

Toronto Shelter and Support Services



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

Land Acknowledgement for Toronto



We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and 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 Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.



General Manager's Message



In 2023, we continued to experience significant demand for shelter services, largely driven by the ongoing housing crisis, insufficient wage and income supports, and the large-scale arrival of refugee claimants in Toronto. In May 2023, Council joined other municipalities in declaring homelessness an emergency, an important recognition of the need for more intergovernmental coordination, funding and supports to address the ongoing challenges the sector continues to face.

I, along with members of our senior management team, remain grateful to our staff and many partners who continue to work alongside us to ensure that the people we serve receive the best possible care and support. As outlined in these pages, in 2023, we collectively provided emergency shelter to close to 22,000 unique individuals and helped more than 5,900 people to move into permanent housing. This is important and critical work that we need to celebrate.

In 2023, we were pleased to launch our division's new name to better reflect the important work that we do. We also introduced several pivotal enhancements to our services, including new shelter standards for Confronting Anti-Black Racism and lower temperature thresholds to activate important winter services. We also launched our 10-year Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, which will set the foundation for shelter system stability.

In 2023, we were also pleased to celebrate the five-year anniversary of our Meeting in the Middle Strategy and commitment to advancing reconciliation.

The work we do matters. We remain committed to promoting equity and inclusion, and working together to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

With sincere thanks,

Gord Tanner
Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS)

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2023 Accomplishments



Provided emergency shelter to close to **22,000** people at City-run and -funded shelters, 24-hour respite sites, 24-hour women's drop-in programs and Warming Centres



Launched our **10-year** Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy

Assisted more than **5,900** people to move into permanent housing

Connected with individuals living outside more than **24,500** times



Invested in a new pilot program to provide intensive mental health services to individuals experiencing homelessness on the TTC



Provided emergency shelter and wrap-around supports to **8,500** refugee claimants looking to build a new life in Canada



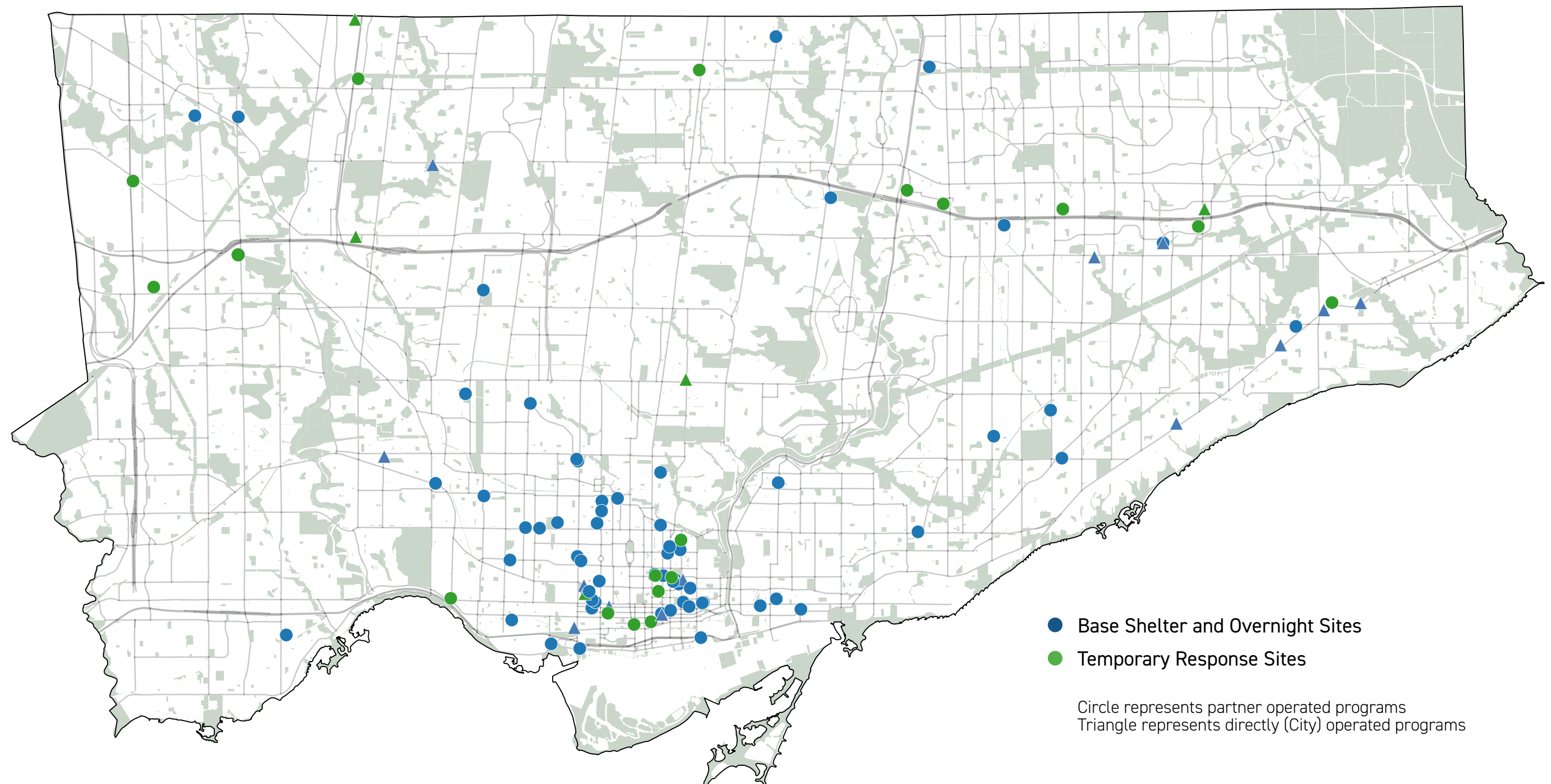
Embedded the Encampment Office into our Division, and established a new Refugee Response Unit and Outreach and Access section

Celebrated the **5-year** anniversary of our Meeting in the Middle strategy to advance reconciliation and opened a new shelter for Indigenous Youth



Continued work on Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR), including the launch of new CABR shelter standards

Shelter Services in Toronto



African Ancestral Acknowledgement

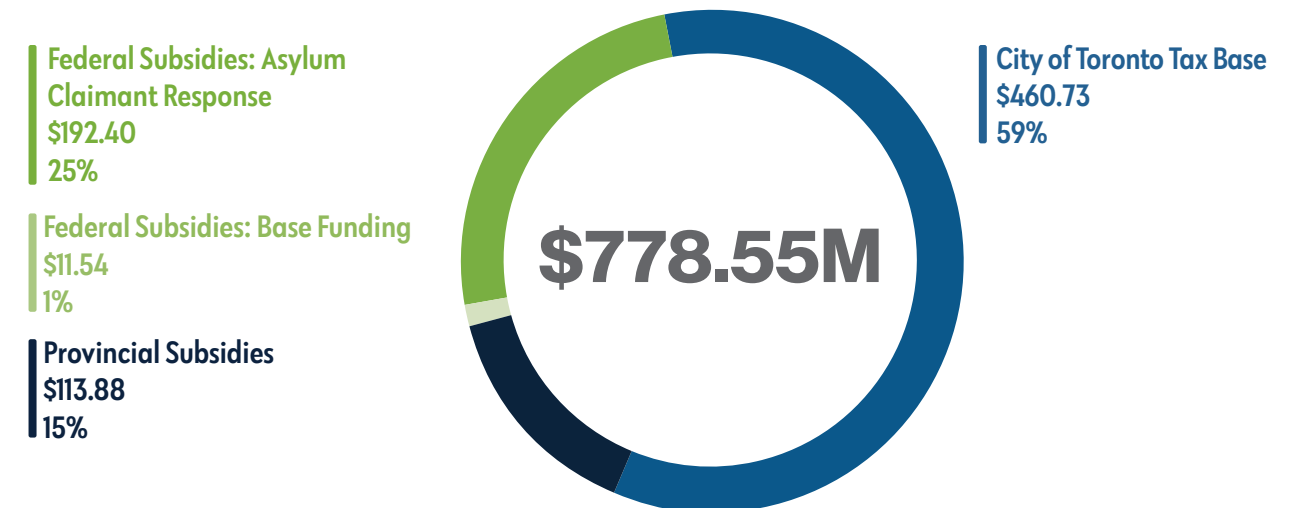
The City of Toronto acknowledges all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

This painting was created by Carol Mc Donald, Manager, Women's Residence, to commemorate TSSS' Divisional Mentorship Program for Black Staff.

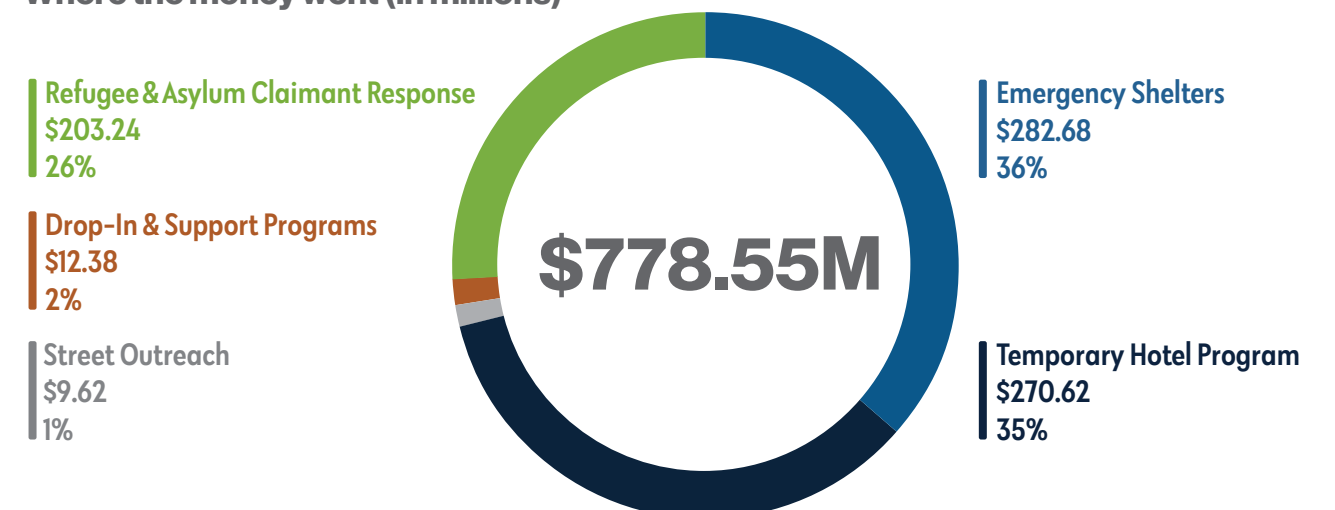
Financial Highlights

Toronto Shelter and Support Services' 2023 Operating budget was \$778.55 million. The funds we receive are from several sources, including the City's tax base and Federal and Provincial Governments. Together, the funds ensure we can continue to provide housing-focused, client-centred services to people experiencing homelessness through community outreach programs, emergency shelter, respite and wrap-around supports, and daytime drop-in programs.

Where the money came from (in millions)



Where the money went (in millions)



Who We Serve

“ That’s where he met Sarah and Russell – two Street Outreach Counsellors. His decision to speak with them changed his life.

”

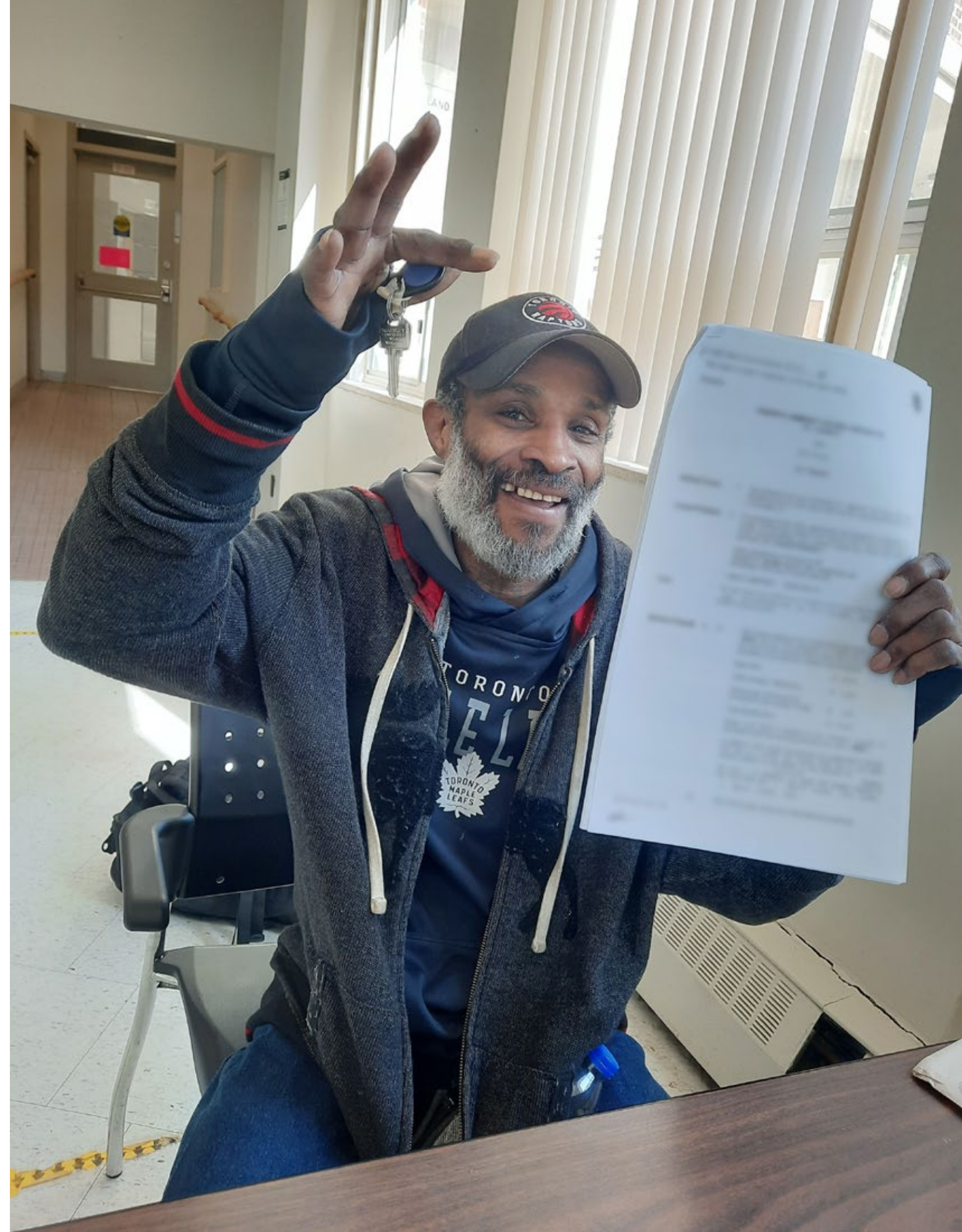
Karl

After being released from jail, Karl found himself in an encampment under the Gardiner Expressway. That’s where he met Sarah and Russell – two Street Outreach Counsellors. His decision to speak with them changed his life.

Although hesitant at first, Karl ended up having a long talk with the counsellors. He told them about his substance use, his struggle to find work, and how he lost his ID and most of his belongings. Sarah and Russell helped Karl enter the shelter system.

Working with Sarah, Karl got all the necessary documentation to qualify for a home through the City of Toronto’s Rapid Rehousing Initiative. A few weeks later, he secured a bachelor apartment in the community he grew up in. It was what he always wanted.

Karl got emotional when he signed his lease – grateful for the support he received. He commends the counsellors for listening to him and helping him find a place to call home. By opening up to Sarah and Russell, Karl opened the door to safe, stable housing.



Michael

Becoming homeless in September of last year and having to live in a tent in Allan Gardens weighed heavily on Michael's emotional and mental health. He was feeling anxious and stressed a lot.

"When I met Gareth – a City of Toronto street outreach worker – he told me that his job was to find me housing that is suitable to my needs. Then, he told me that Homes First [a City-funded agency] had a really nice unit to show me. I am so grateful to Gareth, Streets to Homes, and Homes First for all of the work that they have done to get me this apartment. I'm in a really nice bachelor apartment that I now call home."



G.E.

After losing his job and his housing on the same day, G.E. made his way to Seaton House for shelter. That's where he connected with Laura – an Indigenous counsellor.

The purpose of the Indigenous counsellor and the Indigenous Case Management Support Program is to promote and provide culturally relevant services to the Indigenous residents at Seaton House. Working with Laura and Indigenous-led partner agencies like Anishnawbe Health Toronto and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, G.E. was able to access supports and services, and ultimately, secured permanent housing.



Jonathan

"I'm very grateful that I woke up today because it gives me a chance to have a better day than the day before." After experiencing homelessness for several years, Jonathan looks ahead – filled with hope.

"I lost a lot when my dad passed away. I relied on him so much that when he died, I just let everything go. I basically had a nervous breakdown. I didn't know how to deal with it, so I just walked out on life."

"I was out in the street for two to three years before I went to the shelter. A friend of mine dragged me there because he was scared I was gonna freeze to death." Jonathan ended up at the Scott Mission – and began his journey out of homelessness. "They feed you. They clothe you. You have a bed. You have hot meals. And they'll sit and talk to you and try to work out your problems. I'm so glad I went to that shelter because I really sense an improvement in my quality of life," Jonathan explained.

Since leaving the shelter, Jonathan has been stably housed for five years. He is a regular volunteer at the Fort York Food Bank – an organization that provides hot meals and groceries to low-income individuals and families in downtown Toronto.

"I had a spot for like four years where I was really unhappy. Now, I see people coming into the food bank and I see them leave smiling. How can you feel bad about that?" Thanks to Jonathan, more Torontonians will have a better day than the day before.

“ They feed you. They clothe you. You have a bed. You have hot meals. And they'll sit and talk to you and try to work out your problems. I'm so glad I went to that shelter because I really sense an improvement in my quality of life. ”



Responding to Demand for Homelessness Services

We continued to experience significant demand for emergency shelter services in 2023 for many reasons, including the ongoing housing and opioid poisoning crisis, insufficient wages and income supports that have not kept pace with the rising cost of living, and a record number of refugee claimants seeking emergency shelter. In May 2023, City Council joined other municipalities in declaring homelessness an emergency.

To help respond to demand, staff and partners worked together to extend the leases for most temporary shelter sites, introduce capacity by adjusting physical distancing measures, and enhance winter and refugee response services. We also launched a new capital infrastructure strategy that will provide stability to the system in the years to come, along with guidelines for building these sites.

Extending Temporary Shelter Sites and Revising Distancing to Add Capacity

In 2023, we continued the Council-approved plan to gradually transition out of temporary shelter sites in a way that minimized the impact on the shelter system and those who rely on services delivered through the sites. Staff worked to extend the majority of temporary lease and licensing agreements. Through negotiations, five sites were identified for closure as the property owners required the sites back to resume regular operations.

As sites closed, we worked closely with site operators and clients to develop relocation plans that matched clients with permanent housing, as much as possible, or space in the shelter system that met their needs.

To introduce additional capacity to respond to demand, we also worked with providers across the shelter system to return to pre-pandemic distancing between beds, while maintaining rigorous infection prevention and control measures. This work helped to add approximately 450 additional spaces into the shelter system.

Client outcomes from all temporary sites closed in 2023

	Housing	Shelter Referral/ Self-Referral	Unknown Location
Number of People	168	363	49
Percentage	29%	63%	8%

Enhancing Winter Services

We continued to work with our partners to help as many people as possible to access emergency services during the 2022/2023 winter season, which ended on April 15. This included activating Warming Centres during periods of colder temperatures and mobilizing quickly on direction from Council to keep the Centre at Metro Hall open continuously starting in February.

In May, Council approved a staff report that recommended changing the criteria for activating Warming Centres. Instead of opening at -15 degrees Celsius, Council approved the recommendation to open Warming Centres at -5 degrees Celsius or during a winter weather event warning, starting for the 2023/2024 winter season. This recommendation was informed by feedback from community partners and stakeholders, input from service users and staff, and advice from health experts including Toronto Public Health.

Staff started work to plan for the 2023/2024 winter season in April, looking to identify and secure winter spaces for use, as well as to incorporate feedback to improve planning and coordination of services. Through this work, the 2023/2024 winter services plan, which kicked off on November 15, included:

- 180 spaces added in the shelter system
- 380 spaces offered at new 24-hour winter respite sites
- four Warming Centres activated when temperature reached -5 degrees Celsius or during a winter weather event warning
- extended operating hours at 10 drop-in locations
- continued street outreach, including additional teams who worked to connect with individuals outside during periods of extreme cold
- activating 30 additional Warming Centres spaces when temperatures hit -15 degrees Celsius, along with temporary contingency spaces in areas not traditionally used for sleeping (i.e. common areas, boardrooms)
- 275 housing units that would become available throughout the winter season

Several of the sites used for the 2023/2024 winter season have been secured for multiple years, helping to add important stability to future winter plans.

For the 2023/2024 winter season, to improve communications, we developed a listserv that members could sign up for to be notified when Warming Centres opened and closed. We also featured ads in Yonge–Dundas Square and used voice technology to ensure callers to Central Intake could learn that Warming Centres were open and the locations without having to speak to a customer service agent.

Drop-in Programs

In 2023, we provided funding to support 29 drop-in programs located in neighbourhoods across the city. The programs, run by our community partners, provide a range of valuable services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, such as food, healthcare, laundry, showers, and referrals to other social and community programming. Many of these programs also provided extended drop-in hours throughout the winter, helping to provide an additional place for people to get in from the cold.



Refugee Claimant Response

The number of refugee claimants seeking emergency shelter increased significantly in 2023. At the beginning of the year there were 2,544 refugee claimants in the shelter system. By the end of December that number had grown to 4,193. With shelter capacity at its limit, an additional 1,395 refugee claimants were also being supported outside of the shelter system.

To provide additional capacity, in July we worked quickly with the Canadian Red Cross to open 250 new shelter beds. Despite this work, the number of refugee clients unable to be matched to shelter remained high, resulting in lines forming outside of the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC) and people camping on the street.

Throughout the summer and fall, we worked with City divisions and community partners to support several Black-led churches and other organizations, including Revivaltime Tabernacle, Dominion International Church and Pilgrim Feast Tabernacles who were at the forefront of the response. We remain grateful for their leadership.

Throughout the year, we joined municipalities from across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), and other key stakeholders, to continue to advocate for additional funds from the Federal government, along with an intergovernmental strategy to respond to the large-scale arrival of refugee claimants. This included establishing regular senior-level intergovernmental meetings early in 2023 to discuss refugee response, as well as a Working Group to plan for the strategy and future reception centre.

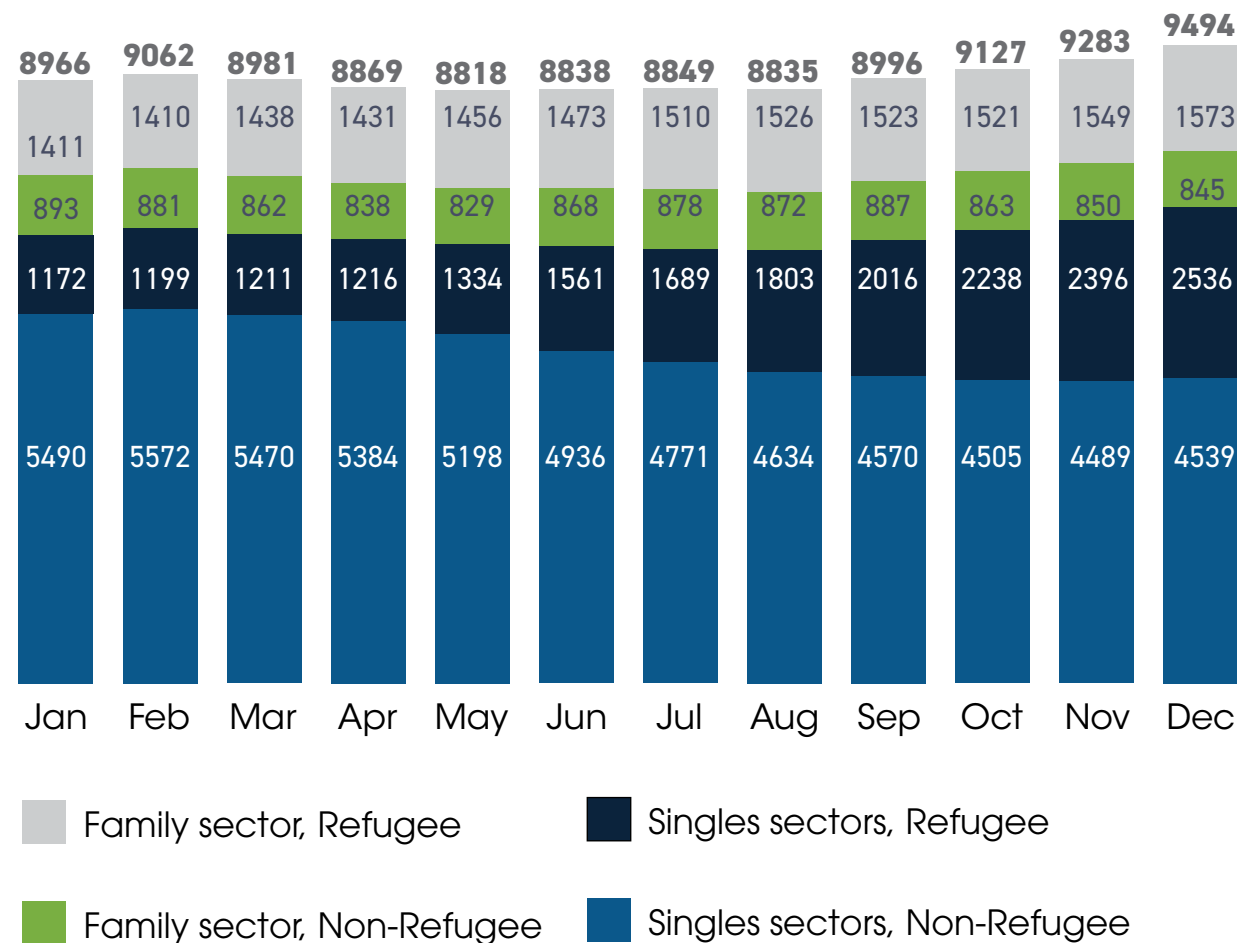
We also continued to advocate for additional Canada–Ontario Housing Benefits, which have been an effective tool to help refugees and other individuals experiencing homelessness to secure permanent housing. Working together with sector partners and clients, close to 3,000 refugee claimants moved from the shelter system into permanent housing in 2023.

Other 2023 highlights include:

- establishing a dedicated Project Director and team in TSSS to lead the Division's response to refugee arrivals and intergovernmental advocacy, and manage TSSS' refugee-serving shelter programs
- working with other City divisions to create a dedicated section on the City's DonateTO webpage to allow members of the public to donate and provide information on rental units that could be used to support refugee claimants
- distributing \$750,000 that was approved by Council to reimburse churches and community organizations involved in sheltering refugee claimants. Additional funds were also provided to churches at the forefront of the response

- the establishment of a dedicated 24-hour respite for refugee claimants
- ongoing work with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to coordinate transfers of refugee claimants to IRCC hotels, and with the provincial Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills development to advocate for and facilitate coordination of provincially funded settlement services in the City's shelter system

2023 Average nightly shelter system occupancy by month, by refugee status and sector



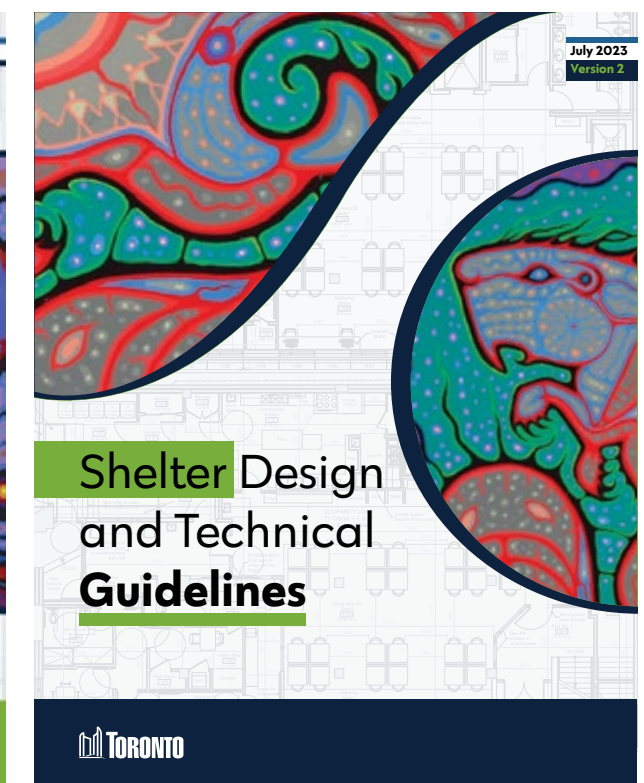
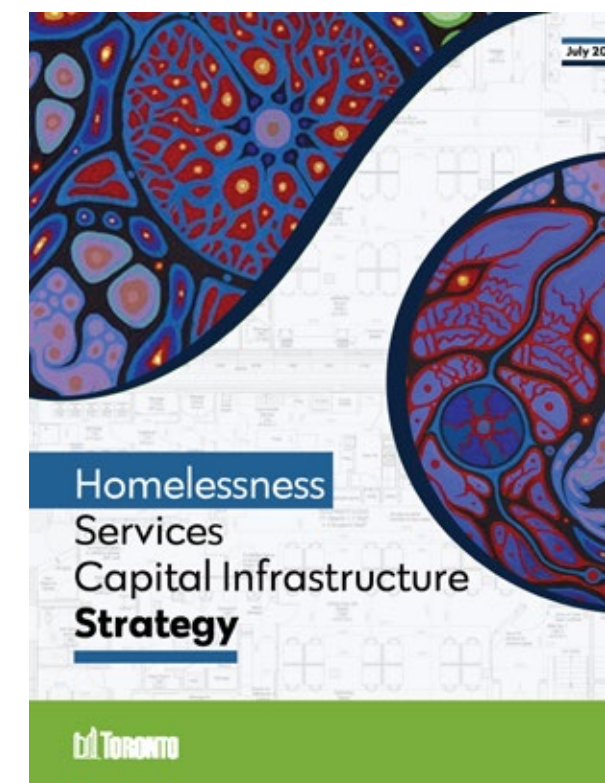
Historic New Deal with Province of Ontario

At the end of 2023, Toronto City Council unanimously adopted recommendations to implement the "Ontario-Toronto New Deal Agreement". Amongst other things, through the agreement, the Provincial Government has committed \$600 million between 2024-2026 to help fund emergency shelter services in Toronto.

Launch of our Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy and New Shelter Design Guidelines

In 2023, we launched several pivotal strategies:

- Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, which provides our short-, medium- and long-term goals to transition from a reactive, emergency response to a long-term proactive approach to capital planning that supports the recovery and stability of the shelter system. The strategy, which was presented and approved by Council in November 2023, recommends moving from a system made up of primarily temporary leases and agreements, to a system with more permanent, purpose-built shelter spaces. The strategy includes moderate growth in areas where there are significant needs, such as families, youth, Black and Indigenous led spaces.
- Updated Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines, which outline design principles and evolving best practices for the planning and design of new or renovated shelters in Toronto. The updated guidelines, which are intended to foster more positive outcomes and experiences for all shelter users, staff, visitors and surrounding communities, were designed through extensive consultation with clients and members of the homelessness services sector.



Reducing Chronic Homelessness

Housing First Approach

In 2023, we focused on fostering a housing first, client-centred approach to help support individuals experiencing homelessness to move into permanent housing. This was done by building the skills and capacity of staff and partners to undertake this important work.

Efforts included:

- hosting monthly Housing Outcomes sessions, where Case Managers and housing staff could learn about best practices and housing resources to support clients
- developing a Shelter Service Model Steering Committee to facilitate strategic oversight and accountability of case management-related work in shelters
- hosting 10 Community of Practice meetings for service providers to learn about follow-up supports to help clients achieve housing stability
- providing quarterly housing outcome reports that include housing checklist data, enabling staff to better understand client housing readiness
- updating the Notice of Collection and By-name List Consent to help clients better understand and consent to how their information is shared with housing and support providers
- coordinating ongoing tax, ID and other Service Canada clinics to help clients meet housing application requirements
- working with York University's Canadian Observatory of Homelessness to validate and review the STARS Supports Assessment. The tool will launch system-wide in 2024 to assess the types of personal and professional supports clients may need to maintain housing
- translating into multiple languages a housing options resource document that provides information for staff and clients
- developing a comprehensive internal Case Management Tools and Resources webpage to help staff at City-led sites support clients in developing permanent housing plans

In addition to this work, in partnership with the Housing Secretariat and senior leaders, we continued to advocate for additional Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits (COHB), which provide a portable benefit to help households with rental housing costs. In July 2023, we were pleased to hear that the City and Ontario Government would each be contributing an additional \$6.67 million to COHB.

Celebrating our Success

Working together, in 2023, 5,927 people experiencing homelessness moved into permanent housing. Of these, 3,964 (66.9%) people were experiencing chronic homelessness.

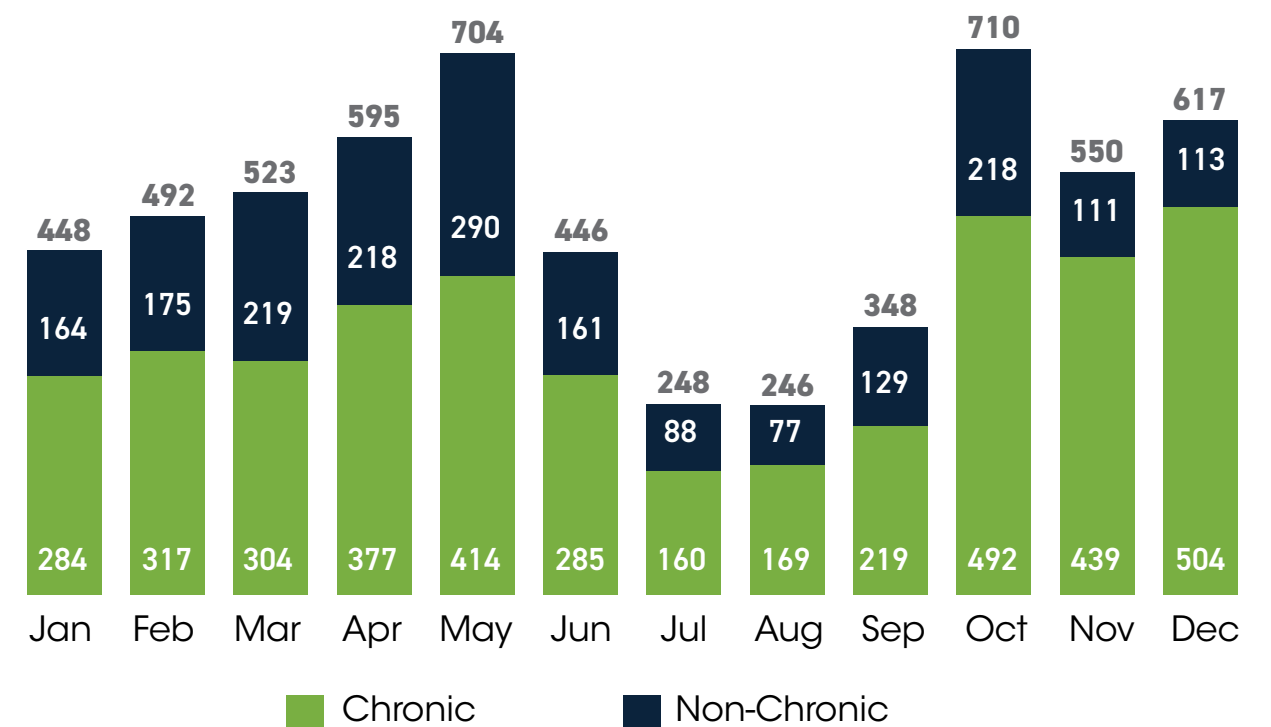
In 2023, 823 people (509 households) were supported through the Rapid Rehousing Program to move into Toronto Community Housing Corporation units with at least 12 months of follow-up support. All units came fully furnished thanks to a partnership with the Furniture Bank. A further 688 people (614 households) moved into units with supports through the PATHS Supportive Housing program.

Providing Supports to Promote Healthy Tenancies

Follow-up supports provide necessary and important services to help individuals transition from homelessness into permanent housing. In partnership with the Housing Secretariat, we supported 985 people to receive follow-up case management supports (i.e., support with food insecurity, community integration, connection to primary and mental health care, etc.)

Another 210 individuals received service specific supports to help them remain stably housed (i.e., access to personal support workers, occupational therapy, trustee services, harm reduction and hoarding supports, etc.), while 45 individuals received both follow-up supports and service specific supports.

People moved from shelter to permanent housing in 2023, by chronicity of homelessness



Advancing Equity and Inclusion

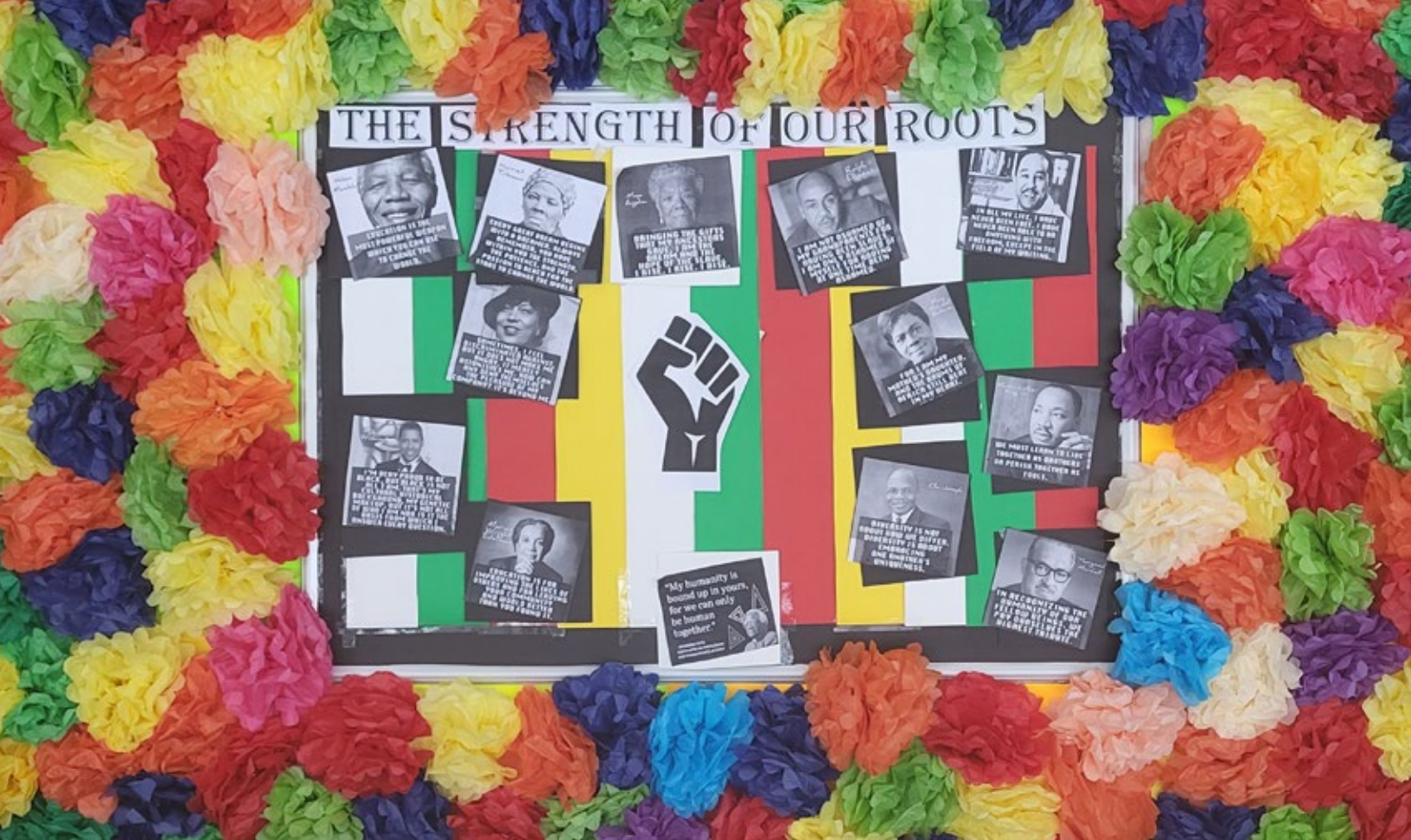
Advancing Reconciliation

This year marked a very significant milestone in our work to advance reconciliation and Meeting in the Middle! TSSS and Indigenous partners gathered to celebrate 5 years since the birth of Meeting in the Middle and the strong partnership and commitments we collectively made to address Indigenous homelessness in Toronto.

Working together we also:

- continued to allocate 20% of all grant funding (\$8.67 million annually) to Indigenous-led projects in collaboration with the Housing Secretariat and the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle. This involved refreshing our Memorandum of Understanding with Indigenous partners – a collaborative framework for priority setting and administration of grants funding
- released a report, in partnership with the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB), of Indigenous Homelessness from the Street Needs Assessment to better understand and inform our work to address Indigenous homelessness in Toronto
- worked closely with Native Child and Family Services Toronto to create Twin Turtles – a new permanent shelter site with culturally based services for Indigenous youth
- implemented the Prioritization and Matching policy, setting a minimum target of matching 25% of all housing opportunities to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. In 2023, 96 Indigenous households were matched to a Rapid Re-Housing Initiative (RRHI) unit, and an additional 139 Indigenous households were supported to exit homelessness into permanent supportive housing opportunities available through Priority Access to Housing and Supports (PATHS)
- included actions to advance reconciliation in the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy by committing to dedicate 20% of future infrastructure funding for new shelter development to Indigenous shelter services
- revised the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines based on consultations with Indigenous communities





Confronting Anti-Black Racism

TSSS continues to prioritize Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) initiatives to support Black staff and clients. Most recently, TSSS celebrated strides made through completing the five shelter service-related CABR Action items identified in the City's Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

In 2023, TSSS continued to engage the division and service sector in creating a variety of supports to improve services and programs for Black clients, increased staff capacity on how to apply an ABR lens to their work, and increased opportunities where staff were recognized for supporting positive and more equitable work environments.

Working together we:

- launched revised Toronto Shelter Standards with 52 new CABR standards in the areas of: capacity building, policy development, considerations for the complaints process, admissions and discharges, client engagement, collaboration with community partners, client focused CABR resources and support, and providing culturally relevant foods
- developed new roles and committees, designed to enhance opportunities for staff from across the division to learn, connect and collaborate on CABR-related topics. This included the introduction of a CABR Staff Committee and CABR Portfolio Liaison team
- launched the CABR Knowledge Exchange Table to facilitate open dialogue between service providers to encourage best practices, new ideas and innovative strategies to better support Black clients and staff across the service sector
- launched the "Focus on Black Excellence Recognition Program" where Black staff who are progressing in their careers and doing exceptional work to confront anti-Black racism within the organization and/or the community are celebrated on a divisional platform
- launched an interdivisional Black Mentorship Program in partnership with Toronto Employment & Social Services to support cross-divisional staff connection, enhance professional growth and build professional and leadership skills for Black staff
- revised the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines based on feedback from community consultations with Black community and client group stakeholders
- worked with community partners and established a client advisory group to develop guidelines on creating safer spaces for women of African descent
- continued collaboration with community partners on a variety of CABR trainings, including the development of training on anti-Black racism as a trigger to mental illness, and piloting the "Partnerships in Parenting Training – Understanding Indigeneity and Anti-Black Racism as it Relates to Child Welfare" in collaboration with child protection agencies
- worked with Eva's Initiative to complete designs that will be used to update their shelter to feature safe spaces for Black queer youth

Delivering High Quality Services

Improving Health Outcomes

In 2023, we continued to work with Ontario Health Toronto Region, Inner City Health Associates and other health partners to review and update the Homelessness Health Services Framework, which provides a consistent and coordinated approach to health services in all shelters. It also maps primary care, harm reduction and mental health resources to shelter locations to identify the resource needs and gaps.

In early 2023, we wrapped up a significant engagement process with sector partners that would inform the framework's ongoing development and success. The final engagement report, completed in Q2 2023, summarized key feedback and recommendations from the sector and has been used to inform planning and future priorities for operationalizing the framework.

In 2023, we also worked closely with our Indigenous homelessness and health partners to develop a document that outlines the work these providers are doing to connect Indigenous people experiencing homelessness to the health services and support they need. The document was created to serve as a strategic planning tool that will support a system-level approach to collaboration between the homelessness and health service sectors to support Indigenous clients. It is also a living document, which can be updated as service needs and provisions shift and grow with community needs.

Partnership Highlight: Inner City Health Associates

Toronto Shelter and Support Services is pleased to work with Inner City Health Associates (ICHA) to provide high quality health services to individuals experiencing homelessness in shelters and drop-ins and those living outside. With over 200 physicians, nurses and administrative staff, ICHA provides transitional primary care, psychiatry, palliative care, population health, substance use care and pediatrics/adolescent medicine.

In 2023, ICHA served 7,941 clients across 68 shelter and drop-in sites. This represents an increase in the number of clients and sites supported in 2022 and 2021, which was 6,522 clients at 53 sites and 5,882 clients at 47 sites, respectively. ICHA's Street Clinical Outreach for Sheltered Torontonians (SCOUT) program also provided mobile clinical care to people living outside, including in encampments.

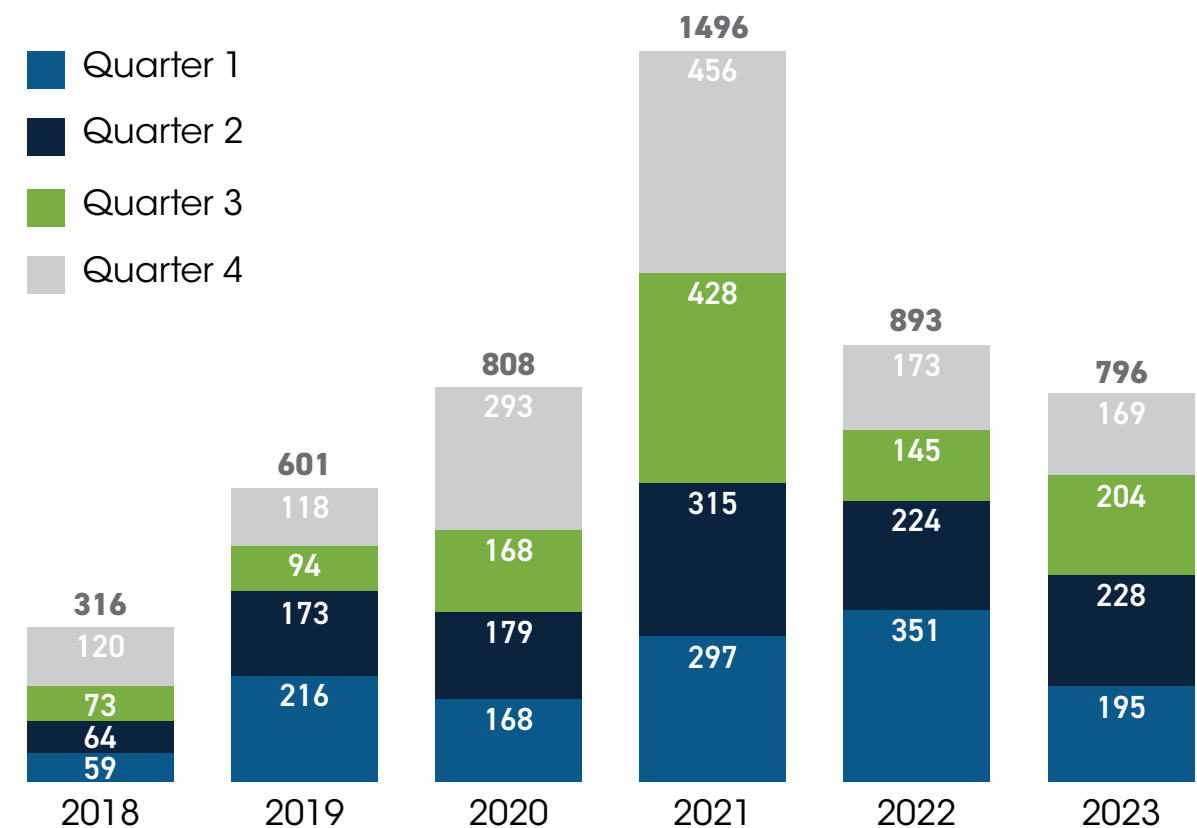
Harm Reduction Services

This year, we continued to enhance our harm reduction approach across the shelter system and expanded mobile and embedded harm reduction supports in targeted shelter sites, prioritized using suspected non-fatal overdose data.

In 2023, we worked with partners, including Toronto Public Health, ICHA, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Center, and The Neighbourhood Group, along with shelter providers to strengthen overdose prevention and response capacity. We did this through ongoing trainings and Naloxone distribution, expanding use of oxygen in overdose response and increasing access to peer-led harm reduction supports, including peer witnessing, at priority shelter sites.

Working with partners, we also provided critical services at five supervised consumption sites, with a new location opening in Q1 2023 to serve a high needs population. In total, there were nearly 4,800 supervised consumption visits in 2023. The sites also provide a range of other important harm reduction, health and case management supports. While the drug toxicity crisis continues to disproportionately impact people experiencing homelessness and those living in the shelter system, there was a decrease in incidence of fatal and non-fatal drug toxicity poisoning at shelter sites in 2023, thanks in part to these measures.

Calls to Toronto Paramedic Services for non-fatal suspected opioid overdoses in homelessness service settings, 2018 - 2023



Building from the initiatives and learnings of the pandemic and evidence from across Canada, in 2023, we began work to co-create a model for embedded harm reduction in the shelter system. We convened two cross-sector workshops with harm reduction partners, shelter providers and people with lived and living experience of substance use. We continue to collaborate with these partners to develop a partnership framework/agreement to strengthen coordination and guide implementation of the embedded harm reduction model going forward.

TSSS' Harm Reduction Advisory Committee, comprised of people with lived/living experience of substance use and homelessness, also met throughout 2023. The Committee contributed to the design, operation and evaluation of policies and initiatives that impact clients who use substances in the shelter system.

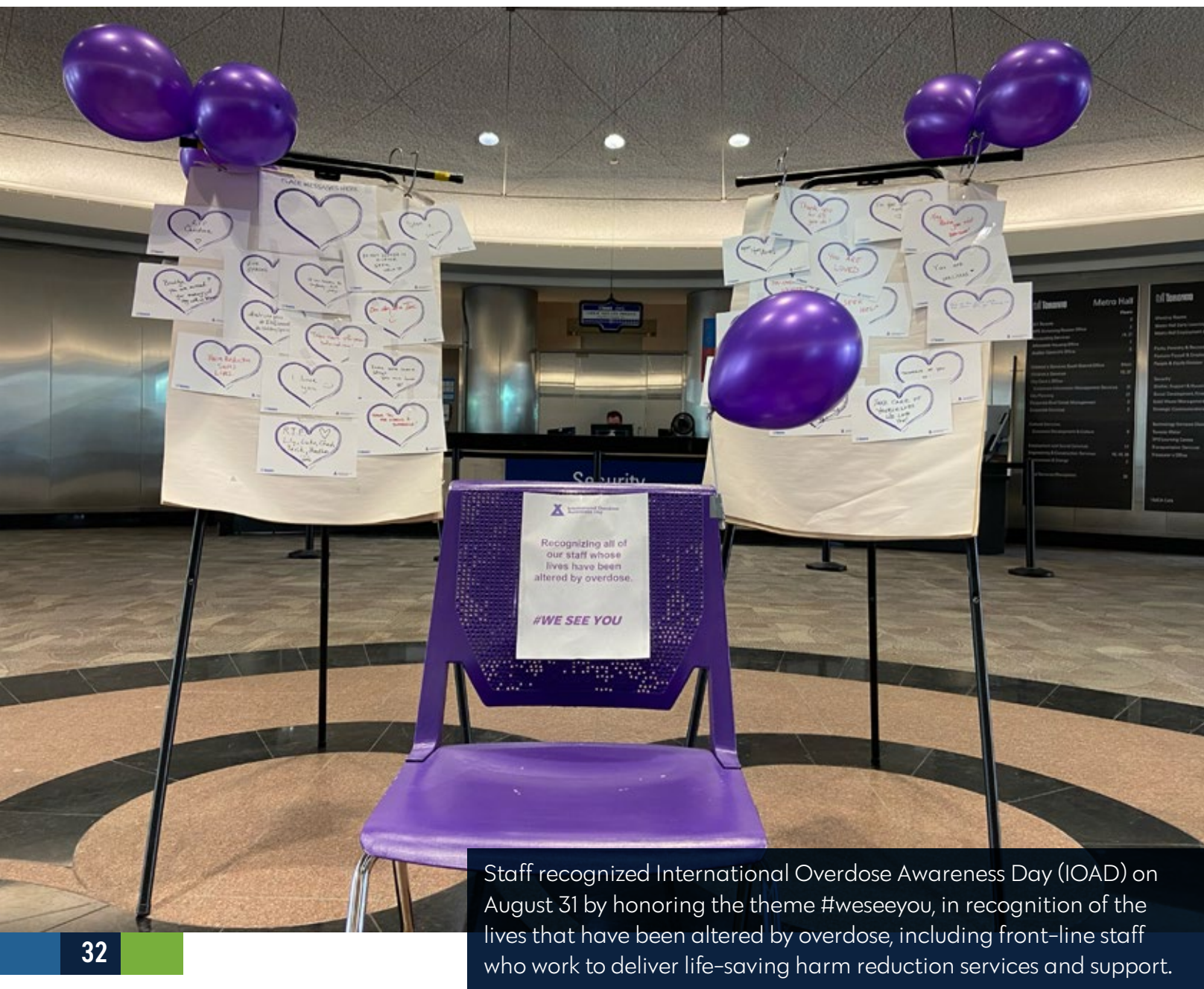
Excellence in Care: Spotlight on the Seaton House Overdose Prevention Site (SHOPS)

In response to the alarming number of overdoses in Toronto, specifically the downtown east neighbourhood, TSSS opened the Urgent Public Health Needs site at Seaton House men's shelter in 2022. The SHOPS (Seaton House Overdose Prevention Site) helps to reduce stigma associated with drug use by providing a compassionate, non-judgemental space where clients can be open about their drug use.

SHOPS enables clients to get harm reduction kits and consume drugs under trained supervision in a safe, hygienic environment. Clients can also access drug counselling on their own terms, as well as information on treatment options, including referrals to specialize programs, such as safer supply and opioid agonist treatment programs.

Heralded as the only 24-hour overdose prevention site in North America, SHOPS had more than 3,000 visits in 2023. Harm Reduction Counsellors, who are leaders in the use of oxygen to manage overdoses, also worked to support 127 overdoses.

SHOPS helps to decrease overdose-related trauma for staff and clients. Through the incredible work of staff, the program also mitigates burden on the healthcare system by decreasing calls to Toronto Paramedic Services and hospitalization.



Staff recognized International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) on August 31 by honoring the theme #weseeyou, in recognition of the lives that have been altered by overdose, including front-line staff who work to deliver life-saving harm reduction services and support.





Street Outreach and Encampment Response

Our Streets to Homes outreach team and partners continued to conduct daily outreach to individuals living outside, including in encampments, to build supportive relationships, help address immediate health and safety needs, and refer people into the shelter system or permanent housing. Staff and community partners worked together to deliver a variety of services to those living outside, including help to develop permanent housing plans and access income and ID, physical, mental health and harm reduction services, and fire safety education. Staff also provided referrals to meal programs and handed out seasonal supplies such as sleeping bags, water and weather appropriate clothing.

2023 achievements:

- 24,592 engagements with people living outside
- 17,610 people who accepted an indoor referral or accessed other wrap-around supports, such as housing support or other social or health care services
- 1,094 people referred into the shelter system
- 358 people successfully housed

In March 2023, the City accepted recommendations in the Ombudsman Toronto's final report "Investigation into the City's clearing of Encampments in Summer 2021", which identified the importance of updating the City's Interdepartmental Service Protocol (IDP) that was adopted by Council in 2005. To inform this work, we consulted with people with lived experience in encampments, City staff, community organizations, and stakeholders working in the homelessness and human rights sector. Results of this work, as well as the City's strategic approach to encampments, will be presented to Council in 2024.

On recommendation from the Ombudsman, we also released our report summarizing findings from enhanced outreach and support efforts at Dufferin Grove in 2021. The report outlined how work to bring comprehensive social and health services to the large encampment, realized significant success in referring people to shelter and permanent housing, or reuniting individuals with family.

In 2023, the City applied these findings to Allan Gardens, another large encampment site. Using the approach at Dufferin Grove Park, staff and partners offered enhanced services, and established an Information & Help Centre to connect individuals to services and answer community questions. Staff also implemented an Encampment Prevention Plan, which worked to limit further encampment growth by connecting new individuals to available shelter spaces. Through this work, in 2023, 75 people from Allan Gardens were moved into permanent housing and more than 280 people were referred into the shelter system.

Much of this work was coordinated by the Encampment Office, working in partnership with other City divisions, community agencies and stakeholders. To ensure the City's response to encampments is grounded in a Housing First, trauma-informed and people-centred approach, the Encampment Office became part of Toronto Shelter and Support Services in 2023.

Strengthening Outreach on the Transit System

In 2023, we continued to work closely with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to provide outreach to vulnerable people on the transit system. Focusing on hotspots, we increased the number of Streets to Homes staff deployed in the transit system to engage with people in need, focusing on connecting them to shelter, housing and wrap-around supports. Through this work, Streets to Homes conducted more than 7,800 outreach visits across the TTC in 2023 and worked to refer 540 individuals from TTC locations into the shelter system.

In March, we enhanced this work through a one-year pilot with LOFT Community Services. Through LOFT's Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (M-DOT), individuals requiring more complex and longer-term supports had access to case workers and health care professionals, including registered nurses. Through the partnership, the program exceeded expectations, engaging with 345 individuals and connecting more than 100 people to comprehensive health and mental health supports between March and the end of 2023. In September, based on the program's success, Council re-affirmed their support of the partnership, approving an extension of the program until March 2025.

Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre

Throughout 2023, the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC) continued to be a connecting point for people living outside and a growing number of refugee claimants arriving in Toronto looking to access critical emergency services. In 2023, working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, staff at SHARC supported more than 4,700 unique clients, offering a variety of services such as meals, washroom and laundry facilities, harm reduction and hygiene supplies, and referrals to shelter and social and community programming. Staff also worked to connect 78 clients to housing.



Strengthening the Organization

Re-Defining our Division's Focus

In 2023, we worked to re-define our Division's name, along with our Vision, Mission and Values to better reflect our role as the shelter service system manager in Toronto. This work was initiated by the move of funding and oversight of social housing from our division into the Housing Secretariat division.

To undertake this work, we held extensive engagement with City staff and senior leadership, representatives from City-funded shelters, 24-hour respite sites and drop-ins, and members of Toronto Shelter Network's Board of Directors and the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board.

We would like to thank everyone that helped us determine our new focus. Our new division name – Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) – was unveiled in December. It emphasizes our role in Toronto, commitment to client-centred "Services", and reflects that our work extends beyond shelters, encompassing critical support services and outreach efforts.

Partnerships

We work closely with more than 85 community service providers and sector partners to deliver on our mandate. It is through these partnerships and funding relationships that we can oversee the delivery of critical services, such as emergency shelters, 24-hour respite sites, 24-hour women's drop-in programs, daytime drop-in programs, street outreach services, and health and harm reduction support. We also collaborate with divisions from across the City and key agencies to support and meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

In 2023, for the second year, we were pleased to invest \$7 million in our partner agencies to address wages, benefits and increase service levels and stability. This investment was made as part of the City's 10-year plan to invest \$70 million in the sector to help build continued shelter system capacity and resiliency.

To guide our strategic work, we continued to engage and seek guidance from sector partners through our advisory bodies such as the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH), Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB) and Toronto Shelter Network (TSN).

We continue to engage people with lived experience of homelessness and service users for feedback and input to inform our program and service delivery. In 2023, through the Harm Reduction Advisory Committee, we worked with people with lived/living experiences of substance use and homelessness to help shape related policies and initiatives. We formed a client advisory group to advance work to develop safer spaces for Black women. We also consulted service users on shelter safety and spoke to individuals in encampments to help inform how we provide support.

We remain grateful to the many partners, divisions and service users who play a critical role in enhancing and advancing the important work of providing shelter and support to the people we serve.

Staff Mental Health

In 2023, we hired a dedicated Management Consultant to oversee design and implementation of strategies and initiatives to improve staff mental health and wellbeing across the sector. This includes implementation of recommendations developed in 2022 by Circle Point Wellness, following extensive consultation with staff from across the division.

Progress made in 2023 to advance these initiatives included:

- partnering with Toronto Shelter Network and Method Collective to host dedicated days for homelessness sector staff to experience "A Space for Grief", an interactive art installation to process grief and loss
- providing funding to TSN to develop the Grief and Loss Program Report, which outlines a service model for supporting grief within the homelessness sector
- creating a divisional Psychological Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- creating The Monthly Check In, a staff wellbeing newsletter that provides progress updates, free trainings, resources, and wellness tips and strategies
- collaborating with Pension, Payroll & Employee Benefits to implement and promote the City's new Employee Assistance Program with Telus Health, which provides more robust services and supports to staff
- coordinating debrief sessions for staff impacted after serious occurrences, as well as multiple mental health and wellbeing trainings

This important work will continue in 2024 as we look at additional ways to support staff mental health both within Toronto Shelter and Support Services and across the shelter system.

Improving Shelter Standards and Safety Measures

As part of our commitment to maintaining high quality services, in 2023, we implemented a series of updates to our Toronto Shelter Standards, starting with an update in April that included specific supports and services for Indigenous clients and clients with disabilities, new training for staff to improve equity, and updates on health and safety practices.

In December, we launched new mandatory Toronto Shelter Standards for Confronting Anti-Black Racism intended to improve the experiences of Black people accessing Toronto's shelter system by confronting and removing barriers to service that may exist.

To ensure adherence to standards in shelters and 24-hour respite sites, our Quality Assurance Team held ongoing standards-related training and information sessions throughout the year for City and agency staff. The team also completed more than 410 standards-related assessments at sites, as well as 406 assessments to ensure strong infection prevention and control measures remained in place.

Recognizing the importance of shelter safety, we also updated the Incident Report module in our Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) to better support documentation of workplace violence. This improvement aligns with continued work we undertook in 2023 to develop the Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System (BRASS). BRASS will enable information sharing in SMIS about clients with a history of violent behaviour to support shelter staff in proactive safety planning.

To help develop BRASS, in 2023, we engaged with more than 90 individuals in the sector – from senior management to operational staff – to introduce the tool and identify considerations for implementation and ways to reduce potential harms. BRASS is expected to launch in Q2 2024.

In 2023, we also completed a Client Satisfaction Survey, where over 630 clients shared their experiences using shelters or 24-hour respite sites, including their thoughts on safety. This feedback will be used to inform ongoing shelter planning and service improvements.

We continued to support researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), who are undertaking a study into factors that contribute to safety in shelters, with a specific emphasis on client service restrictions. In 2023, CAMH conducted interviews with service providers and people experiencing homelessness at eight Toronto shelters to get input into their experiences of violence and service restrictions in the shelter system. Findings from the study will be released in Q2 2024.

Enhancing Central Intake Services

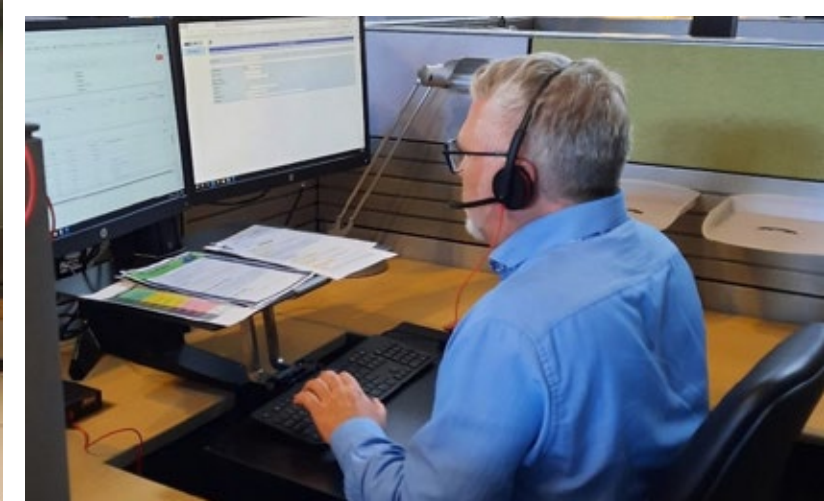
Our Central Intake team continued to provide essential services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness by working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to refer individuals into the shelter system and bridging hotels and provide valuable information on housing stability and other community services. In 2023, staff answered a record 452,000 calls.

To help support this volume, staff implemented a number of initiatives in 2023 to improve service delivery, including:

- a new call log module designed to collect better insight on clients waiting for shelter, along with a dashboard that makes it easier to match individuals with spaces that meet their needs (e.g., accessible beds, pregnancy support, pet-friendly, etc.)
- system alerts to help staff see when beds come online in real-time, along with additional staff to fill spaces, helping to minimize wait times
- a new multi-divisional working group to support the City's bridging program, which provides temporary hotel spaces and support services to families waiting to enter the shelter system. The program was also entered into the City's Shelter Management Information System, helping to provide valuable insight on additional occupancy pressures facing the family sector
- a new dashboard to monitor call queues and wait times, along with workforce management software, to enable shift leaders to monitor demand and adjust schedules to improve wait times
- a new internal knowledge base that allows staff to ensure timely, up-to-date and accurate information is shared with callers
- an updated quality assurance tool, which was automated to allow management to more effectively assess calls for quality assurance and coaching of staff
- new interactive voice technology to let callers know when Warming Centres were open, along with the locations, so that those interested no longer had to wait to speak to someone to get the information



We celebrate and recognize the commitment and dedication of staff who make a difference every day



Looking Forward

Street Needs Assessment and Developing the Homelessness Service Plan

TSSS will be conducting its sixth Street Needs Assessment (SNA) in the Fall 2024. The SNA is a point-in-time count and survey of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto conducted in collaboration with community partners in the homelessness and allied sectors. The SNA gives people experiencing homelessness a voice in identifying the supports and services they need to end their homelessness and provides critically important data to improve services and programs for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. In 2024, we will also start developing the division's next multi-year Service Plan, which will replace the Homelessness Solutions Service Plan. The next Service Plan will identify our priorities and guide the planning, management and delivery of TSSS' services over the next five years. Throughout 2024, we will engage with service providers, community partners, Indigenous partners, service users and staff as key inputs to the Service Plan development.

Work to Advance Capital Infrastructure Strategy

In early 2024, in collaboration with Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM), we presented a report, which Council approved, that recommended extending temporary shelter hotel leases and contracts for the medium term (3–5 years, where possible), while we work to build more permanent, purpose-built shelter spaces. This approach supports the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS), approved by Council in November 2023. Our efforts in 2024 will focus on working with landlords to extend temporary leases and working with CREM and CreateTO to identify at least five locations for potential new shelter sites. As this work continues, community engagement will be an important component of our work.

Ongoing Refugee Response

The number of new refugee claims made in Ontario continues to increase, and new records have already been made in the first three months of 2024. Continuing to build our readiness and capacity, as well as strengthening the ability of our community partners to support refugee claimants, remains our priority. Ongoing intergovernmental advocacy, municipal-level partnerships, and a sustained operational response will remain essential components in this work. This includes advocating the Federal government to fund the establishment of a regional reception centre, and coordination with partners in the GTHA should a centre move forward.

Encampment Response

In 2024, we will work to support those in encampments by working collaboratively with staff from across the City of Toronto, along with community partners, to provide supports and services to people living in encampments, focusing on access to shelter and housing. Work will continue on implementing the Ombudsman Toronto's interim and final recommendations released in July 2022 and March 2023, respectively. In 2024 we will report back to Council on the City's strategic approach to encampments, including work achieved to implement the recommendations and an updated Interdepartmental Service Protocol (IDP). The City's approach and IDP will outline a clear and coordinated process to guide staff in supporting people living in encampments by ensuring their safety and protecting their fundamental human rights, while helping them to access adequate indoor spaces and housing that meet their identified needs.

