

September 6, 2022

His Worship John Tory
Mayor, City of Toronto
100 Queen St. W.
City Hall, Second floor, West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2



Dear Sir,

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) and the Toronto Shelter Network (TSN) are writing this letter to express our deep concern regarding the untenable financial and system capacity pressures facing the 24-hour emergency homelessness system (shelter system).

Attached you will find a public statement, detailing our concerns and our call to action. Beyond the intense challenges in serving the current number of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, the degree of financial instability and precarity in the sector is only getting worse. It threatens service providers ability to remain operational, deliver services and be the strong partners that they have been, and continue to aspire to be, in addressing the city's housing and homelessness crisis.

Service providers have reached a breaking point. The shelter system, particularly the community operated component, has long been underfunded and has long faced occupancy pressures. Since the onset of the pandemic, service delivery costs have escalated dramatically – some organizations are contending with a 40% increase to their expenditures. At the same time City funding has increased by just 5%. This is not sustainable. Organizations are dealing with deficits previously unseen, and are now in a position where they need to fundraise 40% - 50% of their service delivery costs. System leaders are struggling to find solutions that will enable them to keep their doors open to the City's most vulnerable residents.

As our public statement shows, already, hundreds of people who require shelter are being turned away due to lack of system capacity. Toronto is the nation's largest municipality. It needs a stable and strong emergency homelessness system, perhaps more so now than ever before. Our system must be evidence-based, with an investment in practices and solutions that are proven to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring. It must be delivered collaboratively by the City, together with its community providers. And, critically, with winter approaching, it requires an immediate financial investment if we are to avoid the inevitable closure of those shelters currently operating under unsustainable conditions. Inaction will only contribute to already untenable occupancy pressures.

To be clear, we know that expanding the shelter system is not the solution. We support the strategic shift taken by City Council in 2020 (Item EC16.1) to repurpose funds committed to more shelter beds into permanent housing options. The City Council approved Homelessness Solutions Service Plan and the 2020-2030 Housing TO Action Plan lay out sound strategic actions, but they must be properly resourced through the City's annual budget in order to meet their promise. Today, we are asking for fair and equitable funding and salary allocations across the non-profit community sector so that the shelter system as a whole can be effectively resourced to deliver client and housing focused services.

We also take this opportunity to thank you for recognizing the work of the homelessness sector these past two years and for declaring the last week of January as Emergency Homelessness and Shelter

Worker Week in Toronto. Today, we look to you for assistance and for leadership, and we call on you to direct City staff to establish a joint **City and Community Emergency Task Force** that will bring immediate action to this crisis and work towards our shared goals of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. City Council adopted the creation of such a table in December 2020 (Item PH19.11).

The TSN and TAEH are willing and able to bring together our resources and expertise from across Toronto's shelter services and supportive housing sectors to immediately take on the challenges of better service delivery in collaboration with our city partners. The stronger relationships between our community networks and the Shelter, Supports and Housing Administration (SSHA) and the Housing Secretariat forged by responding to the pandemic together can be leveraged now to do even more. By working together, this Task Force can:

- Identify and implement immediate steps that we can move forward together to relieve the burning occupancy pressures we are collectively facing;
- Identify the critical areas for increased investment in the sector that will maximize their impact in creating equity and bringing stability to the shelter system;
- Develop practical, doable strategies and solutions that will enable us to house people quickly;
- Analyze evidence-based practices together to inform a modern service system that actually starts to meet our shared goals of homelessness being rare, brief, and non-recurring; and
- Track performance indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness of this emergency response and incorporate what is learned into next steps.

We look forward to meeting with you soon to continue this important discussion, to learn more about your vision for ending homelessness if re-elected and, more importantly, to initiate action on behalf of those who are most vulnerable in our City.

Sincerely,



Sonja Nerad, Executive Director Toronto Shelter Network



Kira Heineck, Executive Director, Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness

Cc: TAEH Steering Committee and TSN Board of Director Organizations

Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto -- Community Living Toronto -- COTA -- Covenant House Toronto -- Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services -- Eva's Initiatives -- Fife House -- Fred Victor Centre -- Homes First Society -- Houselink & Mainstay Community Housing -- John Howard Society, Toronto -- Loft Community Services -- Salvation Army -- StreetHaven -- Sojourn House -- The Access Point -- Toronto Developmental Services Alliance -- United Way of Greater Toronto -- Wellesley Institute -- WoodGreen Community Services