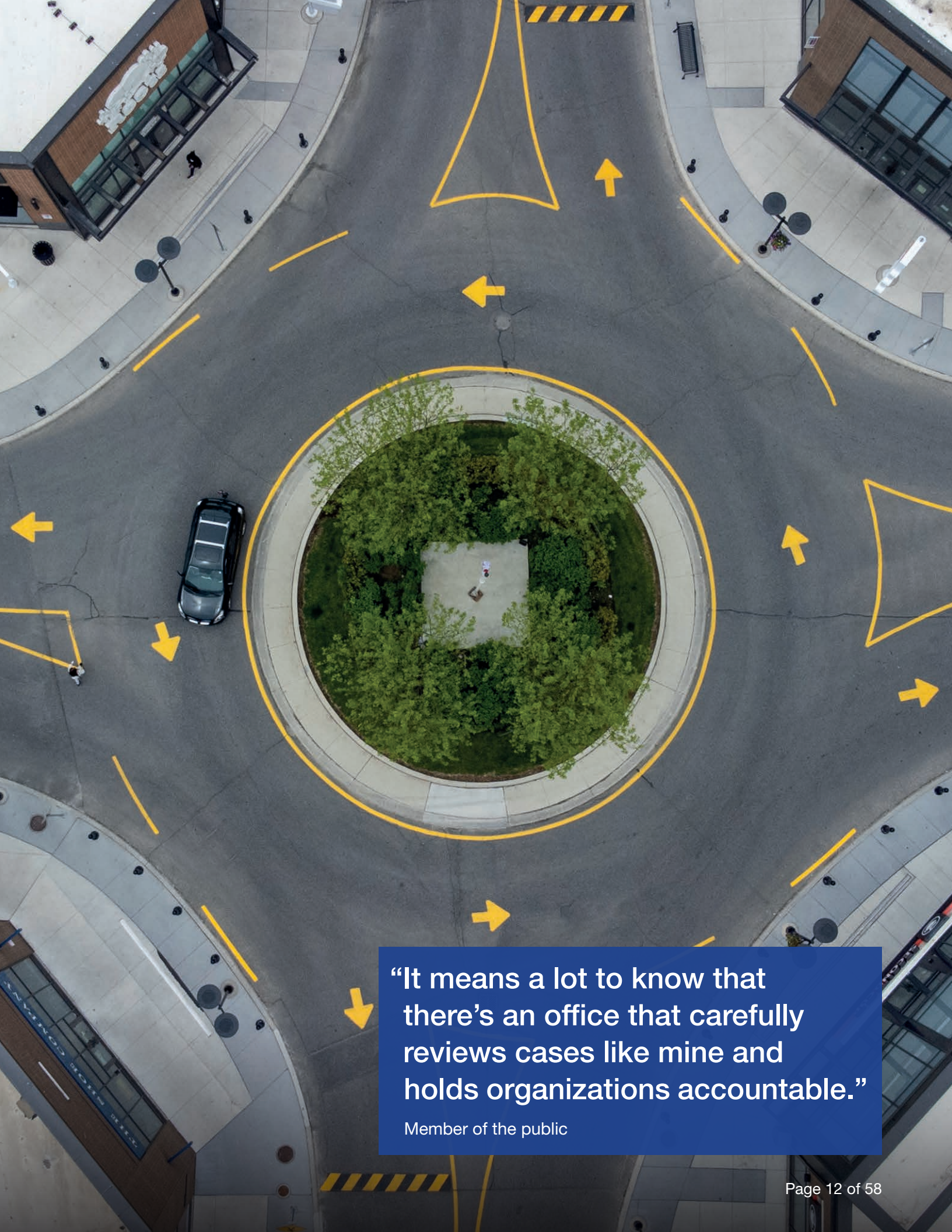
Our values

Our values guide the way we work and how we engage with the public and City staff. They inform how we interpret fairness, exercise discretion and uphold our responsibility to act with integrity and independence. We strive to reflect these values consistently in all aspects of our work.

- fairness and equity
- accessibility
- respect and empathy
- willingness to help
- constructive dialogue
- rigour
- accountability

Learn more

Learn how our values shape our work at ombudsmantoronto.ca/values



“It means a lot to know that there’s an office that carefully reviews cases like mine and holds organizations accountable.”

Member of the public

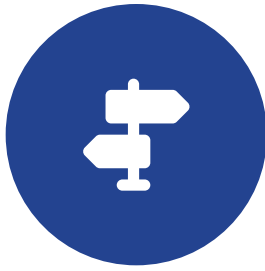


What does fairness mean?

Everyone who interacts with the City of Toronto deserves fair process, fair decisions and fair treatment.

At Ombudsman Toronto, we assess complaints using these three lenses of fairness.





Fair process

A fair process focuses on how the City makes decisions or delivers services. People should have a meaningful opportunity to participate when decisions affect their rights or interests. City staff should act impartially and ethically.

Fair process means:

- clear communication and good record-keeping
- notice before decisions or actions are taken
- information about how to participate and how to request a review or appeal



Fair decision

A fair decision should be based on complete and accurate information, especially when it can significantly affect someone's life. City staff should follow laws and policies, and consider relevant information. City staff should take into account individual circumstances and use discretion where appropriate.

Fair decisions are:

- based on policies and rules that are fair, lawful and consistently applied
- grounded in complete and relevant information
- equitable, non-discriminatory and considerate of the needs of those affected



Fair treatment

Fair treatment focuses on how people are treated when interacting with the City. Interactions should be respectful and dignified, and services should be accessible and responsive to diverse needs. Fair treatment is supported by clear complaint processes and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Fair treatment includes:

- dignity, respect and professionalism in all interactions
- services that are accessible and meet diverse needs
- an accessible and effective complaints process

Key points to remember

- Fairness doesn't mean everyone is treated the same, it means people are treated according to their unique needs.
- Fairness doesn't guarantee a specific outcome, but it does require consistent and reasonable processes.
- Fairness also requires that individuals have a meaningful opportunity to be heard without bias or discrimination.

**“Thank you for your time and effort
in reviewing my case and helping
me and my family through this very
difficult situation.”**

Member of the public





Our work

When the City acts unfairly, the impact on people's lives can be significant.

The City interacts with the daily lives of millions of people like you, shaping the everyday services you rely on—from roads and water to transit and parks.

What we do

We independently and confidentially review fairness issues about the City. We don't take sides. We advocate for fairness.

As an office of last resort, we usually only get involved after someone's brought their concerns to the City and received a final response. We then review what happened, how the City responded and whether the process was fair.

If we find the City acted unfairly, we provide clear, practical recommendations to resolve the issue and improve services. We handle both individual complaints and systemic issues affecting the public.

Who can make a complaint

Anyone who interacts with City services can contact us, even if they don't speak English or live in Toronto. If someone needs help, another person can make a complaint on their behalf, with their permission.

What you can expect from us



Impartiality

We don't take sides. We're advocates for fairness, not for the City or the public.



Guidance

When a complaint is not in our jurisdiction, we offer referrals to other resources.



Accessibility

We make our services easy to access and offer interpretation services.



Accountability

We identify unfairness and develop practical solutions.



Transparency

We explain our process and how we reach our decisions, including our findings and any recommendations.



City services we oversee

We oversee all City of Toronto divisions and most of its agencies, boards and corporations. City services within our scope include:

- administration of Ontario Works benefits
- administration of parking tickets
- animal services
- building permits
- bylaw enforcement
- City-run childcare centres
- City-run long-term care homes
- City-run social and affordable housing waitlists
- emergency shelters
- fire services
- garbage and green bins
- paramedic services
- parks and recreation
- property standards
- property tax
- roads, sidewalks and bike lanes
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)
- Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation (TSHC)
- Toronto Hydro
- Toronto Police policies, procedures and practices
- Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)
- water services and bills
- winter road and sidewalk maintenance

Learn more

Find the full list of City services we oversee at ombudsmantoronto.ca/who-we-oversee



How to make a complaint

Anyone who interacts with the City of Toronto can make a complaint. Our services are independent, confidential and free.



Step 1: Contact the City

Raise your concern with the relevant City division, agency, board or corporation. If you're unsure where to begin, call 311. As an office of last resort, our team will usually only get involved after other avenues have been exhausted.



Step 2: Review the City's response

Follow the City's complaints process by escalating your concerns until you receive a final response. If issues arise, you can contact us for guidance.



Step 3: Make your complaint

If you're dissatisfied with the City's final response, reach out to us by phone, email or via our online form. Your complaint will remain confidential and we will not contact the City without your consent.



Step 4: Discuss your complaint with our team

We'll contact you to discuss your concerns and let you know what our office may be able to do to assist you. If your complaint falls outside our scope, we'll provide a referral where possible.



Step 5: Our team gathers information

If necessary, and with your consent, we'll speak with the City and keep you informed throughout the process.



Step 6: Our team shares our results or findings

Once our review is complete, we will explain any findings, actions and recommendations, as applicable.

Office of last resort

We get involved after the City has had a fair opportunity to resolve an issue. If you're unsure where to start, we can guide you. If you remain dissatisfied after receiving the City's final decision, you can bring your complaint to us. If we find unfairness, we recommend improvements.

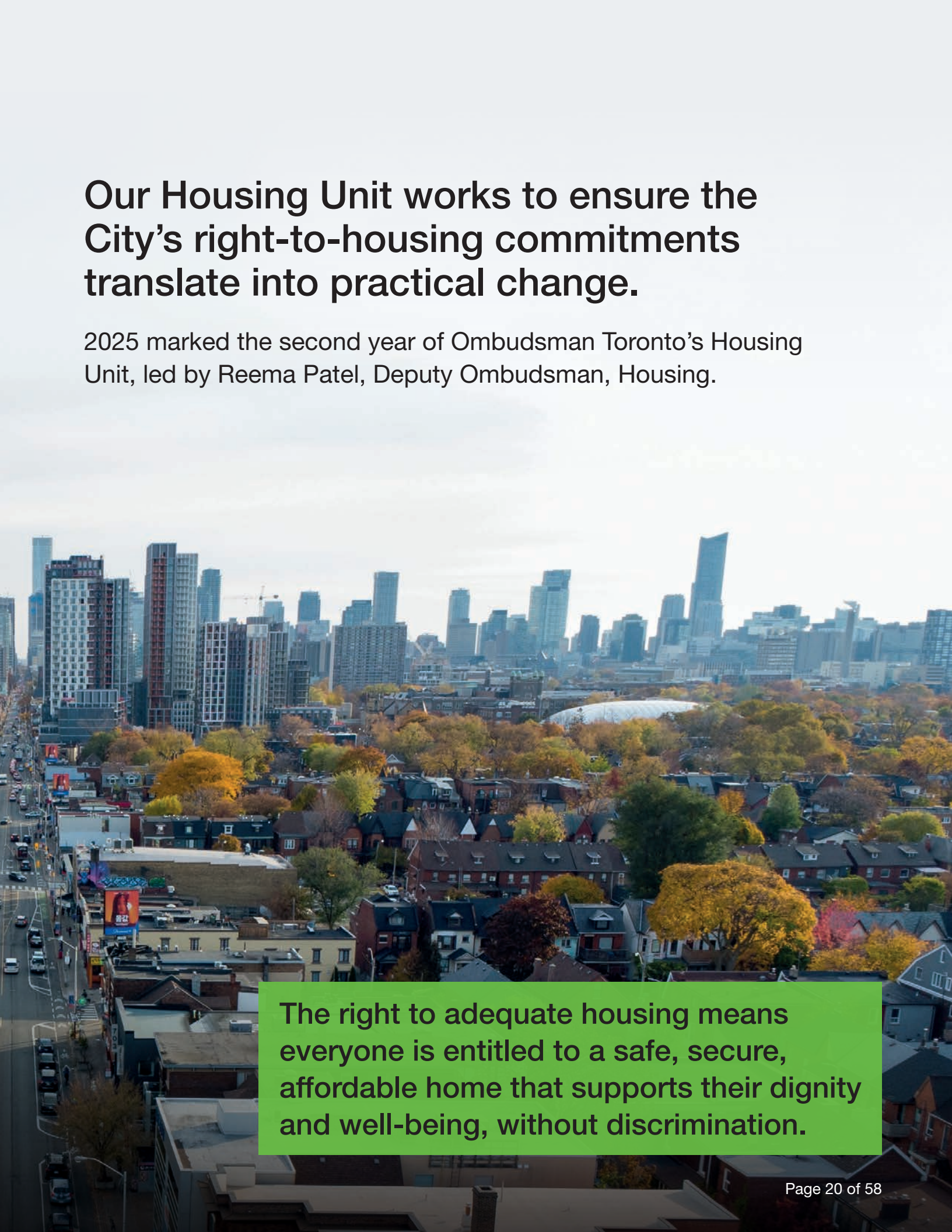


Advancing the human right to housing



Our Housing Unit works to ensure the City's right-to-housing commitments translate into practical change.

2025 marked the second year of Ombudsman Toronto's Housing Unit, led by Reema Patel, Deputy Ombudsman, Housing.

An aerial photograph of Toronto, Canada, showing a mix of urban environments. In the foreground, there are residential neighborhoods with brick houses and trees displaying autumn foliage in shades of yellow and orange. In the background, the dense downtown skyline is visible, featuring numerous high-rise skyscrapers under a clear sky.

The right to adequate housing means everyone is entitled to a safe, secure, affordable home that supports their dignity and well-being, without discrimination.



The growing urgency of the housing crisis

Across Toronto and beyond, fewer people can afford housing:

- wages aren't keeping up with housing costs
- housing is treated as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than as a social good or a human right
- homelessness, housing precarity and vulnerability are on the rise
- the scarcity of affordable, adequate and secure housing presents a clear and present danger to individuals' lives, economic security, health and well-being

Canada's housing policy recognizes that the right to housing is a fundamental human right, affirmed in international law. This requires all levels of government to work together to solve the housing crisis.

Through its Housing Charter, the City has made significant strides to fulfill its right-to-housing commitments. However, meaningful progress requires sustained action across the public service.

Our Housing Unit holds the City accountable to its right-to-housing commitments. By identifying systemic fairness issues proactively and encouraging the City to meet its goals, we make sure the City's housing commitments translate into meaningful change for the people of Toronto.

Embedding the right to housing across City services

A human rights approach to housing integrates housing as a right into all relevant policies, programs and laws—while ensuring people have a voice in the decisions that impact them.

Through our investigative powers and proactive work, we:

- **identify** systemic fairness issues
- **advise** divisions on how to integrate right-to-housing principles
- **promote** fairness and accountability across City services

This work reinforces that advancing the right to housing is a shared responsibility across all City divisions—not just those traditionally focused on housing services.

Highlights of 2025

Our work in 2025 strengthened our commitment heading into 2026. In 2025, we:



listened to community about barriers they face in finding and keeping adequate housing



released our second investigation report, which examined the City's response after a rooming house fire displaced 11 low-income tenants from deeply affordable housing



advised the City behind the scenes, helping City staff integrate fairness and right-to-housing principles into their service delivery

In 2026, we will continue to emphasize that progressively realizing the right to housing is a responsibility across the entire City of Toronto.

Advocating beyond the City

The City's ability to deliver on its right-to-housing commitments depends on cooperation from all levels of government.

Our 2024 investigation into the City's decision to stop allowing refugee claimants access to base shelter beds led to a unanimous City Council motion that adopted our recommendations, with minor revisions, to ensure more transparent and equitable shelter services for refugee claimants.

In 2025, proposed cuts to federal funding for Toronto's refugee services under the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) jeopardized shelter access for thousands of Toronto-based refugees. In response, we sent an open letter urging the federal ministers to maintain proper funding and prevent a repeat of the situation we investigated in 2024.



“Every day we’re deepening our ties with the communities most affected by Toronto’s housing crisis—their voices must lead the way.”

Reema Patel, Deputy Ombudsman, Housing



2025 by the numbers





“Thank you very much for guiding me in the right direction. I appreciate your quick response. It means a lot to me.”

Member of the public

4,326

cases handled

80%

complaints closed within 30 days

45

investigation recommendations made public

109

formal recommendations monitored

81

engagement and outreach activities

23

consultations with City staff

2

investigation reports

Increase in cases over time

78%

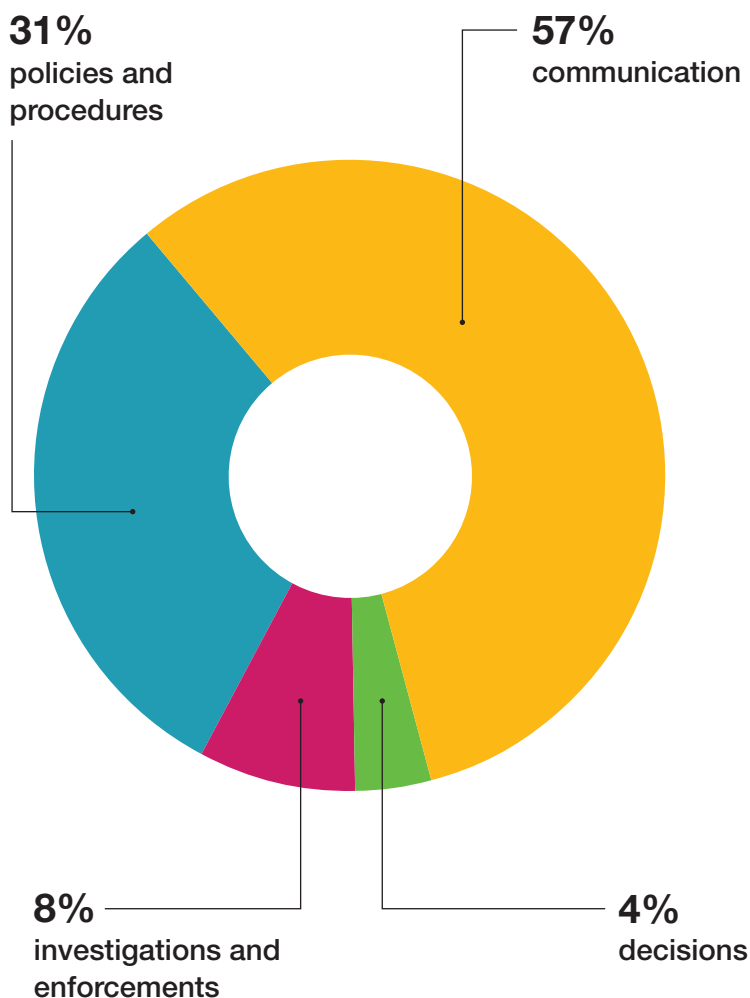
Increase from 2020 to 2025

140%

Increase from 2015 to 2025

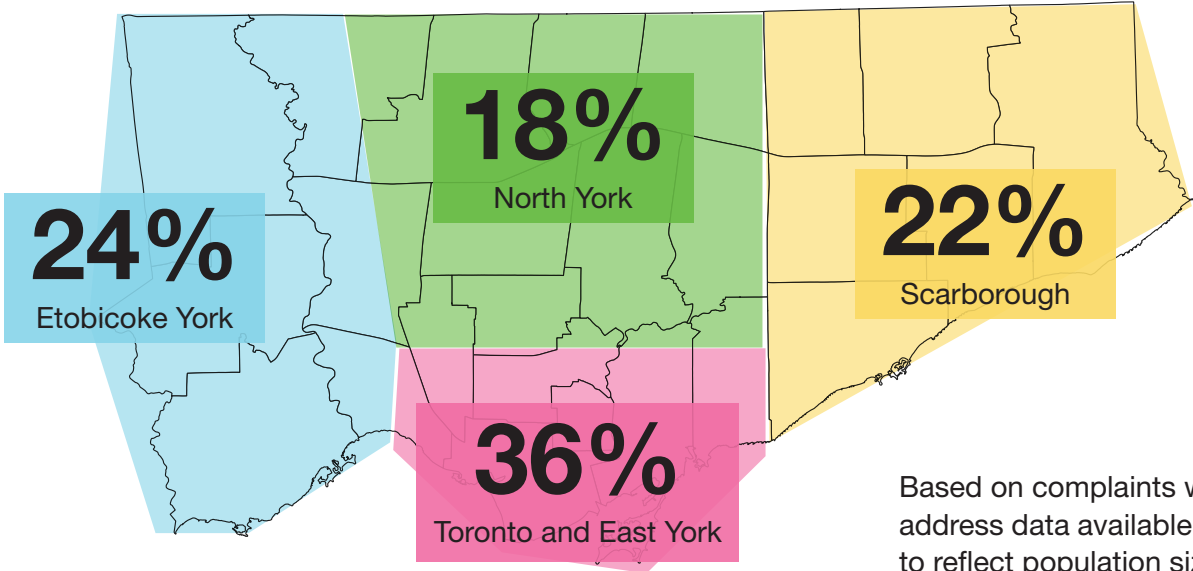
Fairness problems we found

In 2025, we identified problems of unfairness in close to half of the enquiries we made. With case complexity on the rise, some cases involved multiple instances of unfairness. Learn more about the most frequent types of fairness problems we found:



- Communication:** lack of response, delays in getting back to people, unclear or inconsistent information
- Decisions:** failing to provide sufficient reasons for a decision, making an unreasonable or unfair decision
- Investigations and enforcement:** failing to give proper notice
- Policies and procedures:** not having sufficient written procedures, not making policies publicly accessible

Who we heard from



What we heard about the most

Most common complaint topics by division, shown in alphabetical order

Housing Secretariat

- Housing waitlists
- Oversight of non-City social housing providers
- Housing supports and grants
- Housing allowances

Municipal Licensing and Standards

- Property standards
- Noise
- Apartment building standards
- Short-term rentals

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

- Unit maintenance issues
- Neighbour issues
- Unit transfers
- Rent assessments, increases and arrears

Toronto Shelter and Support Services

- Shelter maintenance and user experience
- Community outreach and engagement
- Shelter intake
- System-wide policies and plans

Transportation Services

- Road and sidewalk maintenance
- Construction and design issues
- Traffic management
- Bylaw enforcement

How we heard from you



- 47% Email
- 27% Online form
- 25% Phone
- 1% In person, fax, or letter



Case stories

Case stories show how we resolve concerns every day without formal investigations. We provide timely clarification, follow-up and practical solutions. While formal investigations remain essential, we take a proportionate approach, carefully assessing each issue and using appropriate tools. These examples show how we evaluate each concern and work collaboratively to achieve fair, timely outcomes.

**“Thank you for understanding
and the best service ever.”**

Member of the public

All names have been changed to protect people’s privacy. Photos are for illustrative purposes only.



Addressing an urgent accessibility concern

Dennis, a long-time resident of a Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) building, lives with quadriplegia and relies on 24-hour attendant care. He contacted us after the building's accessible entrance became unusable.

City staff had taped off the area for weeks after nearby water infrastructure repairs had damaged the entranceway, leaving a hole where it met the sidewalk. City staff hadn't provided tenants with a timeline for repairs.

At least two dozen residents who use wheelchairs or mobility devices had to use a rear entrance that was narrower and exited into an alley without a sidewalk, creating safety risks. Dennis was concerned that the dispute about who was responsible for the repairs was impeding a resolution to tenants' accessibility requirements.

What we did

We contacted both TCHC and Transportation Services to press for immediate repair, especially given the accessibility needs of tenants. We also worked with Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) and 311 Toronto to remind them of the importance of prioritizing issues that could create or worsen barriers to equitable access. We



stressed to all divisions the urgency of the repair and significant accessibility concerns.

The result

After our involvement, TCHC repaired the area in under a week. Building management issued a notice apologizing for the disruption.

Why this matters

Public services are only truly fair when they are accessible. Residents, especially those who use mobility supports, should be able to safely enter and exit their homes without unnecessary risk or delay. When infrastructure problems arise, City staff should act quickly, work together and communicate clearly so residents know what is being done and when.



Strengthening public information for a subsidy program

Amelia, a parent of two children, received approval for a childcare subsidy from the City's Children's Services division. Despite being approved for the subsidy, she struggled to find suitable childcare for both children in her area because of a lack of subsidized spaces.

She was also concerned that Children's Services didn't notify her when one of her children became ineligible for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program. Although CWELCC is a federal program, Children's Services knew that a change in eligibility affected Amelia's subsidy.

What we did

We sought information from Children's Services and reviewed relevant legislation, policies and communications. We found that staff took reasonable steps to assist Amelia but the lack of suitable providers enrolled in the CWELCC program in her neighbourhood was largely due to systemic issues beyond Children's Services' control.

While Children's Services acted fairly, we identified that the public-facing information about the subsidy program could be clearer. We advised that the division update its website to better explain:



- the fact that subsidized spaces may not be available in every neighbourhood
- limits on where subsidies can be used
- timelines for securing placements
- next steps when care isn't found in time

We also suggested that Children's Services notify clients when it becomes aware of eligibility changes that may affect the rates a client pays, including but not limited to, changes to CWELCC eligibility.

The result

City staff accepted our suggestions for addressing similar situations. Children's Services updated its website to improve clarity, including on issues outside of the City's control or where City initiatives intersect with provincial or federal programs.

Why this matters

Fair service depends on clear and accurate information. When City programs intersect with provincial and federal requirements, people can face challenges understanding how changes may affect them. Transparent communication helps the public understand their options and sets realistic expectations so they can make informed decisions about services that significantly impact their daily lives.



Escalating a tree safety concern

Juan raised concerns about a tree leaning against a hydro wire. Juan believed the situation posed a safety risk, but the City told him that it could take up to eight weeks for the City to inspect and assess the tree and a further six to eight months for the City to prune the tree.

Concerned about the immediate potential harm the tree posed to the public, Juan contacted our office.

What we did

We contacted the City's Urban Forestry branch in the Environment, Climate and Forestry division to explore options to escalate the concern. Urban Forestry determined that an inspection was warranted and assessed the tree.

The result

Urban Forestry confirmed the tree posed a safety risk and removed it in three weeks.

Why this matters

Timely responses and clear pathways for people to escalate their concerns support fair and effective public service, particularly where safety concerns are involved.





Addressing accommodation needs and strengthening accommodation policies

Rezeda raised concerns on behalf of her mother, a wheelchair user, who was experiencing difficulties with Wheel-Trans at the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC).

TTC staff told Rezeda that her mother's wheelchair couldn't be accommodated on Wheel-Trans vehicles, and that her mother would need to transfer from her wheelchair to a seat.

Her mother had tried different wheelchairs, and Rezeda shared details about the current wheelchair with staff to explain how it met the Wheel-Trans requirements. When she couldn't resolve the issue, she contacted our office for assistance.

What we did

We contacted Wheel-Trans and asked TTC staff to review the situation and discuss Rezeda's concerns directly with her. During their review, staff determined that some of the wheelchair manufacturer's information had been unclear, and they were able to confirm that the wheelchair met transportation requirements.

The result

Wheel-Trans confirmed the wheelchair could be accommodated and committed to reviewing its policies to improve clarity for customers and allow more flexible decision-making.



Why this matters

Accessible transit is an essential part of a fair and inclusive city. City agencies like the TTC should clearly communicate requirements and take the time to understand people's concerns so they can respond fairly and effectively. This helps ensure that those who rely on Wheel-Trans can travel safely and independently, without facing unnecessary barriers.

“I'd like to express my solid appreciation for your help in resolving a longstanding issue my family has had with Wheel-Trans. In less than one week, we got a personal call from management, the issued was settled and my mother's passenger profile was updated correctly. We're extremely grateful.”

Rezeda



Providing guidance on concerns outside our scope

Shoshana contacted our office ahead of an upcoming eviction hearing at the Landlord Tenant Board.

They said their landlord hadn't provided information about the arrears they allegedly owed, and they didn't know where to turn for help.

What we did

Although the matter was outside our jurisdiction, we referred Shoshana to a local legal clinic so that they received timely legal support.

The result

Shoshana received legal assistance in time for their hearing and was able to remain in their home.

Why this matters

Even when a concern falls outside of our jurisdiction, we help people navigate complex processes. We clarify the City's role and connect people to the appropriate resources. These extra steps help make sure people don't fall through the cracks during critical moments.





Providing contact information and process guidance

Amar submitted a claim against the City after his basement flooded. When he tried to get information about the claim from Toronto Water and didn't get a response, he contacted our office.

What we did

We explained Toronto Water's role in the claims process and clarified how claims against the City are handled. We informed Amar that the City uses a third-party adjuster who assesses claims made against the City, and provided him with the appropriate contact information.

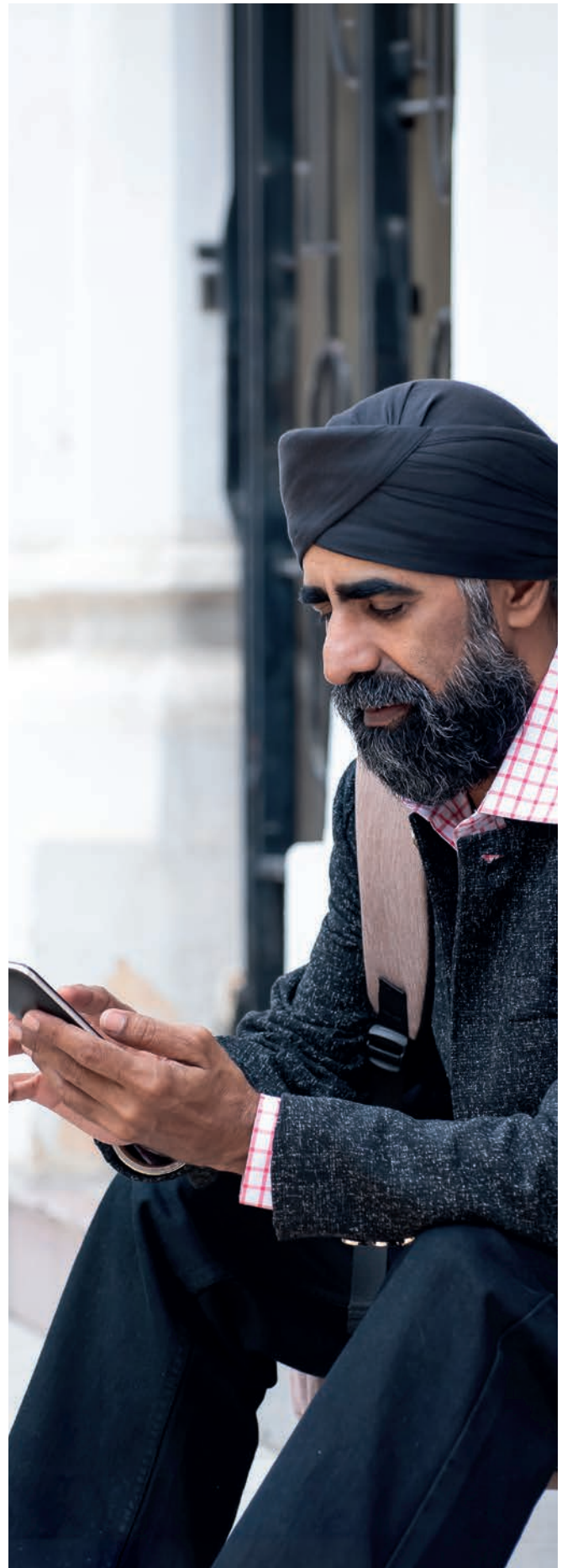
We also advised Amar that the City's Insurance and Risk Management unit in the Finance and Treasury Services division responds to escalated complaints about services provided by the adjuster.

The result

Our office directed Amar to the appropriate contact in the right division to address his concerns. He told us he better understood the process and was grateful for our assistance.

Why this matters

When people don't get responses from the City, clear and timely guidance helps point them in the right direction and prevents confusion and unnecessary delay. Our office helps people navigate complex City processes and makes sure legitimate concerns reach the right staff.





Enhancing accessible communication practices

Anthony was experiencing homelessness and staying intermittently in a shelter. He didn't have consistent access to a phone.

After he emailed the Toronto Employment and Social Services division (TESS) about concerns with his Ontario Works benefits and didn't receive a response, he contacted our office.

TESS told us it doesn't communicate with Ontario Works clients by email and had mailed its response to the shelter Anthony was staying at. Anthony said he never received the letter, which contained sensitive personal information.

We also heard from other TESS clients who had concerns that TESS wouldn't communicate with them by email when they raised complaints. This practice created barriers for individuals without reliable phone access, those who preferred email and those who wanted a written record of their communications.

What we did

We contacted TESS to clarify its communication practices and asked that staff resend its response to Anthony in a way he was able to access. TESS first tried sharing the letter through a document-sharing application, but Anthony couldn't get it to work. We followed up again and requested that TESS staff email the letter to Anthony, and they agreed.



Given similar concerns from other clients, we reviewed TESS's complaints process more broadly. We found that while TESS had made rare exceptions by allowing email complaints, it hadn't updated its overall complaints process. Although the division cited security concerns about email, it hadn't accounted for clients without reliable access to a phone or mail.

We raised concerns that this approach could delay complaint resolution, create barriers for vulnerable clients and pose risks when confidential information is sent to shared shelter addresses.

The result

Through collaborative discussions, we identified opportunities for more flexible communication methods. In response, TESS created and launched a general email address for clients who prefer to submit service complaints by email. TESS lets its clients know of potential risks associated with email before proceeding. This solution balanced TESS's concerns about data security with accessibility and fairness.

Why this matters

Accessible communication removes barriers that can prevent people from fully participating in processes that affect them. City divisions should offer clear and flexible options, especially for the most vulnerable, so people can better receive information about services they rely on and respond accordingly. Our office works collaboratively with divisions to identify practical solutions and address accessibility barriers, often without the need for a formal investigation. This helps resolve issues efficiently while making effective use of public resources.



Correcting a rent calculation error

Kenneth, a senior living on a limited income, contacted our office with concerns about the rent charged for his Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation (TSHC) unit.

Despite having submitted information showing his income had decreased, TSHC hadn't adjusted his rent for five months. Kenneth believed that because of this, he'd overpaid rent for several months. He had requested a reassessment but didn't receive a response to his multiple inquiries.

What we did

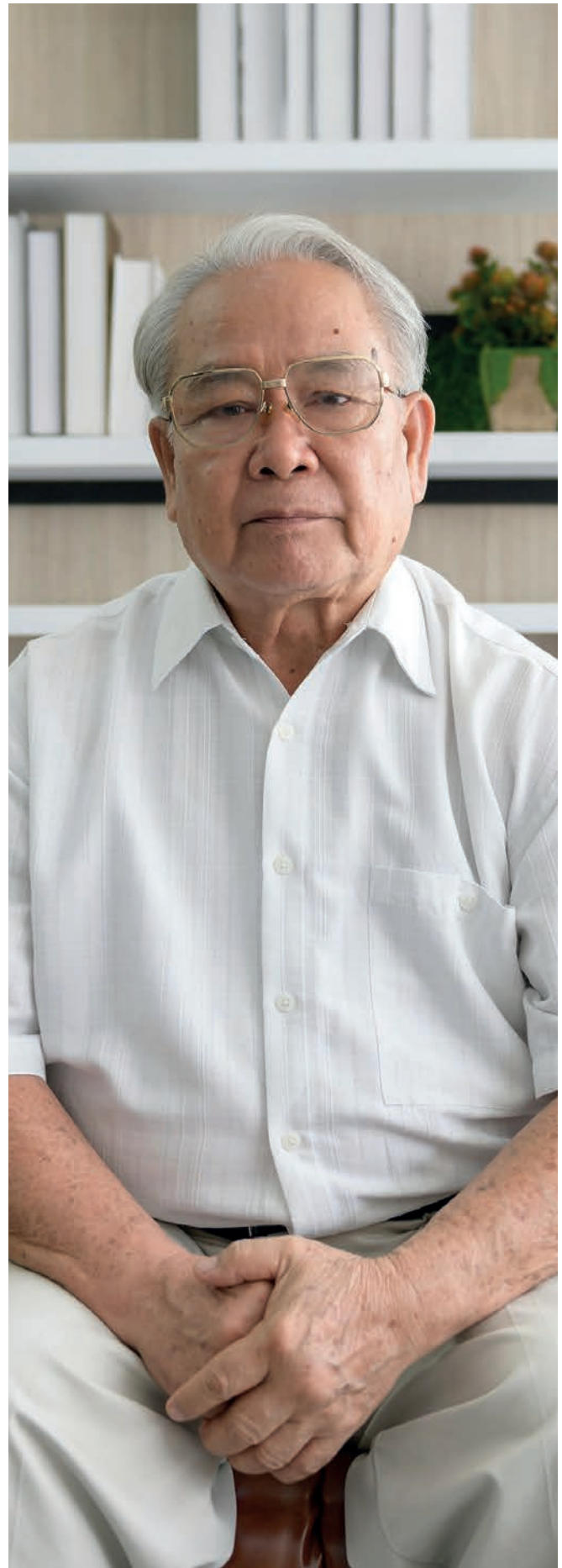
We contacted TSHC to review Kenneth's file.

The result

TSHC identified an error in its rent calculation and corrected it. Staff adjusted Kenneth's rent and issued a refund for the five months he had overpaid.

Why this matters

Timely and accurate rent calculations are critical, particularly for seniors on fixed incomes. Errors can create financial strain for the most vulnerable in our city. Clear process and transparent communication make sure people are treated fairly and prevents unnecessary hardship.





Addressing a water bill delay and refund

Navya, president of her condominium board, contacted our office after several months of attempting to dispute an \$18,000 water bill with the City.

What we did

We referred Navya to City staff in Revenue Services and Toronto Water. When she didn't receive a response, she returned to our office.

With Navya's consent, we followed up with Revenue Services. Staff agreed they would escalate the matter to a supervisor at Toronto Water to determine the status of the complaint.

The result

Revenue Services followed up with Navya. She subsequently told us that the matter was resolved and the City had issued a refund for the majority of the bill.

Why this matters

Large billing disputes can create significant financial uncertainty for residents. Clear and timely communication can help prevent prolonged stress and ensure property owners aren't left navigating complex systems on their own. Our involvement helped make sure Navya's concerns reached the right staff for a fair resolution.





Improving communication to support accessible service

Petro, a recent immigrant, was living in a City-contracted shelter. When the shelter kitchen closed for renovations, residents could no longer prepare their own food.

Petro couldn't eat the catered meals provided due to dietary requirements related to a medical condition.

What we did

We contacted the Toronto Shelter and Support Services division (TSSS) to understand how dietary needs were being addressed during the kitchen closure. TSSS staff confirmed that a process was in place for residents to communicate dietary requirements. However, on-site shelter staff confirmed that Petro wasn't aware of the process.

The result

Although the City had a process to support shelter residents' dietary requirements, gaps in communication prevented Petro from accessing meals that met their dietary requirements. The City had on-site shelter staff follow up with Petro to ensure clear communication so that the issue was resolved.



Why this matters

City divisions working with contracted operators must ensure front-line staff clearly communicate available supports to those who need them the most. When shelter residents know how to access essential services like appropriate meals, they face fewer barriers to basic needs. This oversight creates equitable access of essential services.



Facilitating an application review and access to supports

Simone, a full-time caregiver and mother of a child with severe disabilities and complex medical needs, contacted our office with urgent housing concerns.

As a recipient of the City's Emergency Family Shelter Support program, she feared she would be required to move from her current location into a shelter that couldn't accommodate her child's needs and was far from their medical supports. She'd interacted with multiple staff across divisions but didn't receive written information outlining the program's terms.

Simone was also concerned that her application to the Special Priority Program (SPP) for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing had been denied. The SPP provides priority access to social housing for individuals who are victims of abuse or trafficking. Simone said the nature of the intimate partner violence she was experiencing made it difficult to meet the program's criteria. Simone described the emergency assistance process as unclear and difficult to navigate.

What we did

We flagged her SPP application for review by Access to Housing, a unit within the Housing Secretariat. Following the review, staff approved



and backdated her application. During our involvement, staff also connected Simone to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), a portable rent supplement that helps people afford private market housing. Simone was found to be eligible for this support.

The result

Simone accepted the COHB while maintaining her priority position on the waiting list for RGI housing.

Why this matters

Residents facing complex and urgent circumstances require coordinated, trauma-informed service delivery and clear communication. City staff should conduct reviews that consider the full context of a resident's circumstances to help ensure eligible residents access supports without delay. This improves housing stability for the most vulnerable in our city.



Clarifying policies for community arena access

Mason received a temporary suspension from a City of Toronto community arena managed by a volunteer board.

He was concerned that the arena didn't follow a fair process and that he was unfairly denied access to a City facility.

What we did

We reviewed the communications between Mason and the board, examined the arena's policies and spoke with City and arena staff. In addition, we looked at the City policies that apply to the arena.

We identified fairness issues in how the suspension was issued and discussed with the arena's management. We advised the arena to develop a community code of conduct policy and process, which has since been finalized.

The result

Mason was satisfied that fairness concerns were identified and addressed with the arena's management.

Why this matters

Clear processes help ensure decisions are made fairly and consistently, especially in situations which may involve heightened tension or stress. When expectations and processes are documented, people understand what to expect and how concerns will be handled. This strengthens accountability in community spaces.





Supporting more transparent grant guidelines

Jordan contacted us after their organization wasn't awarded funding under the Black-Mandated Funding Framework (BMFF) grant program.

The program aims to address funding gaps and historical underinvestment in organizations serving Toronto's Black communities.

Jordan raised concerns about the decision-making process and believed staff in the City's Social Development division may have relied on public sources rather than on application materials only. Jordan had already escalated their concerns and received the division's final response before contacting us.

What we did

We spoke with Jordan multiple times to understand their concerns and experience. We also met with Social Development staff to gather information about the grant process. We reviewed documents provided by Jordan, as well as the City's grant policy and the BMFF program guidelines.

Our review identified gaps in the BMFF program guidelines provided to applicants. We found that the guidelines didn't clearly state:

- the purpose and impact of pre-application and eligibility sessions
- the use of publicly available information when verifying applications
- how funding decisions are made



We suggested updates to program guidelines to improve transparency, which the division accepted.

The result

Although the funding outcome didn't change, Jordan expressed appreciation for the clarity we provided. Social Development staff committed to updating the BMFF grant guidelines to reflect our suggestions. Staff also shared the information with the City's Grants Coordinating Committee which led other divisions to review their grant guidelines as a result of our involvement.

Why this matters

Clear and transparent guidelines strengthen fairness in competitive funding processes. When people understand how public funds are allocated, it reduces confusion and builds trust in City services. Our involvement increased transparency to make sure decision-making is clear, and led to meaningful improvements without a formal investigation. The division also shared these changes with the City's Grants Coordinating committee, prompting broader updates to grant guidelines beyond just this one program.



Confirming the status of a refund

Anh had waited several months for a recreation program refund. The City had mailed a cheque earlier in the year, but the address was missing Anh's unit number and she never received it.

After correcting the address, the City told Anh that the cheque would be tracked to ensure it hadn't been cashed, and the credit would be added to her recreation account. Weeks passed without an update and Anh reached out to us.

What we did

We contacted Parks and Recreation to look into the status of Anh's account credit.

The result

Parks and Recreation staff reviewed the situation, confirmed the original cheque hadn't been cashed and added the credit to Anh's account. Staff also followed up with her directly and acknowledged the delay and frustration Anh had experienced.

Why this matters

Clear follow-up and timely communication help ensure administrative errors don't become prolonged frustrations. When City staff promptly correct errors, people receive services they are entitled to without unnecessary delay. This helps protect public trust in municipal government.





Clarifying a ticketing concern

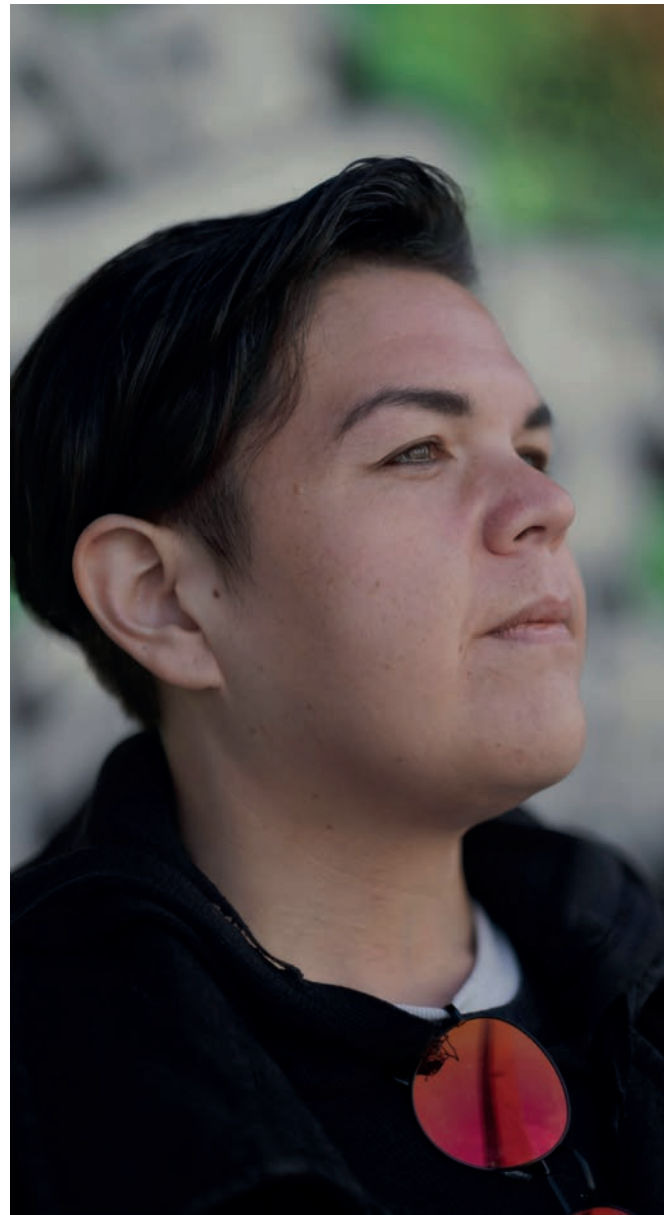
Zayan lives on an arterial road—a larger, high-capacity road designed to carry large volumes of traffic. For medical reasons, they had a City-approved accessible parking space in front of their property.

Despite this, they received a parking ticket for parking in the spot between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. and contacted us for answers.

What we did

We provided Zayan with a referral to the appropriate City division and contacted Transportation Services to learn more about the process. City staff let us know that accessible parking spots are only exempt from some parking rules, and that a City bylaw does not exempt drivers with accessible permits from rush hour restrictions.

Although the City followed relevant bylaws, we identified concerns about whether exemptions and restrictions were clearly communicated in writing to people getting an accessible parking space. We asked the City to share this information directly with Zayan.



The result

Zayan received clarification on the peak-period parking restrictions. Transportation Services confirmed that applicants are typically informed of approvals by phone and are not provided with written confirmation. Staff updated report templates and standard operating procedures to improve clarity so that the City communicates exemptions and restrictions to people in writing.

Why this matters

Clear communication supports transparency and helps people understand restrictions so they can make informed decisions and avoid unanticipated penalties.



Confirming decision-making steps in a consultation process

Ren was concerned about the installation of a bike lane and related street changes that removed on-street parking spaces directly in front of his home.

Ren said that the loss of parking access created challenges for him and he believed that Transportation Services did not provide sufficient notice of the change. Dissatisfied with the division's response to his concerns, he reached out to our office for answers.

What we did

We reviewed the communication between Transportation Services and Ren, as well as the City's implementation and consultation process for the bike lane. We also spoke with City staff and found that they had mailed public consultation notices to residents within the area. The notice outlined multiple ways residents could provide their feedback about the upcoming work including by phone, email, regular mail and through an online survey.

The City also held a virtual public meeting to hear feedback from residents. Ren had unfortunately missed the notice and didn't participate.



The result

We explained the consultation steps that the City had taken with the public. Although Ren was disappointed, he was grateful to our office for reviewing his concern.

Why this matters

Sometimes, after we gather and consider all the available evidence, we find that the City applied its policies and procedures fairly, as in this case. Regardless of whether we ultimately identify unfairness, all people deserve to have their concerns heard.



Investigation reports



“I am truly grateful for the support I received from Ombudsman Toronto.”

Member of the public



An investigation into the City's response to a vital services outage in a multi-tenant home

When 11 tenants lost heat, water and electricity after a small fire in their rooming house, they reached out to the City of Toronto for help. Our investigation found that bylaw officers and managers from the City's Municipal Licensing and Standards Division (MLS) acted in a biased and arbitrary manner when they declined to help them.



After tenants lived without vital services for a week, they contacted the City for help. The City has bylaws requiring landlords to provide vital services such as gas, electricity and hot and cold water to tenants. MLS had the power to push the landlord to restore the vital services but decided not to enforce the bylaw.

Unable to tolerate their living conditions, 10 of the 11 tenants moved out. The experience had affected their physical and mental health and resulted in a loss of dignity. Some of them moved into homes with higher rents and less security of tenure. One of the tenants remained in the building through the winter, without heat or running water. The vital services outage lasted for six months.

[Learn more](#)

Read the full report at
ombudsmantoronto.ca/investigation-reports

“The investigation demonstrates the importance of the City having effective and responsive programs that meaningfully support tenants. I fully support all recommendations from the Ombudsman.”

Mayor Olivia Chow

What we found

Our investigation found that:

- MLS acted arbitrarily and did not enforce its own bylaws.
- MLS staff were not properly trained on bylaws and procedures.
- The Housing Secretariat’s Eviction Prevention in the Community program (EPIC) policies and procedures were unclear.
- City staff’s actions were inconsistent with Toronto Housing Charter commitments.

Our recommendations

Ombudsman Toronto made 27 recommendations, including that:

- MLS should review how it enforces the standards for rental housing and develop a process for responding to the loss of heat, power and water.
- MLS should improve the training and supervision of bylaw officers.
- The City’s Housing Secretariat should develop guidelines on exercising discretion in the delivery of emergency assistance through EPIC.
- Staff at EPIC and MLS engaged in housing should be trained on the requirements of the Toronto Housing Charter.

The City has accepted all 27 of the recommendations made. We will be following up to ensure our recommendations are implemented.

How our investigation drove change

Community organizations first raised concerns through engagement with our Housing Unit. Through our investigation, we brought their concerns directly to City Council, making sure that the experiences of affected tenants informed the City’s future handling of cases like this.

The Mayor chose our report as a key item, leading to a Council debate and City staff being held publicly accountable. City Council built on our findings by introducing other motions to strengthen rental standards enforcement and make it easier for the City to do repairs themselves, at the expense of the owner.

What is changing at the City

MLS and the Housing Secretariat are actively implementing our recommendations to enhance accountability and fairness.

Once implemented, our recommendations will strengthen the City’s policies and programs and bring them in line with the Toronto Housing Charter. The City is making progress to ensure that when residents report vital service outages or other serious housing issues, they can expect:

- fast and effective service
- necessary housing supports while the problem is fixed
- that their human right to housing is prioritized

We continue to work with community partners to identify emerging housing concerns.



“The Ombudsman’s investigation into MLS not only shone light on the abysmal conditions ... that so many tenants in our city have to deal with, but also pushed the City of Toronto to step up and take real action to prevent these kinds of blatant injustices from happening again.”

Tenant advocate



An investigation into the City's handling of social assistance overpayments

A Toronto mother complained to us after the City of Toronto's Employment and Social Services (TESS) division told her she had received \$25,546 in excess social assistance benefits over the past 10 years.

Our investigation found that TESS made multiple errors in how it responded to the Toronto mother. City staff did not give her a clear explanation of what she owed, neglected information that supported her case, didn't speak to her to understand the facts and kept her waiting for hours when she tried to speak to a supervisor.



Dina (as she is named in the report) accepted responsibility for half of the amount. But TESS claimed she still owed about \$13,000 because she and her adult child had not reported income they had earned. Dina said she had provided City staff with documents showing that her child's

income was exempt because they were a full-time student. Dina asked questions, resubmitted documents and tried to speak with management in person, but did not receive a fair response. Unable to resolve the issue on her own, Dina turned to Ombudsman Toronto for help.

[Learn more](#)

Read the full report at
ombudsmantoronto.ca/investigation-reports

“A Toronto mother was mistakenly ordered to pay back tens of thousands of dollars in social assistance—an error only fixed after the city’s accountability watchdog launched a probe.”

Mahdis Habibinia, Toronto Star

What we found

- TESS has good procedures in place, but staff failed to follow them and could not explain why.
- City staff did not inform Dina they were doing a financial review of her benefits, so the news she owed \$25,546 in overpayments came without warning.
- Before giving her a chance to respond, City staff finalized overpayments and immediately began deducting her assistance by 10 per cent (about \$96 per month.)
- City staff did not keep proper records that would have meant thousands of dollars of Dina and her adult child’s income was exempt. Additional mistakes occurred because staff worked from incomplete and confusing information.
- Two separate reviews failed to catch and correct errors. City staff never spoke to Dina to understand the facts during either review.
- After reversing almost half of the overpayments, TESS still sent Dina a decision letter that said she owed the full \$25,546.
- Dina went to a local office to speak to a supervisor, but after waiting for hours, she left without being seen. This fell short of TESS’s customer service standards, which state that clients should be able to speak to management within 30 minutes of arriving.
- Management’s involvement was marked by delays and inaction. For two years, supervisors and managers took no action to correct about \$2,400 in overpayments that were assessed incorrectly. TESS did not reverse the overpayments until after Ombudsman Addo launched this investigation.

Our recommendations

We made 18 recommendations designed to strengthen TESS’s processes concerning overpayments, financial reviews, related safeguards and communication. The City accepted all the recommendations and provided a thoughtful and detailed response. Our office was encouraged to learn about the measures that TESS is already undertaking to address the recommendations. Ombudsman Toronto will be following up to ensure the recommendations are implemented.



Our impact over the years





We don't just make recommendations—we support lasting improvements.

Since 2009, we've handled over 39,000 cases and made over 600 formal recommendations to improve City of Toronto services.

When we release formal investigations with recommendations, we work closely with the City so changes are:

- **fair and transparent**, guided by our expertise in administrative fairness
- **practical and achievable**, tailored to the resources and realities of each City service
- **long-lasting**, so the City can prevent costly, avoidable mistakes from happening again
- **open and transparent**, to support public trust in City services

How we ensure change sticks

To ensure the recommendations we make lead to lasting change, we consult regularly with City staff on the effective implementation of our recommendations and escalate if progress stalls, including reporting back to Council, if necessary.

Since our founding in 2009:

39,000+

cases handled

207%

increase in cases in
17 years

52

formal reports

610

formal recommendations
made to improve fairness
in City systems

Expanded mandate



housing rights
oversight



systemic police
policy review

Capacity reality



one of the lowest
staff-to-population ratios among
ombudsman offices in Canada



Working together



“Your insights and learnings were so helpful. Thank you again for making the time, for being so open, and supporting us ... ”

Senior City staff



Cultivating community connections

Engaging with the public helps us better understand the challenges people face and strengthens our work.



In 2025, we participated in **45 engagement activities with the public**. We focused on increasing awareness and reducing barriers, especially for communities facing the greatest obstacles to accessing City services.

Engagement helps us to:



increase awareness
of our work so that
people who feel they
have been treated
unfairly by the City
know how to access
our office



reduce barriers
and reflect the voices
of equity-deserving
communities in our work



**identify emerging
issues** to ground our
work in real-world
experiences



maintain transparency
and strengthen public
accountability



drive focused efforts that lead
to meaningful improvements
and positive change that meets
people's needs

Highlights of 2025

Reaching equity-deserving communities

While our services are available to everyone, those most affected by unfair City actions may not know about us or feel comfortable contacting us. In 2025, we expanded our presence, including beyond the downtown core. We met with people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity, seniors, newcomers and community groups across Toronto.

This work is aimed at making sure people know about our office, encounter fewer barriers to contacting us, have their concerns identified early and see their experiences reflected in our work.

In 2026, we'll continue meeting people where they are and ensuring our work reflects real needs.

Sharing our learnings with the housing rights community

We presented at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in October, sharing learnings from our Housing Unit's first two years.

As the only municipal ombudsman office in Canada with a fairness and a right-to-housing lens, we offered unique insights into what the right to housing looks like in practice and key barriers that remain.

This work is aimed at making sure partners and advocates access practical insights from our investigations, understand how policy commitments translate to implementation and can benefit from lessons learned.

In 2026, we'll continue sharing tools, documenting best practices and contributing to a broader community of practice to support consistent, accountable implementation of the right to housing in Canada.



Hosting community share-back sessions

Following two Housing Unit investigations, we hosted three share-back sessions, including two for the public and one with the rooming house tenants whose experience with the City informed our vital services investigation.

This work is aimed at making sure people engage with our findings in more accessible ways, understand outcomes and next steps, see transparency in how we work and know what to do if they face similar issues.

We'll continue these sessions as part of our commitment to meaningful community dialogue.



Deepening our engagement with Indigenous Peoples

In partnership with an Indigenous facilitator, we're implementing plans to strengthen relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. We're focusing on relationship-building, ongoing dialogue and listening to improve access to our services and further advance our commitment to reconciliation in practice.

This work is aimed at ensuring First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples know about our office, encounter fewer barriers to accessing our services and experience outcomes that meaningfully address their needs.

We'll continue strengthening relationships, improving access and embedding reconciliation into our work in collaboration with Indigenous communities. This work builds trust, supports culturally responsive service and ensures we better respond to the experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in Toronto.



“Thank you once again for your participation in our event. Your presence and support helped make the day a success for our community.”

Community organizer

Who did we connect with?

In 2025, our engagement efforts reached hundreds of people, including:

- those who use City of Toronto services
- community groups and grassroots organizations that serve equity-deserving groups
- legal clinics and advocates
- equity-deserving communities
- service providers working directly with people in Toronto

Each group plays a distinct role in strengthening fairness and accountability in Toronto’s public services, from sharing individual experiences to identifying systemic issues and helping us connect with communities more broadly.



Thank you

We’re deeply appreciative of everyone who’s taken the time to meet with us and share their insights and experiences. If you have an issue you’d like to discuss, please get in touch.



Working with City staff

We help City staff build fairness into programs. By anticipating concerns from the start, we can help staff prevent issues from escalating.

City staff regularly consult us when developing new initiatives or refining existing processes. This proactive approach identifies and resolves fairness risks early, reducing avoidable complaints and improving outcomes for the public.

We also deliver engagement sessions and educational workshops to strengthen understanding of administrative fairness and clarify how our office can be a resource for City staff. Sessions range from general awareness to customized workshops tailored to a division's specific needs.

A common theme in 2025 was fairly managing challenging complainant behaviour. We delivered

customized sessions to several City divisions, including Seniors Services and Long-Term Care, Children's Services and Animal Services in Municipal Licensing and Standards. These were among the **44 consultation and engagement sessions** we held with City staff in 2025.

Why this matters

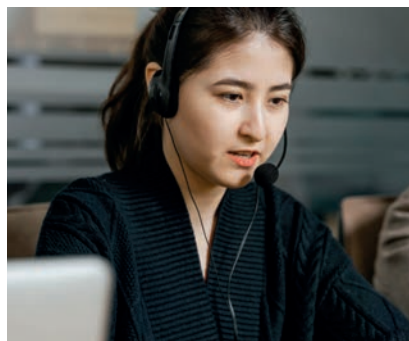
Building capacity in administrative fairness strengthens service delivery across the City. When staff understand and apply fairness principles consistently, they can address concerns proactively. This prevents avoidable escalation, reduces risk and reinforces a culture of fairness across the City.

Highlights of 2025



Toronto Paramedic Services

We provided advice to ensure its new lost-and-found policy for items left by transported patients was fair, clear and accessible.



311 Toronto

We offered guidance on implementing a fair and transparent alternative service arrangement for callers exhibiting challenging behaviour.



The 519

We delivered a workshop on administrative fairness and discussed real case studies involving complex complaints.



Financials

Our operating budget allocation approved by City Council was \$4 million in 2025.

An external audit firm conducts a compliance audit of Ombudsman Toronto annually. All unused funds are returned to the City Treasury.



“I wanted to express our thanks and appreciation for the time you spent with us in the workshop and training session ... Our team thought the information, presentation and discussions were amazing and super helpful ... you provided really helpful context and framing as public servants.”

Senior City staff



Ombudsman
Toronto

At Ombudsman Toronto, we hold the City of Toronto accountable to the people it serves—**you.**

Contact us if you feel you've been treated unfairly by the City.

Email

ombudsman@toronto.ca

Phone

416-392-7062

Address

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