

January 18, 2022

Mayor John Tory
City of Toronto
City Hall, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2
Sent via email



Dear Mayor Tory,

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is pleased that this week, at the Provincial-Municipal Housing Summit, there is another opportunity for more collaboration to address the housing affordability crisis. This crisis, as you are well aware, is only creating more homelessness in Toronto, leaving people in increasingly dire and unacceptable situations, especially during the pandemic, and straining our emergency shelter system to a new level.

We are writing to urge you to include, in your voice at the Summit and your messages to the Province, the need for action on supportive housing and deeply affordable rental housing for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. While TAEH often advocates to the City to do more or to adjust course, we also work closely with the City and its staff on housing and homeless-related policy and programs, as you know. Approaching the Summit, I am confident that TAEH and the City have many shared goals.

TAEH, with other community-based organizations, has endorsed this week's letter by United Way Greater Toronto to the Premier and the big city mayors and regional chairs, in advance of the Summit. The letter expresses the priorities of organizations working with people experiencing poverty, precarious housing, and homelessness. Here I will emphasize some related themes and amplify some points.

While affordability problems span the housing spectrum, there is urgent need to act to create more deeply affordable housing for people experiencing, and at risk of, homelessness in Toronto. We commend the strong steps the City has taken under your leadership. To make a difference, Toronto needs stronger collaboration with the Province of Ontario in rental affordability, developing more affordable rental, and creating supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness.

Housing affordability is key to equitable recovery from COVID-19. The pandemic has worsened the disadvantages experienced by people living in poverty, residing in shared or crowded housing, living with other health problems, and/or experiencing homelessness. Affordable rental is also essential for people working in the housing and homelessness sectors, many of whom make modest incomes and need to live reasonably close to downtown workplaces and clients.

Supportive housing is a vital part of the solution for people experiencing homelessness and/or living with mental health issues or other disabilities or addictions. This type of housing serves as an anchor for people to access health care and social supports they need. As you know, the TAEH and our partners have developed a Supportive Housing Growth Plan for Toronto, a "made in Toronto" strategy. We commend the City's commitment to create at least 20,000 housing units with supports by 2030, and we are your partner in this effort. But to move ahead strongly on this also requires an active provincial partner.

Long-term, reliable funding is needed to achieve affordable rents in new affordable rental and in existing private rental. People experiencing homelessness cannot afford low-end market rents of \$1,000 or more per month. They require rent supplements or housing allowances that achieve deeply affordable rents, at rent-gear-to-income (RGI) levels. The 2021 Street Needs Assessment data, and shelter data, show that the affordability gap is a main driver of shelter use, and the most important way to help clients find housing are those that help cover that affordability gap.

The Province of Ontario must assume more responsibility for funding rent supplements and housing allowances. These should not be paid for from municipal taxes. Various approaches are open to the Province, including: more mental health (Ministry of Health) rent supplements; extending Ontario programs that Toronto and other municipalities use for housing allowances; expanding the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit; and/or initiating new rent supplement programs. Funding formulas for existing supportive housing rent supplement also need to be adjusted to be viable with today's escalating rents.

Many people in Indigenous communities also experience homelessness and severe housing need. Ontario needs a By-Indigenous-For-Indigenous housing strategy, developed by Indigenous organizations in partnership with governments and the community-based sector. More funding is also needed to serve Indigenous people via existing programs.

Toronto needs an Ontario government that is a more active partner in protecting existing affordable rental and developing new affordable rental. For the latter, the federal government is providing capital funding and loans; the City and various municipalities are providing land, capital, and tax exemptions. A more robust effort requires a substantial and multi-year commitment from Ontario as a partner.

Protecting existing rental is also important. The City has led with a program to assist non-profits to acquire some rental buildings and help keep rents affordable. A similar action by the Province would be a cost-effective approach. It is also imperative to avoid loss of RGI rents in non-profit housing when those projects reach the expiry of their mortgage or funding agreement. To this end, the City has adopted a framework, and the Province has recently proposed amendments to regulations under the *Housing Services Act*. With modifications to the latter, as proposed by the non-profit and co-operative sectors, Ontario can safeguard the viability and deeply affordable rents in community housing.

Finally, it would be appropriate for you and other municipal leaders to urge the Province to add municipal and non-profit sector representatives to its Housing Affordability Task Force. We believe these voices will ensure due attention to affordability problems that span the price and income spectrum, including rental housing and including supportive housing for people in deep need.

Sincerely,



Kira Heineck, Executive Director

cc: Chris Murray, City Manager; Paul Johnson, Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services; Abi Bond, Executive Director, Housing Secretariat; and Gordon Tanner, Interim General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration