

What We Heard:

2025-2030 Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness

Stakeholder Engagement Report



Prepared by SN Management for Toronto Shelter & Support Services

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
1. INTRODUCTION.....	11
2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY.....	13
2.1. Consultation Sessions	13
2.2. Analysis and Organization of Themes.....	16
2.3. Presentation of Findings	18
2.4. Limitations	19
3. KEY HOMELESSNESS ISSUES IN TORONTO	20
4. OVERARCHING ENGAGEMENT THEMES.....	24
5. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND SHELTER DIVERSION.....	27
5.1. TSSS Specific Actions.....	27
5.2. Interdivisional Strategies.....	28
5.3. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies.....	30
6. HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AND SUPPORTS.....	33
6.1. TSSS Processes.....	33
6.2. Homelessness Programming.....	38
6.3. Interdivisional Strategies	45
6.4. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies.....	46
7. TRANSITIONING FROM HOMELESSNESS TO HOUSING.....	49
7.1. TSSS Strategies	49
7.2. Interdivisional Strategies.....	51
7.3. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies.....	53
8. A FIVE-YEAR VISION AND OUTCOME INDICATORS	54
9. CONCLUSION.....	56
APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION SURVEY	57
APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEW	65

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The City of Toronto (City) is developing a five-year Strategic Plan that will be led by the Toronto Shelter and Support Services Division (TSSS). TSSS is the City's shelter system manager, directly operating and funding community agencies that deliver:

- Emergency shelter, 24-hour respite and day-time drop-in programs,
- Wrap-around support services, and
- Street outreach.

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan will serve as a roadmap to support people experiencing homelessness through strategies and measures that:

- Improve homelessness prevention and shelter diversion,
- Increase pathways to housing, and
- Ensure comprehensive supports for people who are in the homelessness service system.

To address the complex factors that contribute to and sustain homelessness, the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan will have a City-wide focus, propose new interdivisional, multi-sectoral and intergovernmental strategies and provide a multi-year actionable blueprint for strategic decisions and investments around homelessness that will have lasting impact.

A key part of the process of developing the Strategic Plan is engagement with staff, partners, and other key stakeholders. TSSS contracted with SN Management in September 2024 to help plan, facilitate, and report on a stakeholder engagement process. This report summarizes and presents the analysis, key findings, and themes from the engagement. The report will inform the development of the Strategic Plan which will be presented to Toronto's City Council for approval in 2025.

Stakeholder Engagement Methodology

Between September 2024 and December 2024, SN Management, together with TSSS staff, planned and facilitated 20 consultations reaching approximately 400 people. A consultation guide was used to ensure a consistent approach across all sessions and small group discussions. The guide asked participants to:

- Identify key homelessness issues in Toronto,
- Describe actions/strategies for homelessness prevention and shelter diversion,
- Describe limitations and opportunities for improving homelessness services and supports,
- Describe actions/strategies for transitioning people from homelessness to stable, permanent and supportive housing, and
- Identify five-year outcomes and indicators of success for the homelessness service system.

In addition, 176 people responded to the *Stakeholder Consultation Survey: Priorities for Addressing Homelessness in Toronto*, which was administered by TSSS between October and November 2024, and a literature review summarizing relevant reports helped to provide additional context to the consultations and the analysis of results. Two theoretical frameworks were drawn upon to organize the recommendations provided by the engagement participants into those that TSSS can directly be in control of implementing and those which it can help to influence through collaboration and advocacy.

Findings

Key Homelessness Issues in Toronto Today

Engagement participants described many factors that are contributing to homelessness and/or creating a demand for shelter that cannot be met. Many of these are complex, systemic, and intersecting in nature (i.e., immigration trends), while others are very specific to TSSS programming.

- There are growing income disparities, and the cost of living is increasing.
- There is a serious shortage of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
- Tenants lack eviction prevention supports and protections.
- Homelessness is increasingly stigmatized with many people strongly opposed to having shelters and homelessness supports in their neighbourhoods.
- Human services systems, such as the child welfare, justice and health/mental health systems, do not proactively address housing needs, and many people are left to transition from institutional settings into homelessness and shelter.

- The province has not increased the number of violence against women (VAW) shelters to match the rising demand due to increased family/gender based/intimate partner violence (GBV/IPV), particularly since the pandemic.
- The increasing numbers of homeless refugees and families fleeing violence are impacting shelter occupancy pressures.
- There is a dearth of addiction treatment, harm reduction and mental health services in the community to support people whose mental health or substance use puts their tenancy at risk, as well as a lack preventative supports.
- TSSS lacks dedicated homelessness strategies for preventing or addressing homelessness among youth and older adults.
- Shelter sector policies, processes, approaches and/or shelter environments reinforce a dependency on shelters and are not sufficiently driving staff or clients to be outcome/housing focussed.
- TSSS' Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) does not sufficiently enable interdivisional or intersectoral coordination and information sharing. As such interdivisional supports and services are not as coordinated as they could be or fully maximized to divert people from shelter or quickly transition them to community.
- TSSS' Central Intake is under-resourced and does not have the capacity to systematically match clients to homelessness/shelter programs that align with their needs.

Recommendations for Homelessness Prevention and Shelter Diversion¹

TSSS' mandate does not extend to homelessness prevention in a significant way, and primarily falls under the scope of the Housing Secretariat who oversees the *HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan*². However, the current demand for shelter beds and pressures being placed on staff and the homelessness system to respond to pressures is not sustainable. To this end, the engagement participants recommended that the Division:

1. Develop and roll out a comprehensive homelessness prevention plan, which includes a focus on shelter diversion, in recognition that, over

¹ Homelessness prevention and shelter diversion both aim to stop people from becoming homeless. In this report, "homelessness prevention" refers to broader strategies that can help individuals at risk of losing their housing before they reach a crisis point. "Shelter diversion" is once such homelessness prevention strategy which involves working with people at the point of contact with the shelter system to find them alternative housing options instead of entering the shelter system.

² For more information see: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/94f0-housing-to-2020-2030-action-plan-housing-secretariat.pdf>

the long term, an upstream approach will relieve pressure on shelters and the homelessness service system overall.

2. Develop and roll out a dedicated plan for addressing youth homelessness as a critical component for preventing adult homelessness. Within the youth plan, prioritize youth homelessness prevention and diverting youth from shelters. In addition to TSSS-led initiatives, this includes engagement with other orders of government, such as the provincial Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and other human services sectors, including child welfare, youth justice, education and youth employment, to promote policies and programs that identify and support youth at risk of homelessness.
3. Develop and roll out a comprehensive series of actions to divert older adults from the shelter system to alternative options in the community. In addition to programs that TSSS can advance, this requires significant engagement and collaboration with the long-term care and home care sectors.
4. Work collaboratively with the Housing Secretariat to:
 - Influence and support efforts to expand housing benefits, financial assistance programs and rent geared to income (RGI) or subsidized housing.
 - Advocate for more supportive housing and develop coordinated pathways into supportive housing, in collaboration with other supportive housing providers across all sectors/funding programs.
 - Enhance programs such as Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) and Toronto Rent Bank to help prevent evictions.
 - Engage with Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation and other non-profit seniors housing providers to strengthen supports for tenants at risk of eviction.
5. Work collaboratively with health and mental health partners and correctional facilities to ensure that no one is discharged to the community without a housing plan.
6. Work collaboratively with other City divisions to advocate for stronger municipal controls, requirements, by-laws or incentives aimed at maintaining the current supply of affordable housing, promoting the development of new affordable housing stock, and protecting tenants from evictions.
7. Advocate to provincial and federal levels of government:
 - To secure funding and implement long term solutions that will address the significant pressure on the shelter system resulting from the increasing number of homeless refugees and collaborate

with the immigrant and refugee serving sectors to establish referral pathways and culturally appropriate programming.

- For increased provincial VAW shelter beds and program support to address the unmet needs of people fleeing IBV/GBV.
- For stronger rent control policy.
- For policy and programming that will alleviate poverty and promote income security, including increases to Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates and the minimum wage.

Homelessness Services and Supports

To enhance homeless services and supports, which TSSS is directly responsible for planning, delivering, and managing, participants suggested TSSS should:

- Ground policy and programming in core values and principles, including compassionate, client-centered and need based care, equity, anti-racism, and cultural competency, and introduce a disability lens.
- Establish an accountability framework which defines goals, activities, short, medium, and long-term outcomes, and metrics, and includes mechanisms for capturing data that will enable performance to be monitored, evaluated, and reported.
- Establish a process at Central Intake to assess and match people to the most suitable shelter program, and in parallel improve, SMIS and information sharing to support needs based and client-centered care and service coordination among all homelessness providers, other City divisions and key community providers.
- Strengthen processes that reinforce client rights, responsibilities, and engagement in service delivery.
- Address wage disparities across the sector, promote safe work environments, invest in staff training and development, and create pathways to employment in homelessness serving organizations for people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Develop purpose-built shelters with a maximum capacity of 100 beds, with a built design that meets the specific needs of diverse populations, particularly families with children.
- Build the capacity of the homelessness services system as a whole to deliver culturally competent services and supports for diverse populations, ensuring cross sector Anti-Black racism strategies. At the same time, continue to provide dedicated programs, spaces or

- shelters for populations who are best served in a population-specific setting, including youth, families, older adults, 2SLGBTQ+ clients and refugees.
- Continue to work with Indigenous partners to advance commitments to Reconciliation and create Indigenous specific shelters and homelessness services.
 - Enhance the amount and quality of on-site shelter programming, including client intake and orientation, case management, harm reduction, group programming, employment and life skills development and peer programming.
 - Increase access to transitional shelter programs, in particular for youth, older adults, refugees and people who require additional supports to live independently due to challenges related to mental health or substance use.
 - Work collaboratively with Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) and Social Development and Finance Administration (SDFA) initiatives such as FOCUS and SPIDER to coordinate service delivery to shared clients, enabled by information sharing processes and policies.
 - Increase access to on-site health supports and improve referral pathways to health service providers by strengthening partnerships with primary care, mental health, addiction and harm reduction, disability, seniors support and home care, and hospitals.
 - Work collaboratively with the settlement and employment sectors to improve on-site access to programs and to strengthen referral pathways and supports for clients.

Transitions from Homelessness

TSSS can pursue the following strategies, some of which can be activated by TSSS alone, and others through interdivisional, intersectoral and intergovernmental collaboration and advocacy, to facilitate transitions from homelessness to housing:

1. Clarify expectations and accountability for achieving housing outcomes with clients and with homelessness staff/providers.
2. Proactively connect clients who are outdoors, in encampments or in shelters to community supports and resources, before and after they leave the encampment/shelter to build confidence and sense of belonging.
3. Further build-up life-skills and connections to community supports so that clients can transition to housing safely and successfully.

4. Work collaboratively with the Housing Secretariat to:
 - Embed follow-up supports across the sector through funding allocations, service standards, targets and performance monitoring.
 - Strengthen engagement with private and public sector landlords to increase housing options for clients.
 - Build public understanding of homelessness and support for shelters through strategic and targeted community engagement, education and awareness.
 - Advocate for more supportive housing³.
5. Work collaboratively with other City divisions including the Housing Secretariat and TESS to link clients to housing access and stabilization supports, including the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)/housing benefits, and to advocate for RGI and/or subsidized housing and rapid housing initiatives.
6. Advocate to other orders of government for investments in affordable housing and income security.

Five Year Outcomes and Indicators of Success

Overall, engagement participants believe that, with strategic and outcome focused investments, homelessness in the City can be transformed over the coming five years. Participants envisioned the following changes for policies, processes, and programs:

- TSSS will have clear performance outcomes for the Strategic Plan and will routinely measure and report its performance to stakeholders.
- TSSS will have established a Homelessness Prevention Strategy which includes shelter diversion targets to help manage shelter flow.
- Central Intake and SMIS will be improved to drive needs based and client-centered service planning and delivery, intersectoral information sharing and coordinated client care.
- Referral partnerships with cross-sector supportive and affordable housing providers will be in place and there will be streamlined and timely pathways to appropriate housing options.
- All shelters will have sufficient numbers of qualified staff, in particular, housing workers, case managers and follow-up workers. Shelters will provide integrated health services, including on-site primary care,

³ In this report, affordable housing refers to housing that is financial affordable to people. Supportive housing is affordable and also includes the provision of support services to help people live independently and retain their tenancy.

mental health, addiction treatment and harm reduction services and/or referral to these supports in the community.

- There will be enough shelter beds in the system to meet the demand for shelter.
- Transitional shelter programs will be available to clients who require additional time and/or support to transition successfully to housing.
- There will be more affordable housing, including more RGI and subsidized housing units and there will also be more supportive housing in the City.

In addition to changes in policy, process and programming, participants envision the following impacts for clients and people experiencing homelessness.

- Clients will have timely access to Central Intake and an emergency shelter bed when they need it.
- Clients will receive compassionate and culturally competent care from a multi-disciplinary team of staff, and supports that are tailored, needs based and comprehensive.
- Clients will leave shelter with the supports and skills they need to secure and retain their housing/tenancy.
- Less people will be using the shelter system, and in particular, there will be fewer youth, refugees, families and older adults requiring shelter.
- People's stay in shelter and experience with homelessness will be shorter.
- Fewer people will return to shelter after transitioning to housing.
- There will be no homeless encampments.
- Far fewer people will experience homelessness.
- Stigma associated with homelessness will be reduced and the public will have a greater understanding of homelessness issues.

Conclusion

Close to 600 people provided input to TSSS' upcoming Strategic Plan through stakeholder engagement activities. While many different issues were identified and many actions recommended, there are some that were consistently put forward. Fundamentally, homelessness services must be grounded in values that center the client through compassionate, needs based, culturally competent and trauma informed care that reflects commitments to equity, anti-racism and Reconciliation.

To position itself for sustainability and impact, TSSS needs to establish measurable performance indicators for the Strategic Plan and monitor and report these to its stakeholders. Central Intake should be enhanced so that clients are matched to programs that meet their needs, and the Division's SMIS/information management systems should be improved to better facilitate cross shelter and interdivisional information sharing and service coordination.

Without doubt, there is a role for population specific spaces and/or shelters, in particular for youth, families with children and older adults. TSSS should continue to work with Indigenous partners to advance Indigenous led homelessness solutions and it should strengthen intergovernmental efforts to address refugee homelessness. However, in the context of limited resources, it is critical that the homelessness services system as a whole build capacity and competency for effectively working with diverse populations. There is significant expertise and innovation among service providers that can be leveraged to strengthen service delivery and avoid "cookie cutter" approaches.

To create pathways from homelessness to housing that do not result in returns to homelessness, TSSS should increase transitional shelter programming and collaborate with interdivisional and intersectoral partners to deliver initiatives that build up client's health, mental health, life skills and employment prospects and improve access to supportive and/or appropriate housing. Ultimately to reduce homelessness and flow into shelters, and facilitate successful housing outcomes, TSSS must prioritize homelessness prevention, including shelter diversion. This will require significant interdivisional work and advocacy to other orders of government for policies and programs that create more and affordable housing, protect tenants and increase people's economic security.

There is an opportunity for TSSS to draw upon the collective expertise shared through the consultations and prioritize actionable recommendations that can realize immediate and longer-term impacts on homelessness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Increasing levels of homelessness are visible on Toronto's streets, in encampments and on the City's transit system. Since 2016, bedded capacity in Toronto's shelter system⁴ has more than doubled, and despite being the largest shelter system in Canada, the current demand for shelter space is so high that every night the City is unable to provide shelter to hundreds of people requesting a space. At the same time, many of those who do have a shelter bed may not have the supports they need to stabilize and exit the shelter system.

The City is developing a five-year Strategic Plan that will be led by the Toronto Shelter and Support Services Division (TSSS). TSSS is the City of Toronto's (City) homelessness service system manager. It directly operates shelters and funds community agencies through purchase of service (POS) arrangements to deliver:

- Emergency shelter, 24-hour respite and day-time drop-in programs,
- Wrap-around support services, and
- Street outreach.

TSSS' mandate is to ensure that those experiencing homelessness have access to temporary accommodation when they need it, as well as wrap-around and housing-focused supports to help ensure homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. TSSS works with community partners and stakeholders to deliver person-centered, outcome-focused services to help improve the overall well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness and help connect them with housing.

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan will serve as a roadmap to support people experiencing homelessness through strategies and measures that:

- Improve homelessness prevention and shelter diversion⁵
- Increase pathways to housing, and

⁴ Depending on the time of year, there are about one hundred shelter programs operating across the City, including emergency shelters, respites, and 24 hours drop-ins. The majority of these are operated through purchase of service arrangement by community-based organizations (POS shelters), however, TSSS directly operates more than 20 shelter programs (DOS shelters). In this report, these programs collectively comprise the shelter sector or the shelter system.

⁵ Homelessness prevention and shelter diversion both aim to stop people from becoming homeless. In this report, "homelessness prevention" refers to broader strategies that can help individuals at risk of losing their housing before they reach a crisis point. "Shelter diversion" is once such homelessness prevention strategy which involves working with people at the point of contact with the shelter system to find them alternative housing options instead of entering the shelter system.

- Ensure comprehensive supports for people who are in the homelessness system.

An all-City focus with new approaches, structural changes, and all-of-government, multi-sectoral collaboration is essential to have actionable and lasting impact. Therefore, 2025-2030 Strategic Plan will utilize a multi-divisional and sector-wide approach to propose major initiatives and provide a multi-year blueprint for making strategic decisions and investments around homelessness.

A key part of the process of developing the Strategic Plan is engagement with staff, partners, and other key stakeholders. TSSS contracted with SN Management in September 2024 to help plan, facilitate, and report on a stakeholder engagement process. This report summarizes and presents the analysis, key findings, and themes from the engagement activities. The report will inform the development of the Strategic Plan which will be presented to Toronto's City Council for approval.

Of note, many strategies are being advanced in parallel to this Strategic Plan, some of which are discussed in this report:

- The *Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan*⁶ outlines TSSS' commitments to engage with and support Indigenous communities in Toronto, with a focus on fostering respectful relationships, collaboration, and action for systemic change.
- The City's *Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Action Plan (2014 – 2025)*⁷ will strengthen TSSS policies and programs by applying an anti-Black Racism lens.
- The *Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS)*⁸ is working to build up to 20 new purpose-built shelters by 2033 to support people exiting homelessness.

These strategies have unique aims that will continue to be prioritized and advanced in parallel to the new Strategic Plan.

⁶ For more information see: 10-Year Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

⁷ For more information see: Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (June 2018).

⁸ For more information see: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-246468.pdf>.

2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

The stakeholder engagement process was comprised of the following activities:

- In-person/virtual consultations,
- Survey with community stakeholders,
- Inter-divisional survey⁹, and
- Literature review of recent internal and public-facing engagement reports, strategies, and studies relevant to homelessness supports and services.

2.1. Consultation Sessions

In Person and Virtual Consultations

Between September 2024 and December 2024, SN Management, together with TSSS staff, planned and facilitated 20 consultations attended by approximately 400 people. Four of the sessions were held in person, while 16 took place virtually. The table below lists the consultation sessions. In situations where more than eight people were in attendance, a small group discussion format was used to promote participation and maximize feedback. All of the consultations were recorded manually by the facilitator and/or notetaker assigned to the session or small group. Small group facilitators and notetakers included members of the SN Management team and TSSS staff.

Stakeholder Group	Sub-Group	Dates
TSSS Management/Head Office	Extended Management Team	September 23, 2024
	Head Office Staff	October 17, 2024 November 18, 2024
	Confronting Anti-Black Racism Portfolio Liaisons and CABR Staff Committee	September 23, 2024
Directly Operated Shelters	Front Line Staff	November 27, 2024
	Supervisors	November 22, 2024
Purchase of Service Shelters/Homelessness Programs	Front Line Staff	November 21, 2024 November 25, 2024 November 28, 2024

⁹ Findings from the Interdivisional Survey are not reflected in this report.

	Supervisors and Managers	November 6, 2024 November 14, 2024
	Youth Shelter Interagency Network	September 20, 2024
	Refugee Shelter Providers	October 15, 2024
Open Session	Shelter/Homelessness Service Providers	December 2, 2024
People with Lived Experience of Homelessness/Shelter Users	TSSS Harm Reduction Advisory Committee	October 8, 2024
	TSN Community Health Ambassadors and TAEH People with Lived Experience (PWLE) Caucus	October 18, 2024
Other	Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) and Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB)	November 4, 2024
	Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters	October 16, 2024
	Health and Harm Reduction Stakeholders	November 29, 2024
	Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC)	December 5, 2024

To help frame the Strategic Planning engagement consultations, TSSS identified three potential overarching strategic pillars to guide the work of TSSS and support strategic decisions and investments over the next five years:

- Homelessness prevention and shelter diversion,
- Homelessness services and supports, and
- Transitions from homelessness to stable housing with supports.

A discussion guide designed to explore the three strategic pillars was developed and used by the facilitators. To help ensure a consistent approach

to the collection of information and to guide comparative analysis of the input provided, the following core set of questions were adapted/modified and used for all sessions.

1. What is the most critical homelessness issue in Toronto today?
2. What strategies are most needed to prevent or divert individuals and families from entering and/or re-entering the emergency shelter system?
3. Who are the key players that need to be involved in the design and delivery of these prevention and diversion strategies for individuals and families?
4. What is working well in terms of homelessness services/supports for individuals and families?
5. What strategies are most needed to improve in terms of services/supports for individuals and families?
6. What strategies are most needed to help transition individuals and families from homelessness to stable housing with supports?
7. Who are the key players that need to be involved in the design and delivery of these strategies for transitioning individuals and families from homelessness to housing stability?
8. By 2030, what are the indicators of success for the homelessness system in Toronto?
9. What is the most important recommendation for the TSSS Strategic Plan?

An integrated summary note was produced for each engagement session, consolidating ideas from all small group discussions to be used as a record of the unique perspectives collected.

Stakeholder Consultation Survey

Between October and November 2024, TSSS administered the *Stakeholder Consultation Survey: Priorities for Addressing Homelessness* in Toronto to community groups with direct or indirect involvement in addressing homelessness or issues that intersect with homelessness. These groups include academics, public policy practitioners, representatives from business improvement areas, members of client associations, disability and accessibility advocates, subject-matter experts in health, mental health, and harm reduction, representatives from food banks, correctional facilities, and community advocacy groups, among others. The survey consisted of 16 questions, including one demographic question, eight questions related to the TSSS 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, and five questions related to the HSCIS.

There were 176 respondents to the survey. Presented in Appendix A is a summary analysis of the responses to the eight Strategic Plan questions.

Literature Review

The following reports were included in the literature review to provide contextual background for the consultation responses. These reports encompass various aspects of homelessness, housing supports, and related social services in Toronto. They include:

- [City of Toronto's 2024 Budget Public Consultations – Briefing Note and Open Data](#)
- [TSSS' Hear Our Voices: Consultation Report 2022 - A Report to Apply an Anti-Black Racism Lens to the Toronto Shelter Standards](#)
- [TSSS' Update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces \(IDP\) - Encampment Engagement Report](#)
- [TSSS' Case Management Spring 2024 Shelter Sector Engagement Summary \(draft from August 8, 2024\)](#)
- [The Shelter Safety Study: An examination of violence and service restrictions in Toronto's shelter system](#)
- [Our Health Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto](#)
- [2024 to 2027 York Region Homelessness Service System Plan](#)
- [Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan \(June 2018\)](#)
- [Meeting in the Middle Fifth Annual Gathering Summary Report 2023](#)
- [Shelter Safety Action Plan 2024](#)

These reports were reviewed for key themes, recommendations, findings, and conclusions that would provide valuable context to the feedback received during the consultations. A synopsis presenting the analysis and relevant insights from each report is available in Appendix B.

2.2. Analysis and Organization of Themes

Feedback received during each consultation session, including insights from break-out or small group discussions, was itemized and transferred into an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. As a starting point, the responses were sorted according to the key components of the discussion guide to identify:

- The most critical homelessness issues in the City,

- Homelessness prevention and shelter diversion strategies,
- Strategies for strengthening homelessness services and supports,
- Strategies for enhancing successful transitions from homelessness to stable housing with supports, and
- Five-year outcomes and success indicators for Toronto’s homelessness services.

Key emergent findings for each discussion guide area were identified by noting the reoccurring ideas and comments across the sessions, providing a basis for grouping similar concepts and perspectives. A first round of key emergent findings was determined after the completion of the first half of the sessions, with no limit on the number of key findings identified. The emergent findings were then reviewed by the SN Management team and consolidated into key themes and sub-themes. The remaining consultations were tagged using the list of key themes and sub-themes.

The themes and sub-themes helped SN Management to narrow and then identify two theoretical frameworks to aid with further analysis and presentation of consultation findings, the first being *Spheres of Control, Influence and Power*¹⁰ (*Spheres*). In the context of service and systems planning, this framework is helpful in describing areas or “spheres of control” where an organization has complete control and can make direct decisions. The “sphere of influence” encompasses areas where the organization can still have an impact through its relationships, partnerships, and advocacy, while the “sphere of concern” includes areas beyond direct control and influence, which still affect the organization and the wider society, such as the human resources shortages, availability of housing and income inequality. The Spheres framework was drawn upon to help to organize key findings regarding homelessness strategies or interventions into those that TSSS can directly be in control of, versus those that TSSS can influence, for example through collaboration or advocacy.

In addition, the *Spheres of Systems Change (SSC) Model, based on Bronfenbrenner’s Socio-Ecological Systems (SES) Model*¹¹ describes the ways that different systems interact on an individual’s life to influence their development. Although Bronfenbrenner’s model was created to understand influences on a child’s development, the principles of the model describe how

¹⁰ Circles of Influence is a term that originated in the field of social psychology. The term was first introduced by psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. Similar terms include: Circles of Concern and Influence, Sphere of Influence, Circle of Power, and Circle of Trust. Source: <https://realgoodcenter.jou.ufl.edu/framework/the-six-spheres-of-influence-2/>

¹¹ Source material: <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/systems-practice-toolkit/spheres-of-systems-change/>

individuals are shaped and changed by a range of influences– from familial to societal, and how those levels interact with each other. These concepts are also helpful in understanding how change in systems happens. For the purposes of this report, the SSC model has been drawn upon to help understand that TSSS’ strategies may exclusively or simultaneously have impact on the individual client, and/or on shelter/homelessness policy and programs and/or on broader service systems and public policy.

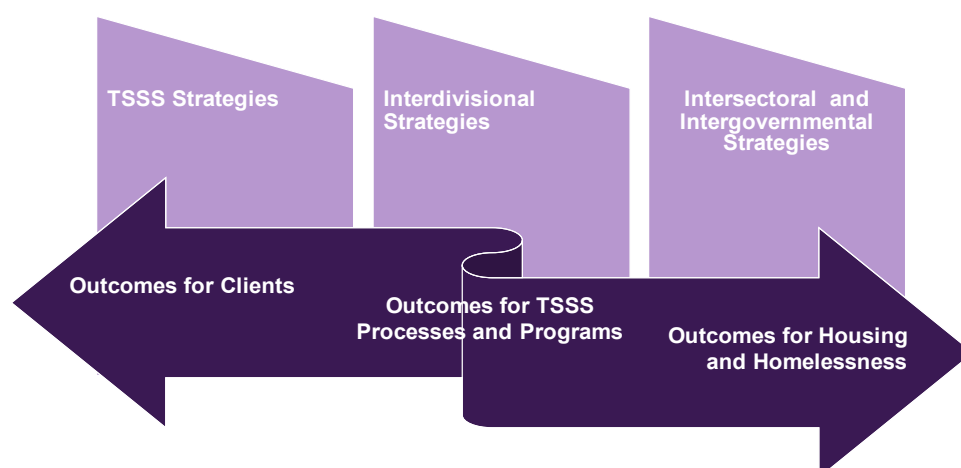


Figure 1: Framework for Interpreting and Organizing Engagement Themes

Figure 1 describes how these two frameworks have been used to understand, organize, and present key themes, particularly those which pertain to homelessness strategies or actions.

2.3. Presentation of Findings

Sections three through eight of this report present findings from the stakeholder consultation sessions, using the following headings:

- Key homelessness issues in Toronto,
- Overarching engagement themes,
- Prevention and diversion,
- Homelessness services and supports,
- Transitioning from homelessness to housing, and
- A five-year vision and outcome indicators.

For each of these sections, we describe the key findings that emerged from in-person and virtual consultations. Highlights from the community survey and/or environmental scan are referenced as needed to shed additional light on the themes. The analytical frameworks were drawn upon to organize the

presentation of suggested actions or activities and later outcomes. In terms of the suggestions, we begin with those that fall clearly within TSSS' scope and move to those that require interdivisional, intersectoral or intergovernmental collaboration or advocacy. Where relevant, we have noted where diverse stakeholder groups voiced strongly divergent perspectives.

2.4. Limitations

More than 600 people were directly involved, though participation in the consultation sessions and community stakeholder survey, in the strategic planning process and hundreds more through activities undertaken over the past three years as described in the Literature Review. Nonetheless, there are some gaps that impact the nature of the findings discussed in this report:

- There was some primary consultation with people who have lived experience of homelessness or shelter use as part of the strategic plan engagement sessions, but this was limited. The facilitators also drew upon previous contributions and input from people with lived experience of homelessness living in shelters and in encampments, that had been documented through the *Encampment Engagement Report* and the *Shelter Safety Study*. In addition, TSSS spoke with more than 3,600 people experiencing homelessness as part of the 2024 Street Needs Assessment, and this will be an important additional input to use for the development of the Strategic Plan alongside this report.
- Most of the participants who attended the focus groups were staff from shelters directly operated by TSSS or by community partners. This resulted in a strong focus on shelters in the engagement findings. There was less participation from people engaged in outreach or day-time drop-in work. To address this limitation, the report draws upon the literature review which highlights other recent engagements with outreach, 24-hour respite and winter services providers, specifically, the *Encampment Engagement Report* and the *Case Management Engagement Summary*. Furthermore, additional engagement with day-time drop-ins will be conducted in 2025 to help inform the strategic plan.
- Many of the suggestions featured in this report rely on an all-City approach and strong interdivisional collaboration. Findings from the interdivisional survey conducted by TSSS were not available for this report, however, they will be drawn upon by TSSS as the strategic plan is developed and implemented.

3. KEY HOMELESSNESS ISSUES IN TORONTO

When asked about key homelessness issues in the City today, participants engaged through the consultation session and community stakeholder survey highlighted:

- A growing homeless population and increased visible homelessness,
- Increasing housing costs and housing shortages,
- High cost of living,
- The lack of tenant supports and protections,
- Increases in immigration, barriers to settlement for newcomers and inadequate supports for refugees,
- Lack of shelter beds or indoor spaces to meet demands,
- Unsafe, overcrowded and poorly managed homelessness spaces, and
- Increasing complexity of supporting client needs, particularly those with active substance use or with mental health issues.

Overall, participants noted that the failure of other orders of government and human services systems (i.e., housing, social assistance, education, child welfare, justice, health/mental health, etc.) to consider, proactively plan for, and address people's housing needs, has also contributed to a growing homeless population and a demand for shelter that far surpasses its capacity. Key themes are presented below.

Lack of Affordable Housing and Tenant Protection

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that one of the key issues contributing to homelessness in the City of Toronto is lack of available and affordable housing. With the increase in both housing costs and the cost of living, housing affordability is a challenge, particularly for those who are at the lower end of the income spectrum and/or are experiencing homelessness. People on fixed incomes, such as pensions, and those on social assistance (Ontario Works – OW and Ontario Disability Support Program – ODSP) were noted as being particularly disadvantaged. Coupled with this, the lack of strong rent control and tenant protection policies is adding to housing precarity.

Increased Family, Gender Based and Intimate Partner Violence

Despite an increase in family, gender based or intimate partner violence (GBV/IPV) since the pandemic, the province, who has a mandate and responsibility for VAW shelters and IPV violence, has not funded more GBV/IPV shelters. Instead, people who have experienced GBV/IPV often need to use Toronto's homelessness services. Toronto's homelessness service system is

not funded or designed to support this population, which includes children and their caregivers, and does not consistently provide gender based and trauma informed mental health, health, legal, or child development supports. In addition, there is concern about the lack of cross-sectoral service coordination and advocacy required to improve access to appropriate housing and supports.

Low Public Support for Shelters and Homelessness Services

Participants were united in their belief that NIMBYism (not in my backyard) is growing, homelessness is highly stigmatized, and there is low public support for shelters. Experiencing community connection and feeling a sense of belonging is a critical factor for the successful transition of shelter clients to community. When shelter clients/homeless people, particularly those with more chronic experiences of homelessness, do not feel that they are a part of the community, they may return to shelter and the safety of the community they experience in homelessness settings.

Youth Homelessness

The last *Street Needs Assessment*¹² conducted in Toronto found that one-third of respondents first experienced homelessness when they were children or youth. The child welfare and youth justice systems are seen by participants as systems that do not appropriately support youth to transition to community and instead are “feeding” youth into homelessness and the shelter system. Without a dedicated strategy for preventing or diverting youth from experiencing homelessness, and for ensuring that those youth who are homeless are supported to secure stable housing, many youth will continue to experience homelessness as adults.

Growing Impact of Homeless Asylum Seekers/Refugees on the Shelter Sector

Over the past five years, the number of homeless asylum seekers and refugees (refugees) in Toronto has increased exponentially, placing a significant burden on shelter capacity and system flow. We heard from participants that many recent refugees struggle with an unaffordable housing market and may not have an established community to support them or may not be aware of settlement resources that are available to them. While refugee specific shelters bring expertise and connections, not all shelters have this capacity. Participants spoke of significant frustration with the lack of

¹² <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/96bf-SSHA-2021-Street-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

engagement by the federal and provincial governments in addressing refugee homelessness, and with the lack of funding that is required to deliver unique and specialized services and supports to homeless refugees. Also concerning is the absence of a robust cross-sectoral response for diverting refugees from shelter use and for providing effective pathways to settlement services and supports and to appropriate housing.

Inadequate Mental Health Supports and Trauma Informed Care

Participants spoke about the connection between mental health and homelessness, noting that many people using shelters and homelessness services struggle with mental health challenges and/or have experiences of trauma. From a prevention perspective, the lack of access to mental health supports, particularly those which are culturally relevant, appropriate for and accessible to diverse populations (i.e., refugee mental health, Black mental health, youth mental health) as well as the lack of supportive housing leaves people who are already at risk for experiencing homelessness even more vulnerable. Hospitals/mental health facilities continue to release patients who have complex needs without confirming that they have housing to return to. Homelessness service providers lack the capacity to support clients with complex mental health needs, and trauma informed competencies and supports are lacking.

Insufficient Substance Use Treatment and Harm Reduction Resources

A significant number of people experiencing homelessness are also people who use drugs or have a history with drug use. While the sector has developed its harm reduction capacity, there is concern that shelter clients are not always matched at intake to environments that are appropriate to their needs. For example, a person who uses drugs may not have access to a shelter/program with enhanced harm reduction and support services due to capacity limitations. The limited availability of publicly funded withdrawal management and substance use treatment programs also means that these options are often not available to clients seeking treatment. In addition, essential harm reduction supports are being removed from the community, and supportive housing that is appropriate for active substance users is limited. Finally, some respondents voiced concern whether harm reduction is an appropriate approach to support the diversity of populations using shelters including youth and Black clients. However, this perspective is contested in the sector.

Shelter Demand, Accessibility and Flow

The shelter system is not keeping pace with the growing demand/need for shelter beds. The system is experiencing extremely high occupancy rates with flow into the system consistently higher than flow out of the system. Approximately 200 people are being turned away from shelter every night and are sleeping in encampments, couch surfing or sleeping on public transit or in their cars. System limitations are particularly concerning during cold and heat alerts¹³.

Originally designed to provide temporary/short term shelter to individuals experiencing an emergency or crisis, the shelter system today is providing long term accommodation to many people. At the same time, outflow is not able to keep up with the increasing demand needed to move people out of shelters, mostly due to the growing dearth of deeply affordable and supportive housing¹⁴. As a result, more people are staying in the shelter longer, making the shelter system less accessible to people experiencing crisis and who are in need of temporary support. Moreover, TSSS/shelter policies, processes, approaches and/or the shelter environment may invertedly reinforce a dependency on shelters and should direct more resources to supporting clients to be outcome focussed.

There is significant concern about the limitations of TSSS' Central Intake process and the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS). Initial access to the shelter system through Central Intake uses a short assessment that may not account for the full scope of client needs (detailed Intake and Triage happens once a client reaches the shelter), and thus, people may not be matched to programs that best align with their needs. At the same time, the lack of capacity in the system reduces a client's choice in service matching, and often they have to accept what is available. There is an opportunity for Central Intake to more systemically coordinate with other City divisions or service sectors in order to potentially divert people from the shelter system by leveraging the supports provided through other sectors, for example emergency financial assistance.

¹³ For information regarding TSSS' winter response please see <https://www.toronto.ca/news/city-of-toronto-releases-2024-25-winter-services-plan-for-people-experiencing-homelessness/>

¹⁴ In this report, affordable housing refers to housing that is financially affordable to people. Supportive housing is affordable and also includes the provision of support services to help people live independently and retain their tenancy.

4. OVERARCHING ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Several overarching or cross-cutting themes are featured below because they are referenced repeatedly throughout this report. Each of these themes highlights actions suggested by engagement participants which can be undertaken by TSSS, independently or through collaboration/advocacy. Some of the actions present quick wins, while others will have impact over the longer term.

Centre the Client

Consultation participants unanimously agreed on the primacy of compassionate, client-centered and needs based care. Client centred care is about respecting every client, their resilience and their choices, demonstrating empathy, and actively supporting clients to participate in identifying their needs and setting and pursuing their goals. Doing so enhances trust between clients and staff, increases client engagement with services and promotes housing outcomes. Many of the actions described in this report are informed by and depend upon client centred care.

Prioritize Homelessness Prevention and Shelter Diversion¹⁵

Across the consultation sessions, there was strong agreement that TSSS needs to prioritize homelessness prevention in order to reduce the flow of people into shelters and to help to ensure that emergency beds are available for those who cannot be diverted to other options in the community. To this end, participants agree a prevention strategy with clear goals, outcomes and metrics should be developed. Effective prevention and diversion initiatives already funded by TSSS, such as the Family and Natural Supports (FNS) program, could be extended to all youth shelters and adapted for use with other populations, such as older adults. However, because homelessness prevention is not TSSS' responsibility alone, TSSS should work with the Housing Secretariat, other City divisions and the broader homelessness sector, to advance homelessness prevention and shelter diversion goals.

¹⁵ Shelter Diversion is an early intervention strategy aimed at preventing homelessness. It involves working with people to reduce their incidence of homelessness by assisting with rehousing and stabilization support before they enter the shelter system.

Be Strategic with Population Specific Programs, Spaces and Shelters

Intersectional analysis¹⁶ suggests that the homelessness services must respect each person's unique journey, and have the capacity (i.e., policies, provider competencies, programs, etc.) to respond to diverse populations using client-centered and culturally competent approaches. However, there is also a need for programs, spaces and/or shelters dedicated to particular populations. Population specific responses require TSSS to assess the status and needs of a target population, implement and evaluate interventions that are designed to improve outcomes for that population, and efficiently and effectively provide services and supports for members of that population in a way that is consistent with population specific norms, values or culture. However, because there are not unlimited resources to activate population-based strategies and/or stand-up dedicated shelters for all sub-groups, criteria should be established for population-based interventions.

Prepare People for Housing

Many clients, in particular youth and adults who have spent significant time in shelter or other environments such as correctional or health facilities, transition from homelessness to housing without basic skills or capacity to maintain their housing. While the sector is committed to Housing First¹⁷ principles, participants expressed a concern that housing clients too quickly can, at best result in a return to shelter and at worst can put clients at risk of harm to self or others. TSSS alone cannot address the shortage of supportive or affordable housing. However, engagement participants suggested that TSSS can work with the sector to strengthen the delivery of needs based and on-site life skills and employment programs. Doing so can help to increase the likelihood that a client will retain their housing and may also enhance a client's long-term employment prospects, thereby contributing to their stability. More specific actions identified by participants are discussed later in this report.

¹⁶ For more information see: <https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/intersectional-approach-discrimination-addressing-multiple-grounds-human-rights-claims/introduction>

¹⁷ The City's approach to addressing homelessness is grounded in a Housing First approach. Housing First focuses on helping people find permanent housing as quickly as possible, with the supports they need to live as independently as possible, without any preconditions such as accepting treatment or abstinence. The underlying philosophy of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they first have housing. The Housing First approach includes providing individualized, person-centered supports that are strengths-based, trauma-informed, grounded in a harm reduction philosophy and promote self-sufficiency.

Enhance Health

Many shelter clients and people sleeping outdoors and in encampments experience complex and intersecting health issues. TSSS and community-based homelessness service providers have strengthened access to and the availability of services and supports that foster health and well-being, including health, mental health, substance use and harm reduction supports. For example, partnerships have been developed to deliver onsite health programming, and shelter staff have received training to develop their own skills. Nonetheless, homelessness and health services need to be more integrated and partnerships strengthened. Specific recommendations are described later in this report.

5. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND SHELTER DIVERSION

This section presents the key findings and suggestions specific to homelessness prevention, including shelter diversion, that emerged from the engagement activities. Actions that can be lifted up by TSSS are described first, including those which are population-specific. These are followed by interdivisional and then intersectoral and intergovernmental initiatives.

5.1. TSSS Specific Actions

Establish a Homelessness Prevention Strategy with Clear Outcomes and Targets

The current demand for shelter beds and the pressures experienced by staff and the homelessness system are not sustainable. TSSS should allocate a portion of its resources to targeted homelessness prevention initiatives in recognition that, over the long term, shifting to a prevention focus will reduce flow into shelters, create a more manageable shelter system and reduce homelessness. TSSS should work with the sector to identify prevention priorities, activities and outcomes, and measure its progress in achieving prevention targets.

Prioritize Youth

According to City of Toronto shelter system flow data,¹⁸ unaccompanied youth comprise 10% of the shelter using population. However, this data may not capture youth using adult or family shelters, or youth who are “couch surfing” or residing in encampments. TSSS should develop and roll out a plan for addressing youth homelessness as a critical component of its strategy for preventing adult homelessness. Further, many participants agreed TSSS should focus its youth homelessness plan on homelessness prevention and shelter diversion and suggested:

Quick Win:
Scale the Family and Natural Supports program to all youth shelters and Central Intake.

¹⁸ For more information see: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-flow-data/>

- Enhancing Family and Natural Supports (FNS) and Youth Reconnect programming. FNS is already being delivered by Covenant House and the program has demonstrated measurable success. Expanding FNS will require TSSS to fund FNS workers at each youth shelter and establish an accountability framework to support the youth shelter sector as a whole to achieve diversion targets.
- Linking FNS to Central Intake. In doing so, a youth seeking a shelter bed through Central Intake can be diverted from shelter to an alternative in the community as quickly as possible. This will involve TSSS collaborating with the youth shelter sector to ensure a coordinated approach and streamlined pathways to FNS across the sector.

Prioritize Older Adults

The shelter sector has not sufficiently addressed the needs of a growing population of homeless older adults. Within its homelessness prevention strategy, TSSS should prioritize diverting older adults from shelter to other options in the community. For example, TSSS could adapt programming currently delivered by the youth shelter sector, namely FNS, to support family members to care for older adults at risk of homelessness.

Quick Win:

Pilot the Family and Natural Supports program model with an older adult population.

5.2. Interdivisional Strategies

Participants recommended many prevention actions that TSSS alone cannot advance, and which require a City-wide approach.

Increase availability of and Access to Affordable and Supportive Housing

Poverty and lack of housing affordability are root causes of homelessness. Rent geared to income (RGI) housing and housing benefits such as COHB are critical supports that help people to find and retain their housing. Therefore, TSSS should continue to work with the Housing Secretariat to effectively advocate to other orders of government for RGIs, enhancements to COHB and/or other housing benefits or financial assistance programs. Eligibility criteria and priority populations for COHB is set by the Province. The City works with referral partners in distinct streams to reach these groups, and more specific eligibility requirements and

Quick Win:

Review eligibility criteria for the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit.

prioritization criteria are determined in partnership with referral partners. Of note, not all engagement participants agree with current priority populations for COHB which includes chronically homeless populations. Some suggested that eligibility criteria for COHB and other benefits programs should be reviewed and refocused to prevent homelessness for populations at high risk of experiencing chronic homelessness, such as youth to help to divert people from needing to use shelter in the first place.

Many people are residing in shelters or encampments because they do not have access to supportive housing. TSSS should continue to work with the Housing Secretariat to ensure that individuals with high support needs, such as those with mental health or substance use, can be quickly diverted to supportive housing programs operated by the City. In addition, TSSS can work with the Housing Secretariat and other supportive housing providers, regardless of their funding/sector, to match clients to supportive housing that best meets their needs, fully leverage all of the supportive housing capacity in the city, and advocate for more supportive housing stock¹⁹.

Finally, TSSS should work with other City divisions to advocate for stronger municipal controls, requirements, by-laws, incentives or programs that can help to maintain or grow the current supply of supportive and affordable housing.

Prevent Evictions

Strong eviction prevention measures address the root causes of homelessness and reduce shelter use and re-use. TSSS should work with other City divisions such as the Housing Secretariat, to scale up existing programs that are seen to effective, such as EPIC and Rent Bank. These programs help to prevent evictions, particularly for people experiencing a financial crisis, for those with more complex needs and/or disruptive behaviours related to hoarding, substance use or mental health, and for those who experience discrimination, for example due to race or gender identity. In addition, eviction prevention programs should integrate a stronger outreach component in order to identify and support individuals well in advance of an eviction.

Quick Win:

Enhance the Eviction Prevention in the Community Rent Bank programs.

¹⁹ For more information see the Toronto Supportive Housing Growth Plan @ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56c4a231d51cd428ca552a3a/t/628fef9878cc43223d29c736/1653600168325/TSHGPlan+Brochure.pdf>.

TSSS and the Housing Secretariat should engage with Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the largest landlord in the City, to strengthen strategies for identifying and supporting tenants at risk of eviction, and to advocate for the consistent application of equity policies and practices to prevent evictions due to racism or discrimination.

Finally, TSSS should work with and/or advocate to City divisions to strengthen by-laws and regulations that protect tenants from eviction, for example, “renoviction”.

5.3. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies

Establish Collaborative Strategies and Diverse Sectors to Advance Population Specific Homelessness Strategies

As noted, an overarching theme of this report is that TSSS develop targeted homelessness initiatives for key populations. To achieve prevention goals for these populations, TSSS needs to develop and engage in strategic collaboration and/or advocacy with diverse human service sectors and other orders of government.

Youth: While there are prevention and diversion programs that TSSS can advance independently, it must also engage with other orders of government and strengthen collaboration with human service sectors to divert youth from shelter. This will help to advance the City’s commitment to Reconciliation and Confronting Anti-Black racism goals and improve pathways out of homelessness for Indigenous and Black youth.

- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)/child welfare: To promote and help establish policies and programs that prevent youth from transitioning out of care (i.e., foster care, group homes) and into homelessness/shelters.
- Youth justice: To promote and help establish policies and programs that prevent youth from leaving a correctional facility without a solid housing plan in place.
- Education: To promote and help establish policies and programs that enable teachers and staff to identify youth at risk for homelessness and/or dropping out of school and support them to access community prevention resources and supports.
- Employment: To coordinate pathways to employment programming and supports that are tailored to the unique needs of homeless youth.

Older adults: Shelters are not equipped to care for aging clients, particularly those with complex health and mental health needs. TSSS should engage with the long-term care sector/long-term care homes to develop coordinated pathways for transitioning older adults from shelter to long term care while also advocating and/or supporting long-term care to develop policies and programs that will meet the unique needs of older adults who have experienced homelessness and who may be struggling with issues such as substance use or trauma. TSSS should collaborate with and support community-based homelessness prevention initiatives, for example, Crisis Outreach Service for Seniors (COSS), that support higher needs older adults to remain in their homes or in the community.

Refugees: TSSS should continue to advocate to the provincial and federal government that they allocate appropriate funding/resources to the City so that it can respond to the shelter occupancy pressures that have been exacerbated by increasing numbers of homeless refugees and develop policy and programming to adequately address the long-term housing and settlement needs of refugees. This also includes engaging with other jurisdictions to set up and coordinate pathways for refugees who would have better outcomes in other cities and regions. Finally, TSSS should work more closely with Refugee Houses/Reception Centres to coordinate shelter service provision to refugees, and with settlement and health service providers such as the Refugee Health Network to coordinate access to settlement and health services tailored to refugees.

Families Experiencing Violence: TSSS should work more closely with the provincially funded Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters to support advocacy efforts for more provincially funded VAW shelters and transitional housing.

Coordinate and Partner with Health and Correctional Institutions

Health/mental health institutions and correctional facilities continue to discharge some people from a hospital, a mental health facility or a correctional institution without always assessing their housing situation and all too often many are discharged directly to a shelter. TSSS should coordinate with these institutions to support policy and programming that ensures no one is discharged/released to community without a housing plan.

Engage and Collaborate with Municipalities and Regions Across Ontario

Many people come to Toronto from other Ontario cities and regions because they are not able to access homelessness services. TSSS should engage with other Ontario jurisdictions to share knowledge and best practices to help them develop their capacity to address local homelessness, operate harm reduction and low barrier shelters, and serve diverse populations.

Advocate for Stronger Rent Control and Eviction Protection

As noted, the increasing cost of living including the cost of housing are contributing to rising rates of homelessness. TSSS and other City partners should advocate to the province for stronger rent control policies (i.e., to reduce or eliminate loopholes that contribute to rising rents²⁰), noting that effective rent control can help people living on fixed or low incomes maintain their housing. TSSS can partner with providers and those who bring expertise in tenancy issues including landlord and tenant association and the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario in advancing these efforts. In addition, TSSS and other City partners can advocate to the province to enhance legal supports (i.e., through Legal Aid or the Tenant Advocacy Centre of Ontario) that can help tenants negotiate or mediate solutions to tenancy issues (i.e., for tenants experiencing a financial crisis or at risk of falling into arrears).

Advocate for Income Security

TSSS should identify and advance advocacy actions for addressing poverty and promoting income security as a key solution for preventing homelessness and promoting housing stability. This includes advocating for increases to Ontario's minimum wage and changes to OW and ODSP so that the financial assistance provided is aligned with housing costs and the cost of living in Toronto.

²⁰ For more information see: Rent control 'loopholes' have let Ontario rents soar: Report.https://www.thestar.com/real-estate/rent-control-loopholes-have-seen-ontario-rents-rise-three-times-higher-than-guidelines-report-finds/article_1b79f288-f744-11ee-8206-2f07b360df11.html

6. HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

TSSS is responsible for the planning, delivery and performance management of homelessness services and supports in Toronto. This section describes consultation findings related to TSSS' core mandate, beginning with key themes and suggestions made by participants that relate to TSSS processes and programs followed by suggestions that are interdivisional and cross-sectoral/intergovernmental in nature.

6.1. TSSS Processes

Reinforce Service System Values and Principles

There are core values and practice principles that should underpin homelessness service delivery in Toronto, including policy, program standards and human resources development.

Most homelessness programs were not designed with an anti-racism lens in mind, and as such have not been meeting the needs of Black or Indigenous individuals and families. TSSS has implemented and should continue to implement commitments from the City's *Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Action Plan* to underpin the sector's work in this area. TSSS can work with the sector to ensure that policies, processes and programming are grounded in confronting anti-Black racism.

In addition, TSSS should continue to work with its *Meeting in the Middle* partners to advance values and actions that reflect its commitments to reconciliation. Training should be delivered routinely to staff in order to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies for working effectively with diverse and over-represented populations that experience barriers due to systemic discrimination and racism.

The number of shelter clients/people experiencing homelessness with a disability (physical, developmental, mental health, etc.) is likely under-reported and is perceived to be growing. TSSS should embed a disability lens into the homelessness

Quick Win:
Develop and pilot test a disability lens in development and implementation of new shelter sites as part of *the Homelessness Capital Services Infrastructure Strategy*.

service model, whereby policies, programs and services are planned and delivered to address the needs of people with disabilities comprehensively.

The homelessness service system's capacity for compassionate and client-centered service delivery needs to be strengthened. This includes TSSS working with all providers to provide policies, standards, and training that bring to life and activate compassionate, needs based and outcome focused service delivery. A client-centered approach requires staff to understand and apply both trauma informed practices and assessments based on the broader determinants of health²¹. TSSS can work with the sector to ensure that training helps staff to integrate these perspectives into their work.

Establish and Accountability Framework and Improve Data Collection

Since the last *Homelessness Service Plan*²² was developed in 2021, the homelessness services system has grown and been transformed considerably, largely in response to the pandemic, growing numbers of

Quick Win:

Develop a logic model, measurable outcomes and indicators and performance metrics/targets.

overdoses, the influx of refugees and increasing demand for shelter service overall. By developing an accountability framework, comprised of a logic model that clearly describes the short, medium and long-term outcomes of TSSS' service and supports, TSSS can engage all service providers around common system goals. The accountability framework should also include mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and report on progress towards planned targets. Establishing an accountability framework will require TSSS to improve its collection and use of data so that it can monitor and evaluate service delivery and outcomes. An accountability framework can help TSSS and the sector to assess sector investments and demonstrate the value of homelessness services to clients, decision makers and the broader public.

Improve SMIS and Information Sharing

The use of SMIS could be improved to support needs-based planning and service coordination, and/or to maximize outcomes (i.e., related to housing and determinants of health) for clients. Staff at some shelter and outreach locations/sites may not have access to SMIS or all of its functionality and different locations/site are not consistently using SMIS functionality in the same way. It was recommended that TSSS improve access to SMIS across the

²¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), many factors combine together to affect the health of individuals and communities, whether people are healthy or not, is determined by their circumstances and environment. Factors housing, the environment, genetics, income, education relationships with friends and family all have considerable impacts on health.

²² For more information see: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-171730.pdf>

sector and strengthen orientation and training so that SMIS capability can be fully utilized.

The sector lacks an information management system that facilitates information sharing and communication among staff who are engaged with the same client. Instead, shelter and outreach clients are frustrated by having to retell their stories time and again (i.e., if they move from encampment to shelter, to a new shelter or to a new program within their shelter). TSSS should establish a system for streamlined and timely information flow between all providers and can draw upon the flow of client/patient information in the health system as an example (i.e., patient information is shared between primary care, labs, hospitals, etc.).

Many homelessness clients are connected to a range of service providers across the broader human services sectors (i.e., a shelter client may be a TESS client, in receipt of ODSP, engaged with an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team and a frequent emergency department user). The homelessness sector should effectively function as part of a greater integrated service delivery system, wherein data and information sharing policies and protocols facilitate coordinated and/or collaborative service planning and delivery within and beyond the homelessness sector and City divisions.

Strengthen Central Intake

There are significant challenges with Central Intake, including long wait times due to the large number of calls for support and the lack of formal systems for matching people to shelter programs based on their needs and goals. TSSS should enhance Central Intake to ensure that there are sufficient staff and resources available to respond to calls in a timely manner, carry out a client-centered and needs-based assessment at the point of intake for all potential clients and facilitate a person's placement to an appropriate shelter. In addition, diversion targets should be developed and articulated for Central Intake. This will require TSSS to strengthen referral pathways with other City divisions and other human service sectors and maximize SMIS capability so that it can be used by Central Intake to divert as many people as possible from shelter.

Strengthen Processes That Reinforce Client Rights, Responsibilities and Engagement in Service Delivery

Pressures on the homelessness sector (i.e., shelters operating at or beyond their planned capacity) strain staff workloads. Staff are increasingly

overworked and challenged to establish immediate communications and regular engagement with clients. For example, clients are not consistently oriented to their shelter or made aware of their rights and/or their responsibilities for developing and achieving housing outcomes, and may not have timely access to the different resources and supports they need to work towards housing goals.

People with lived experience spoke about the “feeling of limbo” that a client may experience in the absence of structured orientation and outcomes focused services and supports. This leads to a loss of hope, which can exacerbate or lead to complacency, substance use or mental health issues such as depression. TSSS should continue to work with shelters to improve their adherence to shelter standards and establish a more timely, consistent and structured intake process, whereby new clients are clearly informed about what is expected of them and what supports they will receive to achieve their goals. This will empower clients to make decisions and activate plans early in their shelter experience, and ultimately contribute to improved flow of clients out of homelessness and into housing.

The homelessness service system is guided by values that center and respect the client’s experience. As such, robust client feedback policies and processes need to be in place at TSSS and across all of its programs. TSSS should support providers to establish proactive and systematic engagement processes with clients (i.e., through surveys, meetings, etc.) that align with expectations for client engagement in shelter standards. Client feedback can shed light on what is working well and help to define improvement priorities. Moreover, when clients feel heard and empowered, they will provide better feedback and thus TSSS can also work with providers (i.e., by providing training) to develop and implement effective feedback processes that engage clients in authentic conversations.

Quick Win:

Standardize evidence-based client feedback mechanisms.

Invest in a Sustainable Workforce

The homeless sector’s capacity to achieve its goals is highly dependent on a sufficient, stable and skilled workforce, at the front line, administrative and management levels. Staff turnover, especially, among community providers is high, with staff frequently transitioning to the City, where salaries are more competitive. As a result, community providers are routinely training up staff only to lose them to the City. Not only is this a drain on service provider (and system) resources, it leads to a reliance on temporary agency staff, who often

are lacking the knowledge and skills to work effectively with clients. As a result, service continuity is interrupted and service delivery is not as consistent, coordinated or of the quality that it should be.

In addition, as a result of increasing violence in homelessness settings and the complexity of client issues, many staff across the sector are feeling unsafe and experience high levels of stress. Moving forward, TSSS should work with service providers to prioritize staff wellbeing and safety through policy, protocols, training and standards as defined in the *Shelter Safety Action Plan*²³. In addition, TSSS should work with the sector to harmonize operating and working conditions for staff across the sector, regardless of employer.

Integral to a sustainable workforce is the employment of people with lived experience across all roles in the homelessness service system. TSSS should engage with the Toronto Shelter

Quick Win:

Incentivize and support providers to employ people with lived experience.

Network (TSN) and service providers to develop policies and standards regarding the employment of people with lived experience in the sector, and provide evidence-based tools and resources to help the sector hire and support people with lived experience to succeed in careers in the sector. Doing so can help to address the sector's human resources issues and, perhaps more importantly, provide a pathway out of homelessness through good employment.

Invest in Staff Training and Development

Shelter standards provide guidance to the sector regarding staff training and development, and the Toronto Hostels Training Centre²⁴ was established and continues to be supported by TSSS to facilitate access to training that is specific to the homelessness system. Nonetheless, across the sector, not all staff have the skills or competencies required to work in challenging environments with clients who have different and complex needs. TSSS needs to help determine staff training and development priorities and ensure that training is accessible, affordable and available. Key training needs include trauma informed practice, harm reduction and conflict management, and training must be grounded in values to drive compassionate, respectful and client-centered care.

²³ For more information see: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-250568.pdf>

²⁴ Toronto Hostels Training Centre was officially renamed IDEA Training Collaborative on March 5, 2025.

Purpose Build Shelters and Limit Their Size

The shelter sector is comprised of very small shelters (i.e., 10 beds) and very large shelters (Seaton House houses over 400 men). There may be economies of scale in developing or operating large shelters; however, there is a strong preference among providers and people with lived experience for smaller shelters (i.e., less than 100 beds). As the HSCIS is implemented, all shelters should include space for group programming and social support/community building. In particular, strong attention should be paid to the needs of families, with shelters purpose built to be child friendly through the inclusion of sufficient indoor and outdoor spaces for play and learning.

6.2. Homelessness Programming

Be Strategic with Population Based Programs, Spaces and Shelters

Clients have complex, intersectional identities that may not fit squarely into population-specific spaces based solely on age, gender, or race for example. Overall, TSSS should stand up new shelters, in particular as the HSCIS is implemented, that are culturally affirming for people of different cultures and intersecting identities, and the sector should have policies, procedures and programs to provide culturally competent services that promote belonging and wellbeing as well as housing outcomes for all clients. In addition, there are some clients that benefit from being in a shelter with an exclusive and dedicated population focus. To this end, TSSS should have a clear framework or criteria for deciding when a new population specific program, space or shelter is called for.

Indigenous People: Through the *Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan*, TSSS has been and should continue to work with Indigenous service providers to roll out homelessness services that are informed and led by Indigenous people and

address the unique context of Indigenous homelessness resulting from historical and current impacts of colonization. The Indigenous organizations that participated in this engagement echoed many *Meeting in the Middle* commitments and called upon TSSS to increase and stabilize funding for Indigenous homelessness service providers and establishing a process for enabling Indigenous-led organizations to make financial, program and human resources decisions independently. This will enable Indigenous organizations to create more spaces and programs (i.e., a “half-way” housing for Indigenous

Quick Win:

Continue to engage with Indigenous providers to advance *Meeting in the Middle* recommendations.

people leaving correctional facilities) that are culturally competent, safe and responsive.

At the same time, because many Indigenous people use non-Indigenous services, all service providers should have Indigenous cultural competency training to support knowledge around the roots and causes of Indigenous homelessness, improve skills to address racism in the system, and improve capacity to support Indigenous clients and connect them to the services they need. In addition, pathways should be established to support providers in referring Indigenous clients to Indigenous specific services and supports as needed.

Youth: As noted, TSSS should develop and advance a dedicated plan for addressing youth homelessness. Youth pathways into and experiences with homelessness are unique. By virtue of their age, youth are still developing (i.e., emotionally, cognitively, etc.), and they often have yet to develop life-skills or the social/community connections necessary for independence. In addition, experiences of trauma, breaks in education, lack of employment experience and their age impacts their capacity to secure or retain housing. The City funds community operated youth shelters that have expertise in child/youth development, youth focused in-house services/supports and as noted earlier, a strong focus on diversion through FNS and Youth Reconnect programming. In addition, with an over-representation of Black, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the shelter system, youth shelters should deliver accessible, safe and culturally relevant supports. TSSS should continue to support the needs of diverse youth ensuring that an equity and confronting anti-Black racism lens is applied in policy and programming, by building staff competencies and through collaboration with organizations that bring expertise in youth homelessness.

Older adults: Older adults experiencing homelessness are not able to access appropriate care in the community, and many are ending their lives in a shelter. TSSS should prioritize older adults within its homelessness prevention and shelter diversion strategy, and design shelter programs and spaces that can support the unique needs of older adults. For example:

- Physically design spaces to accommodate people using wheelchairs and walkers,
- Collaborate with health services to have personal support worker (PSW) and nursing services available on site,
- Have staff with training/competency in geriatric and psycho-geriatric care, and

- Have direct referral relationships to long term care, hospital and palliative care programs, in particular those with expertise in serving homeless older adults.

Refugees: The shelter system was not designed for and is challenged to effectively address the needs of refugees. In general, shelter staff are not trained settlement workers and as such are not equipped to respond to refugees’ complex and unique needs. As noted, the City should work with other orders of government, in particular Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the refugee serving sector, to develop effective and coordinated actions that will address the housing needs of this population and reduce the flow of newly arrived refugees into shelters. At the same time, to better support the large number of refugees currently residing in shelters, TSSS should facilitate stronger and more formalized linkages with the newcomer settlement sector. On-site settlement services or direct referral arrangements with settlement workers will increase refugees’ access to a robust basket of tailored services (legal, health, language training, interpretation, employment/re-training, settlement, etc.). TSSS should also continue to support transitional shelters designed to support higher need refugees with tailored and wrap-around supports.

Families: Families experiencing homelessness, in particular those who have experienced violence, have unique needs. Specifically, children need to be in stable and structured environments that promote healthy child development. Shelters that are purpose-built, in terms of policy, physical design, programming and partnerships, are needed to support families and children. As the HSCIS is implemented, there is an opportunity to create welcoming, nurturing and child-friendly spaces through innovative partnerships, whereby family shelters could be co-located with libraries or EarlyOn Centres.

Improve Safety

Many consultation participants, both staff and people with lived experience, suggested that TSSS improve safety across homelessness settings, including shelters, respites, drop-ins and encampments. TSSS should continue to advance the *Shelter Safety Action Plan*, which provides a roadmap for prioritizing and continuously improving shelter safety for staff

Families get a bridging grant and get into a hotel, and no one is working with them to do case planning. This really gets people dependent on the system and is a waste of resources.

Consultation Session with Purchase of Service Providers

and clients. The plan identifies 14 actions to be undertaken over 36 months and was informed by the *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Shelter Safety Study* which found that violence and service restrictions are serious issues that require more action.

Strengthen on Site Supports and Services

As the sector moves into a post COVID era, there is an opportunity for TSSS to support the sector to strengthen on-site services and supports, ensuring that they reflect values, practice principles and performance standards, and respond to the increasingly complex needs of clients. TSSS should establish program and service delivery targets, ensure access to staff training, and hold providers accountable for delivering baseline programming grounded in system values, principles and outcomes.

However, not all shelter providers have the resources or capacity to deliver the array of programs and supports that diverse clients need. As such, the sector should function in a more collaborative and integrated manner whereby, the knowledge and skills of providers who bring expertise with particular issues or populations (i.e., mental health, harm reduction, refugees, aging, cultural competency, confronting anti-Black racism approaches, etc.) are leveraged and made available to deliver better outcomes. TSSS can support the sector to establish policies and processes for “shared” care or collaborative care planning and collaborative service delivery. For example, if shelter A does not have the expertise, they need to support one of their clients and they are not able to transfer their client to a more appropriate shelter, they should be able to call upon shelter B for their expertise and work together with shelter B to develop and deliver supports that will meet that client’s needs.

Client Orientation and Intake: Within and across shelters, orientation and intake is not happening in a consistent way. As previously discussed, it may be days or weeks before a new shelter client receives an orientation to the shelter. This scenario creates uncertainty on the part of the client, and for those who have experienced trauma or discrimination, may also trigger fear or despair, and increase the likelihood or risk of mental health, substance use or general helplessness. TSSS should fund shelters so that they have the capacity to hire a sufficient number of qualified staff, at the front line and management levels, and put in place targets and processes to ensure that orientation is timely (i.e., takes place within 24 hours) and that needs based assessments are used by staff to match clients to appropriate programs and services in-house and in the community.

Case Management: Participant feedback aligns with the feedback collected by TSSS during its 2024 consultations with the sector regarding case management. Across the system, there are inconsistent and high client to staff ratios that lead to challenges in client access to adequate case management services. Stakeholder engagement conducted by TSSS in 2024 found that there is a need to strengthen the resourcing of case management, standardize roles and responsibilities and embed accountability for consistent benchmarks in performance²⁵. Overall, case management should be flexible and responsive to the unique needs of diverse individuals and populations. However, as a standard, every TSSS client, regardless of the program that they are using (i.e., emergency shelter, 24-hour respite, outreach services, refugee program, transitional shelter, etc.) should be attached to a case management worker, and be responsible for, and supported to, establish, work towards, and attain housing goals.

Quick Win:

Increase funding for case management and establish clear performance

Harm Reduction: In the last few years harm reduction has become better understood by the homelessness sector and there have been significant improvements in harm reduction services and supports available across the system. There is an opportunity for TSSS to review its harm reduction objectives and establish clear outcomes-based metrics related to harm reduction to ensure these gains are sustained and enhanced. The City's *Our Health Our City Strategy*²⁶, recommends actions for all City divisions, including TSSS, many of which were echoed by consultation participants who suggested that TSSS:

- Continue to provide harm reduction policies, directives and training.
- Continue to deliver coordinated initiatives such as the Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (iPHARE) and the Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Program (MDOT).
- Ensure standards and training enable staff to meet drug users where they are at in their journey and provide services and supports in a non-judgmental manner.
- Ensure that harm reduction is appropriate/acceptable for diverse populations including women, Black, Indigenous and other racialized shelter clients.
- Continue to work with homelessness providers and substance use and harm reduction partners to ensure that a coordinated continuum of

²⁵ For more information see: TSSS' Case Management Spring 2024 Shelter Sector Engagement Summary (draft from August 8, 2024).

²⁶ For more information see: Our Health Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto.

services and supports from abstinence-based shelters/programs to low-barrier shelters/ programs are available for clients to access.

- Support the sector to strengthen direct referral relationships with substance use treatment and harm reduction programs.

Group Programs: Group programming and public spaces, which were significantly reduced during COVID, are slowly being reintroduced by shelters. Group programming is invaluable. For clients who have experienced marginalization and social exclusion, group programs foster a sense of belonging and community. Mental health programs help clients to work on their health and wellbeing, while skill building programs enhance life skills and foster confidence required to successfully transition from shelter to housing and independence. TSSS should fund and support shelters to develop and deliver group programs that align with clients' preferences and needs.

Quick Win:

Strengthen the delivery of needs based and on-site programming.

Peer Programs: Programs that are developed and delivered by peers help to ensure that shelter clients have access to services and supports that are relevant, accessible and appropriate. Peer programs also help to advance shelter sector priorities such as vaccination promotion. TSSS should continue to work with the sector to develop and advance guidance regarding peer-based programming that will help all shelter providers to create safe, non-judgmental space for clients to share their experiences and seek guidance without fear of stigma or shame.

"Peer workers and people on staff with lived experience"

Participant, People with Lived Experience Session, in response to the question, "What do you appreciate/like the most about shelter services or supports?"

Employment: Without an adequate income, many shelter clients will struggle to access affordable housing options. TSSS should work with shelters to develop a strategy for enhancing employment programming and supporting shelter clients to secure good work. This will require the sector to articulate feasible short, medium, and long-term employment outcomes for clients and establish programs that can drive towards those outcomes. Because TSSS and shelters are not employment providers, this will also require strategic engagement and partnerships with TESS and community employment providers. More specifically, participants suggested that TSSS:

Quick Win:

Work with homelessness providers, TESS and community employment providers to strengthen employment programming and supports.

- Establish stand-alone shelters or dedicated spaces for shelter clients (youth and adults) who are in school or working to provide them with a stable environment and access to quiet/calm space (i.e., for studying and sleeping).
- Collaborate with TESS to strengthen pathways to employment for shelter clients.
- Collaborate with employment organizations, including TESS and community employment providers, to deliver on-site employment programming including goal setting, skill development, occupation specific training and work placements.
- Create standards and processes for leveraging the knowledge and skills of people with lived experience and employing people with lived experience in the sector.
- Ensure employment related partnerships understand the barriers to employment faced by diverse client populations such as 2SLGBTQ+, Black, refugee or youth and are delivering relevant and appropriate employment services for diverse clients.

"We have (shelter) folks who may have lots of issues, but others are just looking for employment. We get folk from shelter into employment services and get them a job and they are quickly out of the shelter because we got them work."

"Employment provides people with meaning and purpose."

**Participants, Shelter and Housing
Advisory Committee Consultation
Session**

Life Skills training: Many shelter clients, including youth, have spent years living in highly structured environments (i.e., shelter, correctional institutions, mental health facilities, foster care, etc.), and lack or never have had the opportunity to develop the basic life skills required to live independently, such as financial literacy, cooking, communications and system navigation. All shelters should develop life skills programming that aligns with the needs of the clients they serve to help prepare them to live independently in the community.

Increase Access to and Availability of Transitional Shelter Programs

Transitional shelters provide a supportive environment with structured programming that helps shelter clients to develop skills and community connections, address mental health and substance use issues and feel confident about transitioning to independent housing. To increase access to transitional shelters, TSSS should convert

Quick Win:

Convert a traditional shelter to a transitional housing program and assess outcomes.

current emergency shelter beds to transitional beds and establish program specific outcomes and metrics.

While many shelter clients require a short term stay in emergency shelter there are some populations that benefit from a longer-term transitional shelter model.

- Youth: Transitional shelter programs that are embedded with life skills and career development supports (i.e., requirement to be in school and/or employed) are deemed to effective for helping to transition youth out of poverty long term.
- Refugees: Transitional shelters designed for high need refugee populations provide integrated access to settlement, legal, housing and health supports and enable refugees to successfully adapt to and integrate into their new lives in Canada.
- Families fleeing violence: Transitional shelters provide a supportive, trauma informed environment for families fleeing violence, as well as gender-based counselling and programming for both children and adults.
- Shelter clients who are not prepared to live independently in supportive housing because of behavioural issues related to unstable mental health or substance use. These clients could benefit from a transitional shelter program that helps them to stabilize through mental health and substance use support services, and develop the skills they need to live successfully in a community setting.

By increasing the availability of transitional shelter programs, TSSS can reduce recidivism and contribute to improved shelter capacity.

6.3. Interdivisional Strategies

As noted, there are many shelter clients and people sleeping outdoors and in encampments who are connected to service providers across the human service system who may not be aware that they are supporting the same client. City divisions need to leverage their collective resources in order to efficiently and effectively address the diverse needs of clients.

Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS): The vast majority of homelessness service system clients are also TESS clients. City run shelters are able to share client information with TESS, and many have TESS workers coming on-site to work with their clients on shared goals/approaches. Community shelters, however, work independently with clients on goal

planning, system navigation and case management. TSSS and TESS should develop a shared approach to intake, assessment, case planning and case management to ensure resources are maximized and supports focused. Further, with employment emerging as a significant priority, there is an opportunity for the homelessness sector to work more closely with TESS on shared approaches for enhancing access to employment supports and employment outcomes for clients.

Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA): Many homelessness providers partner with and refer clients to the FOCUS and SPIDER programs led by SDFA. TSSS should work with SDFA to ensure that the FOCUS and SPIDER programs are using a coordinated process for identifying and supporting shelter and encampment clients who experience acute or chronic risk related to health, safety and or victimization. In addition, TSSS should work/continue to work collaboratively with SDFA and refugee service providers to ensure that Refugee Resettlement Program²⁷ (RRP) resources are maximized to effectively support newly arrived refugees.

Toronto Public Health (TPH): TPH and TSSS have a long history of collaboration on public health issues impacting people experiencing homelessness (vaccines, COVID, infection prevention and control (IPAC), harm reduction, overdose prevention). TPH and TSSS should continue to work together to identify public health issues and create collaborative and integrated strategies for promoting public health priorities.

6.4. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies

Strengthen Collaboration with the Health Sector

Throughout this report, the interconnection between health and housing has been discussed considerably. Affordable and safe housing is a determinant of health and wellbeing, while good health and wellbeing helps people to remain stably housed. One of the positive outcomes from COVID is the strengthening of homelessness and health sector collaboration, in particular partnerships with community primary care, mental health and harm reduction organizations. However, participants identified numerous opportunities for strengthening collaboration with the health sector.

- Partnerships with community primary care providers such as Inner-City Health Associates (ICHA), other family health teams and community

²⁷ For more information see Refugee Resettlement Program – City of Toronto.

health centres can be enhanced to ensure that there is sufficient primary care available across the sector, including on-site, through outreach (i.e., to encampments) and in the community, especially for clients who are moving from homelessness to housing.

- Partnerships with community mental health services need to be strengthened to address the continued lack of supports for shelter clients. This includes partnerships with community mental health, institutions such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and mental health providers who bring expertise working with diverse populations and an understanding of the impact of racism on mental health.
- Partnerships with the disability, developmental and acquired brain injury sectors need to be strengthened to ensure on-site knowledge, skills and programming for neurodiverse populations and those with disabilities, physical or cognitive.
- With an aging population, partnerships with a range of organizations are needed to help shelters develop their knowledge base around the health of older adults and to provide on-site services, including personal support workers, that are tailored to older adult's specific health needs (i.e., diabetes, heart disease or dementia). Referral relationships with long term care and palliative care are needed when older adults can no longer be appropriately or safely supported in shelter.
- Collaboration that facilitates smooth and appropriate transitions, for example, between hospitals/emergency departments, mental health facilities, shelters and the community. This will help ensure that patients are not discharged without a housing plan and/or the medications, medical equipment and medical supports (i.e., wound care) they require.

Quick Win:

Formalize partnerships with organizations in key sectors:

- Disability
- Seniors support/long term care
- Settlement

Finally, in order for partnerships to be successful, partnership agreements need to be in place to articulate organizational and staff roles and responsibilities and to define accountabilities for shared outcomes.

Engage and Collaborate with other Sectors

In addition to the health sector, clients may use or touch a number of other service providers in other human services sectors. TSSS should identify and

establish service agreements with cross-sectoral service providers or service planning tables. For example,

- Work with Indigenous partners and support their efforts to put in place a culturally relevant strategy supporting Indigenous people who move regularly between correctional facilities and shelters.
- Establish partnerships with settlement service providers to facilitate the delivery of on-site settlement service, and formal engagement with the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and the Canadian Council for Refugees to advocate to other orders of government.
- Engage with employment agencies to help shelters develop and deliver on-site employment programs.

7. TRANSITIONING FROM HOMELESSNESS TO HOUSING

This section presents the key findings from the consultations regarding transitioning shelter clients to stable housing. Once again, actions that can be advanced independently by TSSS are presented first, beginning with those that are focused on the individual client and ending with those that are systemic in focus. These are followed by interdivisional actions and finally those which are intersectoral and intergovernmental in nature. In keeping with suggestions made in the homelessness prevention and shelter diversion section, many of the suggestions made for successfully transitioning people from homelessness require coordinated and collaborative approaches.

7.1. TSSS Strategies

Clarify Expectations with Clients

Shelter clients may not accept housing offers for a number of reasons. Some are worried that they will not be able to sustain their housing if their COHB benefits expire. Others are not satisfied with the location or size of the housing they are offered. Others still have become used to the shelter environment, particularly those who have been in shelter for a long time, and may be afraid of, or uninterested in leaving the shelter for a new environment. Nonetheless, shelter flow could be improved, and shelter occupancy decreased if shelter clients were better prepared to secure/accept housing. TSSS should clearly communicate client accountability for securing housing and provide resources and/or training to help shelter staff engage clients in constructive dialogue about their options and expectations.

Quick Win:

Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations with clients.

Connect Clients to Community Supports, Resources and Peers

Many clients form strong friendships, social support networks and community while they are residing in shelter or an encampment. It is important for TSSS and providers to proactively address issues related to social isolation that emerge when a shelter client transitions to the community. Case managers can start

"If a person is homeless for a long time, they have fear to move out of shelter because they have become community, and this is family. Need to bring in some of the people that have moved out. Bring them back in as peers to have conversations with clients – "If I move out and don't have food, where do I go, who do I talk to?" Bring people to come and say, "It will be good; this is what I've done, and it worked.""

**Participant, People with Lived Experience
Consultation Session**

connecting clients to community resources as soon as possible after intake to help clients feel connected to and welcome in communities (i.e., beyond the shelter environment). Peer workers should be engaged to provide advice and guidance to clients who are preparing to transition to community.

Follow-up workers should be responsible for reinforcing these community connections and supporting their clients to navigate community resources (food banks) and services (banks). It is also important to connect clients to their cultural and faith communities as these can be important sources of support, practical and emotional. TSSS should continue to ensure that there is a network of daytime drop-ins located across the City, so that shelter clients are able to connect with and be supported by a local network of resources including peers. At the same time, shelters can encourage former clients to visit shelters when they need to reconnect with the support systems and communities established in shelter.

Finally, TSSS should set up electronic repository of community information that staff across the homelessness service system can access for use with their clients. This information should be up to date and client resources should be available in clear language and different languages.

Increase the Public's Understanding of Homelessness and Support for Shelters

As a result of the stigma regarding homelessness, TSSS and shelter providers have experienced difficulty establishing new shelter and 24-hour respite programs in communities across the City and many shelter clients experience discrimination while they are residing in shelter which can be hurtful, re-traumatizing and demoralizing. TSSS should continue to embed a community engagement function in all shelters, fund Community Engagement Workers

and establish Community Liaison Committees to help identify and mitigate community issues and promote welcoming communities for shelter clients and people experiencing homelessness. TSSS can also work with other City divisions to undertake broader public education and awareness raising campaigns to address NIMBYism and reduce stigma related to homelessness.

Prepare People for Housing

There is an opportunity to work with shelter clients while they are residing in an emergency or a transitional shelter environment, to help them prepare for independent living and the transition to housing. This begins with assessing client's housing needs, developing housing goals and supporting clients to be housing ready through on-site programs and referrals to community, including continuity of health and harm reduction services. TSSS should work with the sector to establish a common understanding of Housing First and its application in the context of supporting diverse and/or higher need shelter populations in order to drive more successful housing outcomes, more independent living, and less returns to shelter.

"To move from shelter to housing ... individual plan, income supports, follow-up care that is tailored, mental health referrals ... health related supports ... education, job skill supports and awareness."

Participant, People with Lived Experience Consultation Session

Establish and Support Accountability for Housing Outcomes

TSSS should continue to work with the sector to establish clear housing outcomes and targets and develop tools which can measure hard outcomes, such as number of clients that successfully transition to and are stably housed (i.e., for six months, one year, two year), and softer outcomes, such as improved client trust and engagement. To promote housing readiness, TSSS should embed accountability for housing related targets into service agreements, appropriately resource providers and increase access to transitional shelter programs.

7.2. Interdivisional Strategies

Many of the suggestions that can help facilitate successful transitions from homelessness to stable housing require a City-wide approach and are similar to the interdivisional prevention and diversion strategies discussed in section 5.2.

Strengthen up Supports

Follow-up support to a former shelter or outreach client is a critical success factor for enabling housing retention and stability, especially for clients whose needs or behaviors impede their ability to retain housing. TSSS should work with the Housing Secretariat, currently responsible for funding this program, to:

- Embed the follow-up support role at all shelters and put in place policies, service standards and metrics that will guide the consistent delivery of follow up supports that reflect sector values and principles and drive towards sector outcomes.
- Develop role descriptions that lay out the role's responsibility for delivering client-centered wrap around supports, including but not limited to: skill development, system navigation, financial, landlord mediation and advocacy and supportive counselling.
- Enhance access to training and development to ensure that follow-up workers have the knowledge and skills that are needed to support diverse populations as well as clients residing in private landlord and public sector (i.e., TCHC) units.
- Review the frequency and duration of follow-up visits. Currently restricted to a one-year period, engagement participant suggested that moving forward, this practice should not be uniformly applied, but vary based on what each client needs.
- Establish an enhanced follow-up program to provide a higher level of support (i.e., greater frequency and/or longer duration of visits) and access to expert services, such as hoarding specialists or occupational therapy, to people with complex health needs or behavioral issues and/or who have lived in highly structured settings for a long time (i.e., shelters, correctional institutions, mental health facilities, etc.).

Strengthen Engagement with Landlords

TSSS should collaborate with the Housing Secretariat, who is also the divisional lead for landlord engagement, to undertake actions that will strengthen engagement with private and public sector landlords and increase housing options for shelter clients. Suggestions made by engagement participants include:

- Establish and maintain a central roster of landlords with a focus on those who are amenable to housing

Quick Win:

Establish relationships and partnerships with landlords who rent to older adults.

people with experiences of homelessness and attract additional landlords through marketing and communications. The City can focus on strengthening relationships with landlords in the older adults' space, including TCHC seniors' buildings, private sector retirement residences as well as long term care providers.

- Fund all shelters to implement landlord engagement programming. Depending on the size of the shelter this function could be carried out by follow-up workers or may require a dedicated staff role. These staff can help to facilitate good communication and relationship building between tenants and landlords and proactively identify and mitigate or mediate issues that put tenancy at risk. Providing supports to the landlord, and not only the tenant, is critical for securing and retaining units for clients with higher needs or behavioural issues.
- Strengthen client access to the Rent Bank, EPIC and to housing benefits and financial supports such as COHB or bridging grants.
- Continue to advocate for an appropriate allocation of COHB and for financial supports that reflect the high cost of rental housing in Toronto.
- Co-design innovative affordable and/or supportive housing that is purpose built to meet the needs of diverse shelter populations and advocate for more RGI or subsidized housing initiatives that prioritize shelter clients.

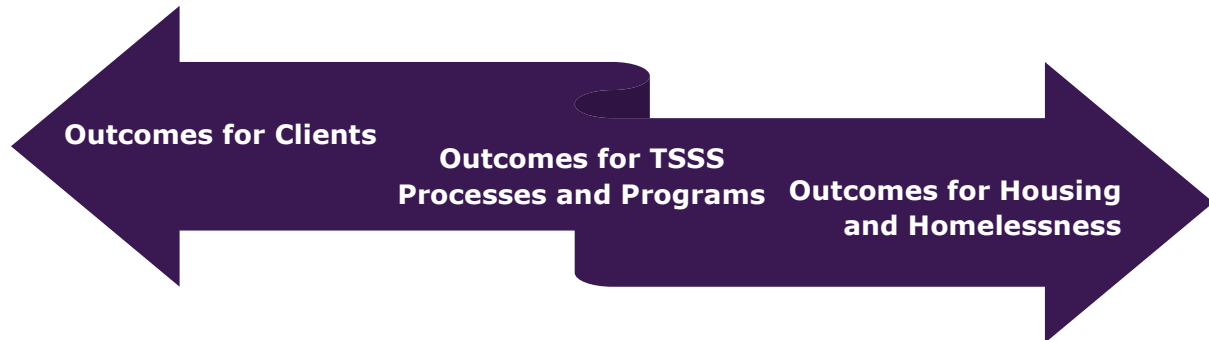
In addition, TSSS should strengthen its engagement with TESS to ensure that clients have access to all the benefits that they are entitled to, including the Housing Stabilization Fund, and work with other City divisions to advocate for stronger municipal controls, requirements, by-laws or incentives that can help to maintain the current supply of supportive and affordable housing and/or promote the new development of affordable or supportive housing. To help facilitate interdivisional collaboration, TSSS should help to put in place agreements and systems that facilitate communication, coordination and information sharing.

7.3. Intersectoral and Intergovernmental Strategies

Section 5.2 described intersectoral and intergovernmental strategies required to prevent homelessness and divert people from using shelters. Many of these same strategies will also aid shelter clients to successfully transition from homelessness to stable housing. Most notably, TSSS should work closely with key partners to advance advocacy efforts that will maintain and grow affordable rental housing stock in the City and increase people's access to financial support and income security.

8. A FIVE-YEAR VISION AND OUTCOME INDICATORS

This section provides a vision for Toronto’s homelessness system and the outcomes that consultation participants would like to see for the system by 2030. The five-year vision for TSSS processes and programs are described first, along with resulting client outcomes followed by the broader outcomes related to homelessness and housing that TSSS can influence through collaboration and advocacy.



Five Year Vision for TSSS Processes

TSSS will have performance outcomes for the Strategic Plan, and routinely measure and report its performance to stakeholders. There will be effective measures in place for homelessness prevention, including shelter diversion. Central Intake will carry out timely needs-based assessments and match clients to programs that best meet their needs. SMIS will effectively facilitate cross sector and intersectoral information sharing and coordinated client care. Referral systems with supportive and affordable housing providers across all sectors will provide streamlined and timely pathways to appropriate housing options.

Five Year Vision for Programs

Homelessness spaces will be safe. Programs will be well resourced with sufficient numbers of qualified staff, in particular, housing workers, case managers and follow-up workers. Service delivery will be culturally competent, client-centered and trauma informed. Programs will provide integrated health services, including on-site primary care, mental health, substance use and harm reduction services and/or referral to these supports in the community. Transitional shelter programs will be available to clients who require additional time and/or support to transition successfully to housing.

Client Outcomes

Clients will have timely access to Central Intake and an emergency shelter bed when they need it. They will be treated with respect and compassion by multi-disciplinary teams of staff, and have access to comprehensive supports that are tailored to their needs and which reinforce their dignity and autonomy. Clients will exit homelessness spaces and programs with the supports and skills they need to secure and retain their housing/tenancy.

Sector Outcomes

Overall, less people will use the homelessness services, and in particular there will be fewer youth, refugees, families and older adults in the shelter system. As a result, the number of shelter beds will match the demand for shelter. People's experience with homelessness will be brief; emergency shelter stays will be shorter, and fewer people will return to homelessness setting after transitioning to housing.

Housing Outcomes

Public stigma of homelessness will be reduced and the public will have a greater understanding of homelessness. There will be more RGI and subsidized housing units in the City, and more housing with supports that people need to maintain their housing. As such, there will be a significant reduction in the number of homeless encampments and far fewer people will experience homelessness.

9. CONCLUSION

More than 600 people provided input through stakeholder engagement activities to TSSS' upcoming Strategic Plan. While many different issues were identified and many actions recommended, there are some that were consistently put forward.

First, homeless services must be grounded in values that centre the client. This includes compassionate, needs based, culturally competent, trauma informed and outcomes focused care that embodies commitments to equity and anti-racism.

In addition, to deliver client-centered care, and position itself for sustainability and impact, TSSS needs to improve key processes. As a priority, a Central Intake should be enhanced so that all individuals receive a comprehensive assessment and in turn are matched to a program that best aligns with their needs. In addition, TSSS' information management systems, such as SMIS, should be improved to facilitate inter-sectoral and interdivisional service coordination.

There is a role for population specific programming, spaces and/or shelters, however, it is critical that all providers build capacity and competency for effectively working with diverse populations and the issues that they present. There is significant expertise and innovation among service providers that can be leveraged to strengthen, expand and coordinate service delivery across the sector.

To create pathways from homelessness to housing that do not result in returns to shelter or homelessness, TSSS should expand access to transitional shelter programs and collaborate with interdivisional and intersectoral partners to deliver initiatives that build up client's health and mental health, life skills and employment prospects. Ultimately to reduce flow into shelters, TSSS must prioritize homelessness prevention, including shelter diversion. This will require significant interdivisional work and advocacy to other orders of government for policies and programs will protect tenants, create more supportive and affordable housing and increase people's economic security.

The new Strategic Plan must articulate clear priorities, measurable outcomes and target, and monitor and report on progress. This will help to build confidence and foster shared accountability for the implementation of priorities. There is an opportunity for TSSS to draw upon knowledge and wisdom shared by stakeholders as it moves forward with this critical planning initiative.

APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION SURVEY

Between October and November 2024, TSSS administered the Stakeholder Consultation Survey: Priorities for Addressing Homelessness in Toronto to community groups with direct or indirect involvement in addressing homeless or issues that intersect with homelessness. These groups include academics, public policy practitioners, representatives from business improvement areas, members of client associations, disability and accessibility advocates, subject-matter experts in health, mental health, and harm reduction, representatives from food banks, correctional facilities, and community advocacy groups, among others. The survey consisted of 16 questions, including one demographic question, eight questions related to the TSSS 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, and five questions related to the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS). Presented below is a summary of the responses to the eight Strategic Plan questions.

1. Respondents

There were 176 respondents to the survey. As seen in Figure 1 below, most of the respondents are from resident associations (27%), health and mental health organizations (20%), and homelessness service organizations (17%).

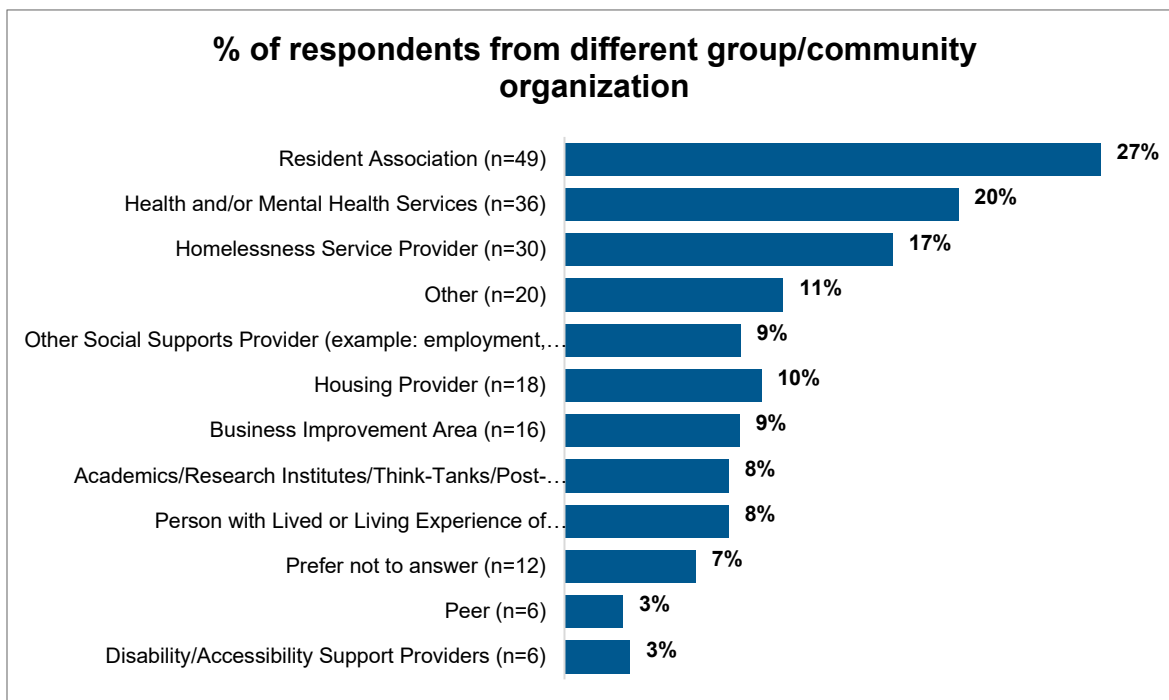


Figure 1: Types of Survey Respondents

2. Key Homelessness Issues

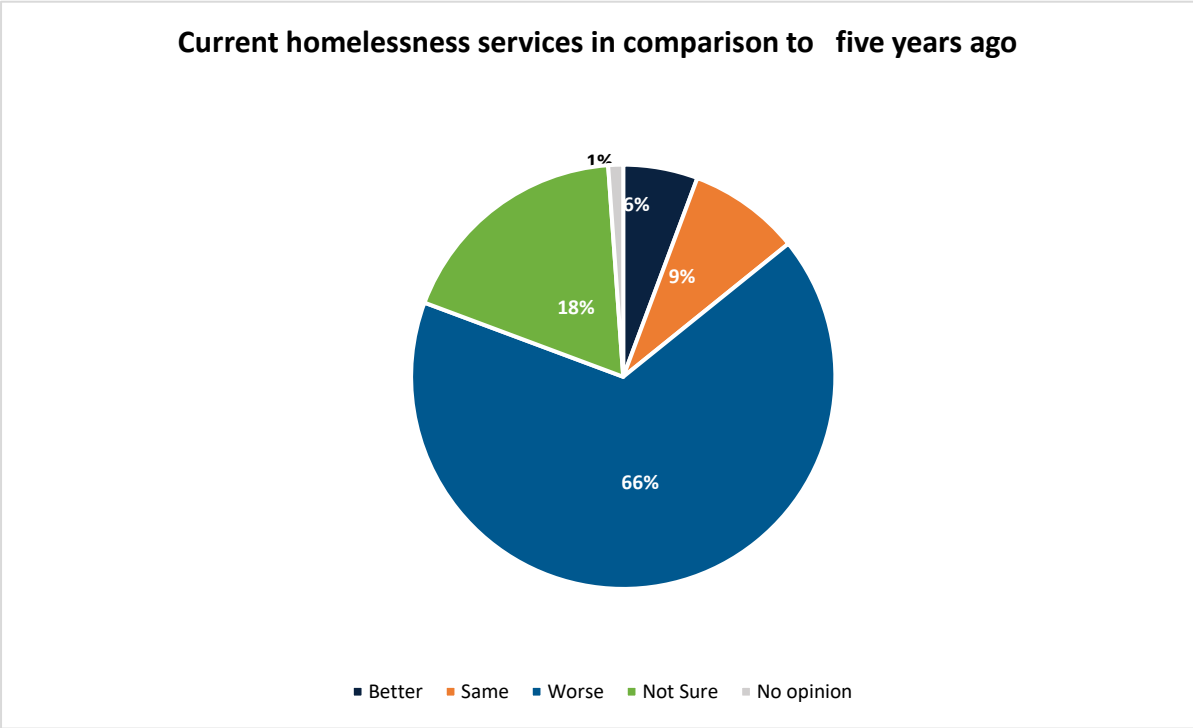


Figure 2: Current Homelessness Services In Comparison To Five Years Ago

The survey asked participants to compare current homelessness services (e.g., shelters, street outreach, and drop-ins) in Toronto with those provided five years ago. Only 6% of survey respondents, as seen in Figure 2, indicated that homelessness services in Toronto are better than before, and of these respondents, most are homelessness service providers (5), housing providers (4) and health and/or mental health services (4). Respondents specified the following areas as the ones that have improved: trauma informed initiatives, the use of an equity lens and addressing diverse needs, safety-focused services, the pandemic response, access to emergency housing services, coordination, and access to other City services.

Respondents noted that issues of homelessness are complex, and that challenges within or impacting the system include the rising cost of housing, high demand for housing, lack of effective needs based/tailored services (i.e., the diverse needs of newcomer populations), a growing homeless population, long wait times and lack of access to central intake.

On the other hand, 66% of respondents replied that current homelessness services are worse than before. Thirty percent of these respondents are from

resident associations while 19% are professionals from health and/or mental health organizations and 15% are from homelessness service organizations. This group identified the growing homeless population, including increased visible homelessness, the housing crisis, including increased evictions, funding limitations, increases in immigration and barriers to settlement for newcomers (employment, language) as some factors that have contributed to the homelessness becoming worse over time.

In terms of shelter service delivery, respondents identified an imbalance between service demand and capacity (i.e., the lack of shelter beds or indoor spaces), unsafe, overcrowded and poorly managed shelters, declined professional engagement, the complex needs of clients who use substances, inadequate support for refugees with diverse needs and a decline in the accessibility of City's services as some of the factors which contribute to the worsening of the City's shelter services.

Overall, respondents agreed that the homelessness crisis in Toronto is worsening, with more people on the streets, inadequate support services, and significant impacts on communities. There is an urgent need for effective solutions, including permanent housing and better mental health support.

3. Five Year Homelessness Priorities

The survey asked respondents to comment on a series of potential priorities for the Strategic Plan. The #1 priority, identified by 47% of stakeholders is *reduce chronic homelessness in Toronto*, followed by *increase shelter spaces in Toronto* and *improve pathways to permanent and stable housing with supports*, ranked #1 by 43% and 36% of respondents respectively (Figure 3). More moderately ranked priorities included, *engage and consult with a range of stakeholders and partners to develop homelessness solutions and indicators related to homelessness prevention and shelter support services*, *strengthen proactive responses to reduce and prevent homelessness*, *enhance safety, inclusivity, and accessibility in shelter spaces to meet diverse needs*, *improve access to homelessness services and supports for equity-deserving groups*, and *enhance coordination between health, mental health, harm reduction, housing, settlement and income support sectors*. These were ranked #1 by 20% to 30% of respondents. The lowest ranked priority is, *establish and strengthen partnerships with community partners and other sectors*, identified by just 6% of respondents as the #1 priority.

Respondents also suggested the following additional ideas be considered as priorities for addressing homelessness: enhance partnerships with law enforcement bodies to remove tents from streets, involve police in community safety projects, amend the Mental Health Act regarding non-consenting treatment, build more supportive housing, encourage employment among shelter clients, and implement mandatory drug rehabilitation programs.

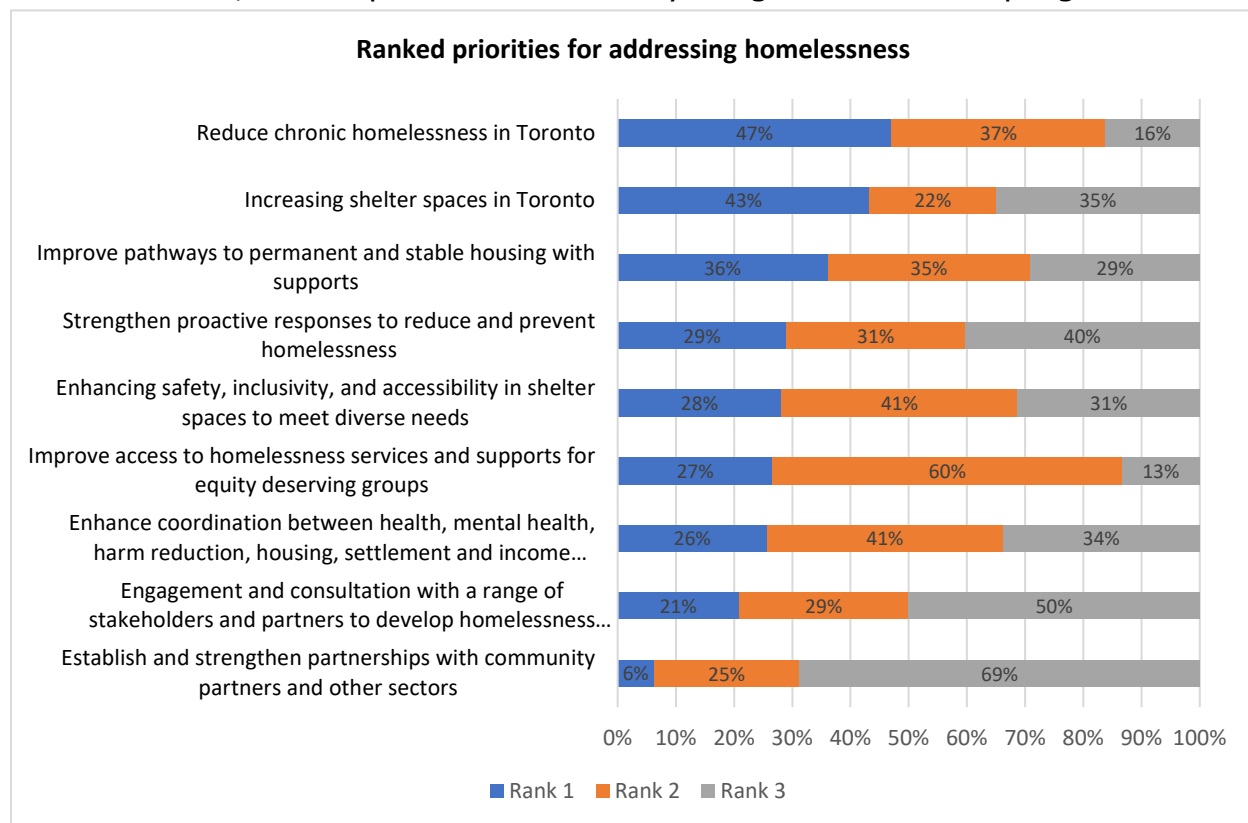


Figure 3: Priorities for Addressing Homelessness in Toronto

4. A Vision for the Homelessness System in Toronto by 2030

The survey asked respondents to describe their vision for the homelessness system in Toronto in 2030. According to respondents, Toronto's homelessness system will be more comprehensive and supportive, people experiencing homelessness will have access to safe shelter space with the necessary resources, rapidly transition out of homelessness with easy access to stable housing, and there will be effective measures for homelessness prevention. Some additional ideas for the vision include:

- Collaboration with other sectors, different levels of government, other cities, and the City of Toronto's other divisions.

- Funding allocations, strong enforcement and good governance.
- Easy access to a shelter system with comprehensive intake and referral, mental and physical health and harm reduction supports, effective case management (referral and follow-up), and assistance in finding employment, training, or volunteer work.
- Person-centered supports for different age groups (youth, adult, older adult) with a focus on inclusive culture.
- A Right to Shelter policy, a climate change lens, etc.
- Improved housing stability (eviction prevention, rent controls), Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) support and population-specific wrap-around support to keep people housed.

5. Assessing the Impact of Homelessness Services in Toronto

Participants were asked about strategies for assessing the positive impact of TSSS' homelessness services. In general respondents suggested continuous monitoring and tracking of indicators, and assessment and evaluation of interventions using standardized tools, including feedback from staff, clients and advocacy groups. Some additional ideas for assessing impact include:

- Identify, and monitor the changes in, various indicators or outcomes, including but not limited to: duration of stay in housing, reduction in returns to homelessness, improvement in health, employment, social connections, and personal skills, decrease in shelter stays and emergency interventions, the number of evictions prevented, the frequency and duration of hospital admissions, incidents on public transport, and access to mental health and addiction services.
- Track the number of participants in skill development training, harm reduction and mental health support, training and other educational programs and conduct participation satisfaction surveys.
- Conduct regular field visits and engagement with managers of service provider organizations and case workers to identify positive changes in clients in the shelter system. Collect periodical qualitative data and engage or open communication with shelter clients to know the impact of the shelter services and needs.
- Measure or count people in shelters and encampments and the success rate of housing over time.

Overall, the survey responses indicate the approach emphasizing comprehensive data collection, realistic outcome measurement, a holistic view of the impact of homelessness services on individuals' lives and continuously

tracking, updating, reviewing, and adjusting processes and actions would help to feature the positive changes in the shelter system.

6. TSSS Advocacy and Engagement

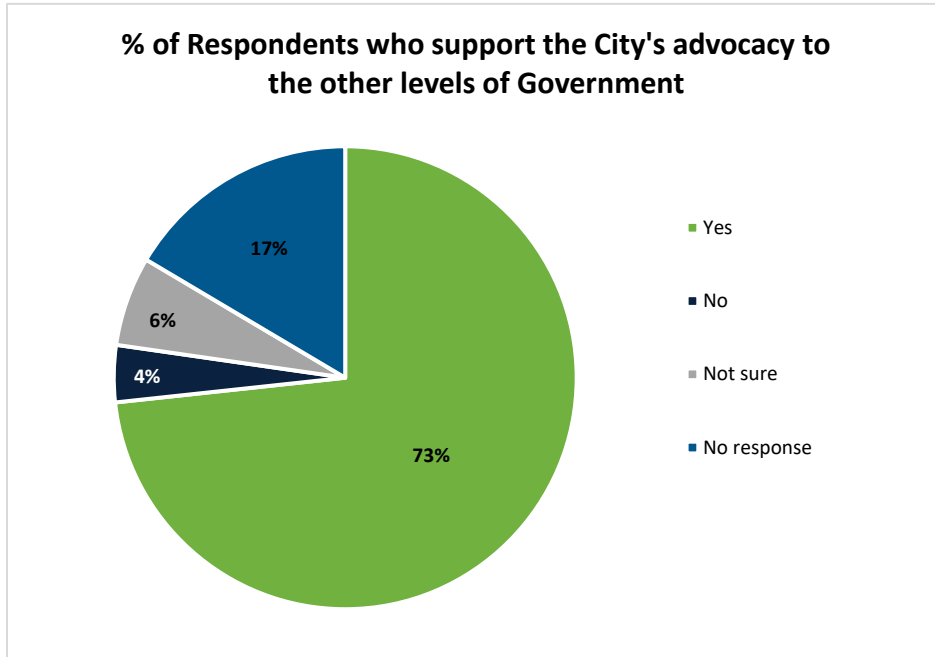


Figure 4: City Advocacy with Other levels of Government

The survey asked participants whether the City should advocate and collaborate with other levels of government for increased funding and to secure their support in helping to address Toronto's homelessness crisis. Seventy-three percent of respondents were in support of the City advocating to and collaborating with other levels of government, and only 4% were not supportive.

7. Key Partners

Respondents identified the key partners or partnerships for TSSS:

- Other levels of government were ranked #1 by 43% of respondents.
- Health and mental health services, including hospitals, harm reduction services were ranked #1 by 15% respondents.
- Housing providers, including affordable and supportive housing providers in the public and private markets were ranked #1 by 7% of respondents.

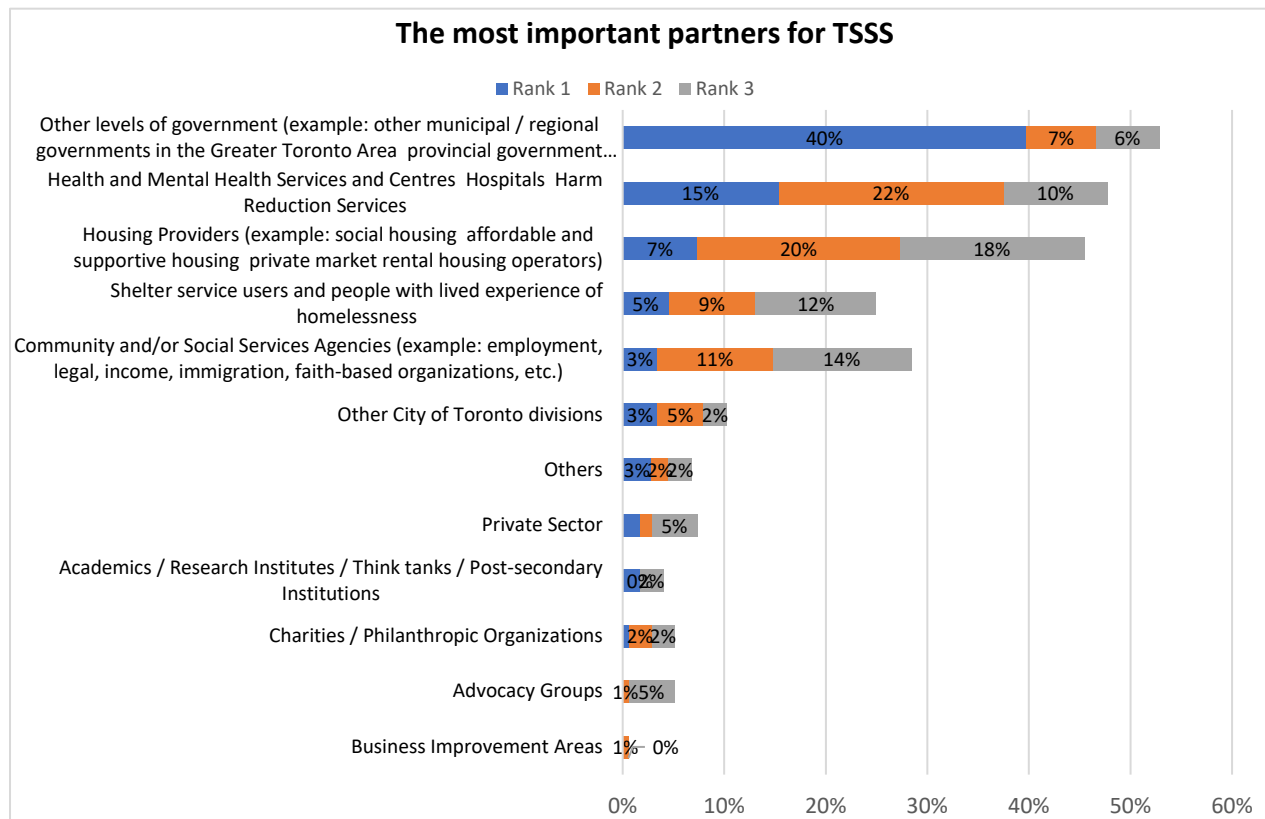


Figure 5: Important Partners for TSSS

8. Underdeveloped Collaborations or Partnerships

Respondents suggested that the City explore and or develop the following partnerships and collaboration:

- Housing providers, including social housing, affordable and supportive housing, and private market rental housing operators.
- Charities/philanthropic organizations that can help to fund community-based services such as counselling services, food banks and emergency housing should be more involved in City plans and challenged to provide resources such as space, clothing and volunteers.
- Community or social sector agencies can provide safe spaces for people experiencing homelessness and to help integrate homeless individuals into community.
- Federal and provincial governments can provide funding, new/more shelter services, spaces for newcomers and more affordable housing.
- Health and mental health services, including hospitals and harm reduction services can help coordinate care pathways whereby

individuals experiencing homelessness can receive streamlined access to health, mental health or harm reduction supports tailored to their needs. Leveraging Ontario Health's digital e-services can help the City to facilitate seamless referrals, improve care continuity and enable better data sharing among agencies.

- Academics can provide fresh perspectives on homelessness and suggest improvements for shelter service delivery.
- Advocacy groups, including people with lived experience can provide expertise to inform decision-making.
- Business Improvement areas can work to make solutions acceptable to the community and involve businesses in solving local problems.
- The private sector can work with developers to create more affordable housing.

APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following reports were included in the literature review to provide contextual background for the consultation responses gathered during recent sessions. These reports encompass various aspects of homelessness, housing supports, and related social services in Toronto. They include:

- City of Toronto’s 2024 Budget Public Consultations: Briefing Note and Open Data
- TSSS’ Hear Our Voices: Consultation Report 2022: A Report to Apply an Anti-Black Racism Lens to the Toronto Shelter Standards
- TSSS’ Update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP): Encampment Engagement Report
- TSSS’ Case Management Spring 2024 Shelter Sector Engagement Summary (draft from August 8, 2024)
- The Shelter Safety Study: An examination of violence and service restrictions in Toronto’s shelter system
- Our Health Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto
- 2024 to 2027 York Region Homelessness Service System Plan
- Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (June 2018)
- Meeting in the Middle Fifth Annual Gathering Summary Report 2023
- Shelter Safety Action Plan 2024

These reports were reviewed for key themes, recommendations, findings, and conclusions that would provide valuable context to the feedback received during the consultations. The analysis which follows organizes key themes from the reports according to the five key areas explored throughout the consultations. Thereafter, a synopsis of each report is provided to present relevant insights from each report.

Summary

Key Homelessness Issues in Toronto

The literature highlights several systemic and ongoing homelessness issues in Toronto. A recurring theme is the inadequacy of shelter services to meet the growing demand. The 2024 Budget Public Consultations emphasize the need for enhanced resource allocation to address homelessness more effectively,

particularly through improved outreach and service integration. The "Shelter Safety Study" identifies that violence and safety concerns in shelters are a significant issue, contributing to instability for individuals seeking refuge. The "Meeting in the Middle" reports highlight the increasing vulnerability of marginalized groups, especially Black and Indigenous individuals, who face systemic barriers in accessing adequate services.

Participants in various consultation sessions noted that homelessness is exacerbated by issues such as racial discrimination, limited affordable housing options, and inadequate mental health support. The "Hear Our Voices" consultation underscores the intersectionality of homelessness, particularly how anti-Black racism impacts shelter access and the quality of services. Furthermore, the "Our Health Our City" strategy highlights that mental health and substance use issues are critical factors contributing to homelessness, indicating the need for a more holistic approach to service delivery.

Prevention and Diversion Strategies

The literature suggests that diversion strategies should focus on early intervention and community-based approaches. The "York Region Homelessness Service System Plan" stresses the importance of developing pathways to housing stability before individuals enter the shelter system, especially through increased rent subsidies and supportive housing options. The "IDP Encampment Engagement Report" calls for a more humane and structured approach to encampment management, advocating for diversion programs that connect individuals to services before they become entrenched in homelessness.

Participants in the consultations echoed the importance of prevention, with a focus on youth, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and refugees. Several consultation sessions highlighted that systems should proactively engage these populations, offering resources such as job training, education, and mental health support to prevent them from entering homelessness in the first place. The "Case Management Summary" report recommends investing in case management systems that offer proactive and coordinated services, particularly for high-risk populations.

Homelessness Services and Supports

The literature emphasizes the need for improved access to shelters, with a particular focus on ensuring services meet the diverse needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. The "Shelter Safety Study" points to the need for

better shelter conditions, with more safety protocols to protect vulnerable clients, and better mental health and addiction services. The "Meeting in the Middle" reports also stress the importance of tailored services, highlighting that both the shelter system and outreach programs need to be culturally sensitive to better serve marginalized groups.

Consultation feedback suggests that while shelter services are necessary, they need to be more responsive and inclusive. For instance, the "Our Health Our City" report notes the importance of integrating health services with housing supports to reduce barriers for people experiencing homelessness with concurrent mental health and substance use challenges. Several feedback sessions also discussed the need for more outreach services in the community and improved communication between service providers to ensure that individuals are not lost in the system.

Transitions to Stable and Supportive Housing

The transition from shelter to stable housing is a critical component identified in the literature. The "York Region Homelessness Service System Plan" emphasizes the need for a seamless transition from shelters to housing, recommending that shelters be linked directly with housing providers to ensure continuity of care and avoid gaps in services. The "Case Management Summary" calls for more targeted follow-up services to help individuals maintain their housing and address issues such as social isolation, financial instability, and mental health concerns.

Participants in the consultation sessions supported this view, noting that follow-up support is essential for individuals exiting the shelter system, particularly for those with complex needs. The "Meeting in the Middle" strategy advocates for the expansion of supportive housing models that include wrap-around services, such as mental health counseling and employment support, to assist individuals in making a long-term transition into stable housing. Many respondents also highlighted that cultural sensitivity in housing and mental health services is essential to ensure long-term stability for marginalized groups.

Five-Year Outcomes and Indicators of Success

The literature provides various indicators of success for homelessness systems, focusing on outcomes such as reduced shelter stays, increased housing retention, and improved mental health outcomes. The "Shelter Safety Action Plan" emphasizes that success can be measured by the extent to which

safety is ensured within shelters and how effectively individuals are transitioned into stable housing. Similarly, the "Our Health Our City" report identifies mental health and addiction recovery as key indicators of success, alongside the provision of housing stability.

Consultation responses reflect these indicators, with many participants emphasizing that success should be measured by the length of time individuals remain housed, the stability of housing after transition, and improvements in well-being, particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds. As the "Meeting in the Middle" reports suggest, these indicators should also consider how well systems address the intersectional needs of Black, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Many respondents also advocated for a more transparent and consistent system of tracking progress, ensuring that data collection reflects the complexities of homelessness and its diverse causes.

City of Toronto's 2024 Budget Public Consultations: Briefing Note and Open Data

The "City of Toronto's 2024 Budget Public Consultations – Briefing Note and Open Data" report outlines public input on homelessness in the City, focusing on priorities for the 2024 budget. Participants highlighted the need for better housing solutions, more accessible support services, and systemic changes to address homelessness. Feedback was collected through online surveys and in-person/virtual sessions, each offering unique perspectives on homelessness challenges.

Major themes:

- **Urgent Need for Affordable Housing:** Calls for more affordable housing units and increased housing supply.
- **Increased Support for Vulnerable Populations:** Emphasis on services for youth, women, refugees, and those with mental health and addiction issues.
- **Prevention and Diversion:** Need for strategies to prevent homelessness, including proactive interventions and diversion programs.
- **Support for Housing First Initiatives:** Continued commitment to Housing First programs for long-term homelessness.
- **Focus on Coordinated Services:** A call for better integration of homelessness services, healthcare, and employment programs.

- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Advocated for more transparency and data to guide homelessness programs and funding decisions.
- **Addressing Systemic Inequities:** Emphasis on tackling systemic barriers, including racial and gender-based disparities.
- **Stronger Community Partnerships:** Increased collaboration between the City, non-profits, and the private sector.
- **Enhanced Client-Centered Case Management:** Importance of individualized, culturally competent case management for diverse needs.
- **Support for Mental Health and Substance Use:** Greater integration of mental health services and harm reduction programs within the shelter system.
- **Empowering People with Lived Experience:** Involvement of individuals with lived experience in the design and implementation of homelessness strategies.
- **Focus on Long-Term Housing Stability:** Emphasis on long-term support to maintain housing, such as employment and financial literacy programs.

In summary, the public consultations underscore the need for a more integrated and supportive homelessness response system in Toronto.

TSSS' Hear Our Voices: Consultation Report 2022: A Report to Apply an Anti-Black Racism Lens to the Toronto Shelter Standards

The "Hear Our Voices" report presents a comprehensive analysis of consultation feedback from Black individuals with lived experience of homelessness, advocates, and service providers in Toronto. It explores how anti-Black racism shapes the shelter experience and outlines necessary structural changes to address these issues. The report emphasizes the need for a shift towards culturally responsive, inclusive, and equitable services to combat systemic racism in shelters and to ensure Black individuals feel safe, respected, and supported.

Feedback from focus groups and interviews:

- **Racial Discrimination and Bias:** Participants highlighted widespread experiences of racial profiling and discrimination within the shelter system, with many Black clients feeling stereotyped, stigmatized, and marginalized. This often led to barriers in accessing services and feeling unsafe.

- **Cultural Competency and Black-Affirmative Services:** The lack of culturally responsive services was a common theme, with participants calling for a more culturally competent staff that reflects the diversity of the people they serve. Many respondents pointed to the need for training on anti-Black racism and more Black-specific services.
- **Lack of Representation and Support:** Participants emphasized the importance of Black leadership and the need for more Black service providers, case managers, and peer support staff within shelters to create a sense of trust and safety.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Many noted that Black clients, particularly those who are survivors of systemic oppression, require trauma-informed services that recognize the intersection of racism, poverty, and homelessness.
- **Policy and Systemic Change:** A systemic overhaul was deemed necessary to address institutional biases and the treatment of Black clients, including addressing the racial disparities in shelter access and accommodations.

The survey corroborated these themes, showing that Black people in Toronto's shelters face higher rates of mistreatment and unequal access to housing and supports. It revealed a widespread sentiment that current shelter systems are not designed to meet the needs of Black individuals and families. Respondents also reported feeling disconnected from services due to language barriers, lack of cultural understanding, and inadequate support from shelter staff.

Recommendations:

- **Policy Reform:** The report calls for the implementation of policies that are anti-Black racism sensitive, ensuring that shelters actively combat discrimination through systematic changes, such as hiring Black staff and offering cultural safety training.
- **Improved Access to Culturally Affirming Resources:** It is recommended that the shelter system increase resources for Black clients, offering services such as mentorship, case management, and peer support from individuals who understand their lived experiences.
- **Black-Affirmative Program Development:** The report urges the creation of shelter programs designed specifically for Black people, ensuring that their cultural, spiritual, and community needs are met through a more tailored approach to service delivery.
- **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Empowering Black clients through community engagement initiatives, such as leadership

programs and support networks, was seen as a critical step in reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging.

TSSS' Update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (LDP): Encampment Engagement Report

This report focuses on feedback gathered to update the Interdepartmental Service Protocol (IDP) for individuals experiencing homelessness in encampments. The main objective is to improve service coordination, prioritize long-term housing solutions, and implement compassionate, trauma-informed care for those in encampments. The report also emphasizes addressing issues of displacement, human dignity, and sustainable solutions for homelessness.

Key themes shared across all audiences:

- **Humanizing the Response:** Stakeholders stressed the need for compassionate, person-centered approaches that respect individuals' dignity while addressing their immediate and long-term needs.
- **Service Coordination:** A clear theme was the need for improved coordination among service agencies, particularly in integrating housing, health services, and outreach programs to create a seamless system.
- **Displacement and Relocation:** Many participants raised concerns about forced relocations, calling for stable housing alternatives and wrap-around services before any eviction or displacement takes place.

Audience-specific feedback:

- **People with Lived Experience and Knowledge of Encampments:** People experiencing homelessness in encampments called for clear housing alternatives and emphasized the trauma caused by being displaced without adequate support.
- **Indigenous People with Lived Experience and Knowledge of Encampments:** Indigenous participants called for culturally safe spaces and trauma-informed, culturally grounded services tailored to the unique challenges they face in homelessness and encampment contexts.
- **Service Providers and Advocates:** Providers stressed the need for comprehensive supports in mental health and addiction services and better coordination among agencies to manage encampments effectively.

- **Local Government and Public Sector:** Government agencies advocated for clearer, actionable protocols and highlighted the importance of balancing enforcement with offering permanent housing solutions.

Recommendations:

The report recommends integrating trauma-informed care, expanding the capacity of shelters, and enhancing service coordination. It also calls for stronger public and non-profit sector partnerships and improved pathways to permanent housing for encampment clients.

TSSS' Case Management Spring 2024 Shelter Sector Engagement Summary (draft from August 8, 2024)

This report explores case management practices in Toronto's shelter sector, focusing on the integration of services and the need for improved coordination to better support individuals experiencing homelessness. The findings highlight the importance of consistency in case management, as well as the need for a more holistic and individualized approach for those in shelter and respite services.

Outcomes and measures:

The report stresses the importance of developing clear, measurable outcomes to track the success of case management services. Participants emphasized the need for standardized tools to assess housing stability, mental health, and social reintegration. Key metrics for success include reduced shelter stays, better client satisfaction, and improved access to permanent housing.

Supporting case management progress:

Improvement in training and resources for frontline workers was identified as essential to the continued development of case management services. The need for comprehensive case management models that can address clients' physical, mental, and social needs was frequently mentioned, as well as increased support for case managers to better manage their caseloads and offer timely interventions.

Key case management considerations for unique and equity-deserving groups: Stakeholders highlighted the importance of tailored case management approaches for marginalized groups, including Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, and youth populations. These groups face unique challenges in accessing and

benefiting from shelter services, and specific cultural competency, as well as trauma-informed care, are crucial to ensuring they receive equitable support.

Case management in 24-hour respites and warming centres:

Case management in temporary spaces like 24-hour respites and warming centers was noted to be more difficult to implement, with challenges around continuity of care and limited access to comprehensive services. Participants recommended ensuring that all temporary shelter services have access to a designated case manager and consistent follow-up support for clients.

Additional case management-related findings:

Respondents recommended enhanced coordination across the shelter system, with a focus on linking shelter services with other social support systems such as mental health care, housing services, and legal advocacy. They also called for a more integrated approach to ensure smooth transitions from shelters into permanent housing, emphasizing that the role of case managers should extend beyond initial intake to include follow-up services.

The Shelter Safety Study: An examination of violence and service restrictions in Toronto's shelter system

This study investigates the challenges of safety and service restrictions within Toronto's shelter system, with a focus on how these issues affect both clients and staff. The findings highlight that violence and restrictive practices impede the ability of shelters to provide safe, supportive environments for individuals experiencing homelessness.

- **Safety in Shelters:** Safety is a major concern, with reports of frequent incidents of physical and verbal violence in shelters. Overcrowded conditions and inadequate staff training contribute to an unsafe environment.
- **Shelter-based Violence:** Violence in shelters is common, particularly among clients with mental health or substance use issues. Vulnerable groups, including women and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, face additional risks of violence.
- **Service Restrictions in Shelters:** Restrictive policies, including limited access to healthcare and support for mental health or substance use challenges, exacerbate tensions and lead to a stigmatizing environment for clients.

Study Recommendations:

The following recommendations were made to address the issues identified in the study:

- Engage community partners providing mental health services in the shelter system to explore opportunities for enhancing crisis intervention and postvention
- Implement more intensive, team-based mental health supports in the shelter system
- Develop accessible, around-the-clock supports for people experiencing homelessness who use substances
- Identify service users with the highest rates of critical incidents and service restrictions, and prioritize them for supportive housing and other health service linkages
- Develop a specialized program to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions
- Establish more supports for shelter staff following critical incidents and workplace violence
- Develop and pilot a flexible, minimally demanding restorative justice intervention model framework for implementation in response to interpersonal conflict and shelter-based violence
- Increase access to recreational, social, and physical activities for service users in the shelter system
- Prioritize the reduction of crowdedness in shelters
- Foster more collaboration and information sharing between shelters and with healthcare professionals who support service users
- Establish more consistent service restriction processes and decisions within and between shelter organizations
- Prioritize use of multi-hour, non-bed loss service restrictions for escalating interpersonal conflict and verbal abuse
- Expand the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in TSSS' committees and decision-making processes related to service delivery
- Establish an accessible source (e.g., Central Intake) where service users can obtain information on any active service restrictions, including their lengths and appeal rights
- Build capacity within TSSS to provide greater oversight and respond to issues pertaining to shelter-based violence and service restrictions
- Strengthen training for shelter staffing practices for supporting service users who use methamphetamine

- Evaluate the extent to which the training competencies matrix, including the individual trainings, are meeting the needs of shelter staff
- Develop a staff training program and educational resources focused on person-centered safety interventions adapted from the Safewards model
- Develop performance indicators on shelter safety
- Collect and analyze data on the role of race and ethnicity in service restrictions
- Reduce the use of the “other” service restriction category in SMIS reports
- Consider further study of shelter-based violence, service restrictions, and safety needs among families in the shelter system

Our Health Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto

This strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing mental health, substance use, and harm reduction in Toronto, with a focus on integrated care systems and supportive services for all clients, particularly those facing homelessness.

Vision

- To create a Toronto where individuals have equitable access to mental health, substance use, and harm reduction services, and where stigma is reduced.
- Foster a City where health and well-being are prioritized through comprehensive, accessible, and integrated care.

Mission

- To reduce barriers to care, improve health outcomes, and provide people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges with the support they need to thrive.
- Focus on system-wide collaboration to improve care access across various sectors.

Principles

- **Equity and Accessibility:** Ensuring care is available for all individuals, with a focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations.

- Collaboration and Integration: Seamless connections between mental health, substance use services, harm reduction programs, and community supports.
- Person-Centered Care: Services tailored to the needs of individuals, respecting their choices and autonomy.
- Trauma-Informed Care: Acknowledging and addressing the impact of trauma on health and wellness.

Strategic Goals

1. Promote mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan.
2. Prevent and reduce harms and deaths related to substance use across the lifespan.
 - a. Reduce drug toxicity deaths caused by the unregulated drug supply and support those affected by the drug toxicity crisis.
 - b. Reduce harms and deaths associated with regulated drugs including alcohol, cannabis, tobacco and vapor products
3. Expand access to the full continuum of high-quality, evidence-based and client-centered services to address mental health and/or substance use issues, including prevention, harm reduction and treatment supports.
4. Advance community safety and wellbeing for everyone.
5. Improve access to housing and other social determinants of health.
6. Support mentally healthy workplaces and optimize the mental health of workers.
7. Proactively identify and respond to emerging mental health and substance use issues.

Year One Implementation Priorities

- Expanding harm reduction and mental health services across the City.
- Integrating mental health and substance use care into primary health services and shelters.
- Building community partnerships to ensure continuous care and support.
- Creating educational campaigns to reduce stigma and raise awareness.

What We Heard: Consultation Report Back

- Public Consultations: Strong support for expanding harm reduction services and mental health supports, particularly in shelters and community hubs.

- Stakeholders' Feedback: Emphasis on the need for training frontline workers to support mental health and substance use challenges, and a desire for greater intersectoral collaboration.
- Lived Experience Voices: Highlighted the importance of culturally competent care and the need for spaces that are welcoming and affirming of diverse communities.

2024 to 2027 York Region Homelessness Service System Plan

The plan outlines priority areas for addressing homelessness in York Region, focusing on service improvements, system integration, and strategies to meet the diverse needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Priority 1: Improve Housing Stability

- Expand access to affordable housing options, including supportive housing.
- Develop long-term housing solutions to prevent homelessness and reduce shelter reliance.
- Focus on transitioning individuals and families out of emergency shelters more quickly into stable housing with appropriate supports.

Priority 2: Enhance Support Services

- Increase funding for mental health and addiction support services, ensuring they are integrated into housing solutions.
- Strengthen case management services to ensure continuity of care and better outcomes for clients.
- Improve access to healthcare and harm reduction services for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Priority 3: Prevention and Diversion Strategies

- Implement early intervention and diversion programs to prevent homelessness before it starts.
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations and other levels of government to provide a coordinated response.
- Develop tailored services for specific populations, such as youth, older adults, and those with complex needs, to prevent entry into the homelessness system.

Priority 4: Build System Capacity and Coordination

- Improve coordination and communication between service providers to streamline access to housing and support services.
- Develop a regional strategy to track homelessness data and outcomes, ensuring continuous improvement.
- Promote community engagement and awareness to build local capacity and support for homelessness-related initiatives.

Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (June 2018)

The report outlines key findings and commitments to engage with and support Aboriginal communities in Toronto, with a focus on fostering respectful relationships, collaboration, and action for systemic change.

Part A: Honouring the Relationship

The document highlights the importance of strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities in Toronto. It emphasizes a commitment to ongoing dialogue, mutual respect, and building trust.

Central to the approach is recognizing and addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples, ensuring their voices are heard in discussions around homelessness and related services. It underscores the need to create more culturally competent and safe spaces for Indigenous peoples within the service system.

Part B: Upholding the City's Statements of Commitment to the Aboriginal Communities of Toronto

- Commitment 1: The City commits to creating training opportunities for the Toronto Public Service to learn about the history and its current day impacts from Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal partners. The City also commits to working with Aboriginal communities to improve public awareness of Aboriginal life in Toronto.
- Commitment 2: The City commits, when working with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto, to learning about the elements of an Aboriginal holistic approach from its Aboriginal partners. The City further commits to supporting this approach in the belief that this will provide the greatest benefit to the community being served.

- Commitment 3: The City commits to working with Aboriginal partners to explore ways to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal organizations and associations to plan, lead, and deliver initiatives for local Aboriginal communities.
- Commitment 4: The City also commits to engaging Aboriginal communities in the City’s decision-making process, to removing barriers to civic participation, and to increasing the representation and role of Aboriginal people on municipal boards and committees.
- Commitment 5: The City of Toronto commits to implementing employment practices that ensure that opportunities for employment are accessible to Aboriginal people and increases the number of Aboriginal employees at all occupational levels.
- Commitment 6: The City of Toronto commits to working formally and informally with all orders of government and other municipalities, institutions, and community organizations to continue exploring promising practices and opportunities for collaboration on Aboriginal initiatives and to promote the interests of Aboriginal people in Toronto, as defined by the Aboriginal communities.
- Commitment 7: The City of Toronto commits to the development of an action plan in partnership with Aboriginal communities in Toronto. The City of Toronto also commits to ensuring an accountability process is established in order to measure the success of the Statement of Commitment

Meeting in the Middle Fifth Annual Gathering Summary Report 2023

The report from the 2023 Meeting in the Middle Annual Gathering highlights the progress, challenges, and aspirations for improving relationships and services for Indigenous communities, particularly in the context of housing and homelessness.

What Went Well?

- Effective collaboration among Indigenous organizations, City staff, and other stakeholders.
- Positive feedback on the strength of community engagement and the sense of solidarity achieved through the gathering.
- Strong partnerships were formed, and significant conversations around policy development took place.
- Ongoing commitment to culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches to service delivery.

What Could Have Improved?

- Some participants noted a lack of clarity in the actionable outcomes from the gathering.
- There were challenges with the pace of decision-making, and some initiatives lacked the required follow-through.
- More work is needed in terms of systemic change, especially in addressing the deep-rooted barriers that hinder full participation from Indigenous communities.

Dreams for the Work Ahead?

- Continued focus on breaking down barriers to access and ensuring that services are culturally relevant and safe for Indigenous peoples.
- Aspiration to see a comprehensive, system-wide approach to addressing homelessness and systemic racism.
- A desire for more dedicated resources and funding to support Indigenous-led initiatives, especially around homelessness prevention and housing solutions.

Meeting in the Middle Commitments: Next Year Goals

- Commitment 1: Cultural Knowledge - Improve cultural learning and development for City staff
- Commitment 2: Holistic Practices - Continue the work of learning from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous service providers and community partners
- Commitment 3: Capacity Building - Continue to strengthen the capacity of Indigenous partners and community
- Commitment 4: Decision-Making - Continue early engagement with TICAB and Indigenous partners in the housing and homelessness sector on all initiatives and program development
- Commitment 5: Employment Opportunities - Improve the City's hiring and retention of Indigenous staff
- Commitment 6: Leverage Opportunities - Continue to share Meeting in the Middle, as a model for collaboration and relationship building with Indigenous communities

Shelter Safety Action Plan 2024

The Shelter Safety Action Plan outlines key strategies to ensure the safety of both staff and clients in Toronto's shelter system, aiming to create safer and more effective environments for service delivery.

Supporting Staff Safety

- What we heard: Staff report feeling unsafe due to escalating incidents of violence and a lack of consistent support.
- What do we want to achieve? Prioritize staff well-being and ensure a safer working environment with appropriate safety measures and training.
- What progress has been made so far? Enhanced training programs for staff in de-escalation, trauma-informed care, and personal safety.
- What is planned for the short and medium term? Increase staffing levels and improve communication tools to enhance staff support during crises.
- How would we measure our performance: Regular staff surveys to assess safety concerns and track incident reports.

Supporting Client Safety

- What we heard: Clients expressed concern over safety in shelters, especially regarding physical violence and intimidation.
- What do we want to achieve? Create safer spaces for clients, reduce incidents of violence, and ensure accessible mental health and addiction support.
- What progress has been made so far? Implementation of safety protocols and the introduction of mental health supports within shelters.
- What is planned for the short and medium term? Expanding the use of peer support models and introducing more shelter spaces designed to reduce conflict.
- How would we measure our performance? Client feedback through surveys and incident tracking, particularly focusing on violent occurrences and their resolution.

Improving System-Wide Oversight on Safety

- What we heard: A lack of clear oversight and inconsistent safety protocols across shelters.

- What do we want to achieve? Streamlined oversight of safety practices across the shelter system, ensuring uniformity and accountability.
- What progress has been made so far? Establishment of a City-wide safety oversight team and regular safety audits.
- What is planned for the short and medium term? Continued evaluation of safety policies, with updates to protocols as needed.
- How would we measure our performance? Regular audits, monitoring compliance with safety protocols, and tracking incident trends.

Conclusions

Stakeholders emphasized the need for a coordinated, City-wide approach to safety, with clear oversight and consistent protocols across shelters. Progress has been made with the introduction of new safety measures, staff training, and oversight mechanisms. Moving forward, the plan will focus on expanding programs, continual monitoring, and data-driven decision-making to ensure the safety of both staff and clients.