

DIRECTIVE

Directive No.: 2026-02
Date Issued: October 7, 2026

Authority

This Directive is issued under the authority of the General Manager of Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS).

Subject

Amendments to the Toronto Shelter Standards (TSS) and 24-Hour Respite Site Standards (TRS) requiring Central Intake for shelter assessment and placement.

Purpose

To ensure that shelter space and occupancy management are managed through a consistent, equitable and streamlined process by establishing Central Intake as the required access point for Toronto's shelter system.

Directive or Required Action

All shelter, 24-Hour Respite Site, and 24-Hour Women's Drop-in providers are required to instruct and support individuals seeking admission into a bedded program to contact Central Intake.

This action has previously been communicated sector-wide in [TSSS Bulletin 2025-04 – Facilitating Access to Toronto's Shelter System by Central Intake and Avoiding Duplicate Client Records in SMIS \(May 2025\)](#).

Effective immediately, this Directive amends the following TSS/TRS standards:

- 8 (f)(iii) / 8 (h)(v) - Access Requests and Customer Service
- 8.1 (c) / (c) - Intake/Assessment
- 8.2 (b) / (b) - Referrals
- 8.2 (d) / (c) - Referrals
- 8.2 (f) / N/A - Referrals
- 8.3 (e) / N/A - Admission
- 11.4 (b) (iii) / (b) (iii) - Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity

One definition has been added to *Section 3 – Defined Terms*.

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Process for shelter program intake of Walk-In Individuals or Families

To ensure a coordinated and equitable approach to accessing shelter services, any individual or family presenting at a shelter, 24-Hour Respite, or 24-Hour Women's Drop-in program seeking access to a bedded program must be directed to Central Intake, the centralized access point to Toronto's shelter system. This process supports a consistent and system-level approach to occupancy and bed vacancy management and helps facilitate appropriate placements based on a client's profile and needs, as well as space availability.

Given its specific role in Toronto's shelter system, Central Intake, which operates 24 hour/7 day/week and that can be accessed by phone or by email, is resourced and positioned to support shelter diversion and placement of individuals and families seeking access to shelter or supports that they may not have knowledge of and/or direct access to. This includes the ability to conduct intakes and referrals into specialized programs across the Greater Toronto Area and beyond (e.g. referrals to available services for refugee claimants, tenant and legal services, primary and mental health care supports).

A "no-wrong-door" approach to shelter services will still be upheld, seeing as individuals seeking access to shelter services will continue to be supported in doing so, with Central Intake now acting as the primary access point for all shelter placements.

When an individual or family walks into a shelter, 24-hour respite or 24-hour Women's Drop-In seeking access to a bedded program, providers are required to:

- Support the individual(s) with calling Central Intake, even when a vacancy is available in their bedded program. When appropriate, Central Intake may place the client at the program they have physically arrived at.
- Assist in the facilitation of the referral to another bedded program, where Central Intake determines that the client calling may benefit from another program, or that an available space is required for another client.

This coordinated approach ensures:

- **Accurate Client Placements:** Individuals and families are matched with programs best suited to their service needs (e.g., refugee claimants placed into refugee-specific shelter programs based on their profile and service requirements), including any accessibility or accommodation requirements, reducing the likelihood of transfers between shelter programs.

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For refugee clients, contacting Central Intake facilitates the potential referrals of refugee clients to other municipalities where housing, employment, and additional specialized opportunities may be more favourable and would support positive housing and settlement outcomes.

- **Client Record Integrity:** Minimizes duplication of client records in the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS).
- **Data and System Monitoring:** Supports data accuracy, including bed availability and unmet demand to inform system-level planning and decision-making.
- **Service System Management and Oversight:** Increases system-wide visibility and limits disruption to service queue placements.

Central Intake can be reached 24/7/365 by phone at **416-338-4766** or **1-877-338-3398** or by calling **311**, and/or by email at centralintake@toronto.ca.

Individuals can access drop-in services at 24-Hour Women's Drop-in program without contacting CI but are required to contact CI if requesting a bedded space.

Shelter-to-shelter transfers, transitional shelter programs, and admission into Inclement Weather programs, such as Warming Centres, will not be managed by Central Intake and are excluded from this Directive. Indigenous-led programs are also excluded at this time, recognizing the unique governance practices within these programs.

- Service providers are responsible for all shelter-to-shelter transfers, including those into a refugee or transitional shelter program, while ensuring that any eligibility requirements are followed (e.g., refugee clients are placed in refugee-specific shelter programs). These must be coordinated directly between the referring and receiving shelter sites. All relevant client information and supporting documentation must be recorded in SMIS.

Updates to Toronto Shelter Standards and 24-Hour Respite Site Standards

- Revisions to standards appear in **bold text**, and/or with a strikethrough.
- New standards are listed as “**new**” and preceded by an asterisk (*).
- Standards no longer in effect are listed at the end of the section.

Section 3 Defined Terms (TSS & TRS)

New definition:

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Shelter-to-shelter referral(s)

Following admission into a bedded program, the process of transferring a client to another emergency shelter or respite program, including to a transitional shelter program, or refugee program (related term: *Admission, Intake and Referral*).

Section 8 Access Requests and Customer Service

(f) / (h)(v) At a minimum, an automated outgoing message will include

- (i) The shelter's name and client group(s) it serves
- (ii) Clear direction regarding when shelter staff will return calls
- (iii) Direction to contact Toronto 311 if the caller requires more immediate support services **and Central Intake for referral to a bedded shelter program**

Section 8.1 Intake/Assessment

(b) / (c) **new*** Shelter providers/Providers will direct walk-in and phone requests for shelter to Central Intake. Shelter providers will

- (i) Provide the client with Central Intake's contact information
- (ii) Assist a client in contacting Central Intake
- (iii) Transfer phone requests to Central Intake and provide the client with Central Intake's contact information.

(c) / (c) **Following a referral by Central Intake**, shelter providers/providers will complete an intake/assessment in SMIS, completing only those fields that are required in order to save the intake request in real time.

Section 8.2 Referrals

(b) / (b) If a client is provided a referral **to another bedded program**, shelter staff will relay clear directions to the client in order for the client to reach their destination as easily as possible.

(e) When referring a client to support services, **shelter providers** will take a client's preferences into account as much as possible.

Section 8.3 Admissions

(e) **Following referrals from Central Intake**, Shelter providers are required to complete the intake in SMIS when admitting clients to bedded programs.

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Section 11.4 Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity

(b) Business continuity plans will, at a minimum,

(iii) **new*** Outline how contact with Central Intake will be maintained

Standards No Longer in Effect

8.1 (b) / (d) Shelter providers, Central Intake and the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC) will conduct an initial intake/assessment in order to determine the service need(s) and related accessibility requirements or accommodation (i.e., modified service requirements) needs of a client.

8.1 (c)/(c) When referring clients to a bedded program at another shelter, the referring shelter will

(iii) Verify the existing intake/assessment or complete an intake/assessment in SMIS, filing in only those fields in SMIS that are required in order to save the intake request

8.1 (d)/ (f) The intake/assessment will determine, at a minimum, if

- (i) There is an available bed in their shelter*
- (ii) The client identifies as a member of the particular client group served by the shelter*
- (iii) There are no active service restrictions for the client at the admitting shelter*

8.2 (b)/ (b) Shelter providers who are not able to admit a client to their bedded program or provide the requested support services will refer the client to another shelter with space in an appropriate bedded program or to more suitable support services.

8.2 (i) / (i) When circumstances limit a shelter provider's ability to complete a referral, the referring shelter provider will

- (i) Assist an in-person client to contact Central Intake and provide the client with Central Intake's contact information*
- (ii) Transfer phone requests to Central Intake and provide the client with Central Intake's contact information.*

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Background

Central Intake provides intake assessments and referrals to Toronto's shelter system through a 24/7 contact centre. Central Intake also provides information about other homelessness and housing stability services, including connections to shelter diversion programs.

Over the past year, Toronto Shelter & Support Services has seen a growing number of clients being admitted into shelters, 24-hour respites and 24-hour Women's Drop-In programs through walk-ins rather than through Central Intake. This disrupts service queue placements managed by Central Intake, reduces system-wide visibility, and limits the ability to match individuals and families with appropriate programs, including specialized services and diversion opportunities. With Central Intake as the primary access point to the shelter system, service providers are supporting service system oversight and facilitating client connections to appropriate and available programs.

In collaboration with community partners, TSSS is working to create enhancements and system improvements that will better support intake to the shelter system through Central Intake and support the broader system goal of ensuring that experiences of homelessness are rare, brief and nonrecurring.

Resources

- [Toronto Shelter Standards](#)
- [24-Hour Respite Site Standards](#)
- [Shelter Management Information System](#)
- [Central Intake](#)

Contact Information

For more information about and support in implementation of this Directive, please contact your Manager or Agency Review Officer.