

Re-Imagining Toronto's Shelter System

COVID Hotel Transitioning
Summary of Planning Sessions 2021/22

Service Planning Objective

Toronto Shelter Network and Dixon Hall, with pro-bono support from KPMG facilitated a planning exercise with shelter service providers. The objective was to discuss and determine best practices and approaches for decommissioning temporary COVID-19 hotel program sites.

Attendees

Two meetings were held; one in December 2021 and the second in January 2022. Shelter service providers, TSN and representatives from Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) attended both meetings.

Discussion

QUESTION

1 How should housing resources be prioritized to support the transition and relocation of temporary COVID-19 shelter clients?

- Participants want to see equity drive decisions and favour an approach that does not advantage one group of clients over another.
- Eligibility and prioritization should be applied as housing becomes available.
- The unique needs of underserved communities (Indigenous, LGBTQ, BIPOC) and specific population groups (active drug users, those with mental health challenges, youth) must be accounted for in transition.
- Be innovative by repurposing current funding (allocated towards hotels) to create supportive housing – let's avoid having people moving out and coming back into the shelter system.

QUESTION

2 What happens to bed spaces at temporary COVID-19 shelter sites as they are decommissioned? How large or small should the emergency system be?

Most participants agreed that base shelter capacity should not be changed when temporary sites close. Until suitable, affordable and supportive housing is available, the size of the base system cannot be reduced.

QUESTION

3 What do service providers need from the City to support the transition and integration of temporary COVID-19 shelter programs and decommissioning of hotel program sites?

- **Notice:** A minimum of three months when a temporary site is closing to prepare for transition.
- **Staffing:** Service providers have strict collective agreements. They need time and resources to address HR implications (i.e., lay-off or severance) that may result from decommissioning.
- **Funding:** Service providers need access to housing supports (rent subsidies) and services (housing support workers) to help transition clients to housing and prevent their return into the shelter system.
- **Housing Supply:** Even with time to plan for decommissioning of temporary sites, there is not enough affordable housing supply for hotel clients. This will limit service providers collective vision of not seeing hotel clients moving back into the base shelter system.

QUESTION

4 What are ways to ensure that the specific needs of groups (e.g., Indigenous people, Black individuals, people who use substances, seniors, youth, 2SLGBTQ+, etc.) are met during any transitions?

- **Engagement & Partnerships:** Engage directly and routinely with these communities to learn about their lived experiences and involve them in decision-making.
- **Consider Specific Needs:** There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Built form, programming, services and partnerships may differ from group to group.
- **Housing First:** Housing is the priority. Best efforts should be made to **NOT** move people from hotel programs into shelters. Equity needs to be considered particularly for those who have been in shelters for a long time.
- **Supports for a Successful Transition & Beyond:** Clients should have access to a support system during transition process, including counselling/mental health and follow-up supports.

QUESTION

5 What is a big, bold idea that has not yet been shared?

- **Modular Housing:** Leverage modular housing to rapidly increase housing capacity
- **Stabilization & Transitional Housing:** Increase availability of transitional housing. Designate sites with embedded supports to provide a springboard to more permanent housing options using individualized placement strategies.
- **Framing & Discourse:** Shift the discourse around the emergency shelter system so that it is seen as an

important part of the housing system, particularly for chronic service users.

- **Investment Cost:** Provide the business case (i.e. value for money) to decision makers for investing in housing vs emergency shelters.
- **Infrastructure:** Advocate to the City of Toronto to ease the planning process for new builds for supportive/affordable housing.

QUESTION

6 How do program operators want to be engaged in the transition planning?

- **Engage Service Providers:** Through every step of the process, including those operating both hotel programs and traditional shelter sites.
- **Engage Clients:** Through every step of the process and ensure all engagements are culturally appropriate.

Next Steps

- ▶ Use the notes from this exercise to inform SSHA's ongoing transition planning.
- ▶ Engage with shelter clients to ensure their perspectives are heard and inform next steps.

