



TO: Economic and Community Development Committee
DATE: October 24 2023
RE: Item EC7.7 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIC)

The Toronto Shelter Network (TSN), represents more than 35 organizations that collectively deliver Toronto's 24-hour homelessness services, including traditional shelters, respite centres, 24-hour drop-ins, transitional housing and the COVID-19 shelter hotels. We enhance the collective capacity of homelessness service providers in Toronto through knowledge sharing and learning, collaborative planning, research and advocacy, and champion access to housing with dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness is a network of over 100 partners across the city, united in the vision of ending homelessness – a vision we share with the City. We also serve as the City's non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum alongside SSHA and the Housing Secretariat.

TSN and TAEH are jointly writing to express our support for the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS).

We are encouraged to see the Strategy amplify the significant need to ensure that all future investments into the shelter are rooted in proactive long-term and strategic capital planning and decision making. This approach will allow service providers to better address the unique needs of shelter users, and we commend the highlighted emphasis on making targeted investments towards spaces that adequately meet the needs of equity deserving groups. If no funding is forthcoming from the Federal government, shelters serving refugees must also be funded to assist refugees and refugee claimants to get the specialized support they need. It is also critical to expand availability of safe shelter spaces for women, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Black, and racialized people with accessibility prioritized to remove barriers for people. A well-designed and purpose-built model for the shelter system will improve access to safer spaces and to culturally appropriate services and will better support people's journey towards stable and permanent housing.

While we are supportive of the expressed intention to move from 40% to 60% long-term, permanent, and purpose-built spaces, it is critical to amplify that these spaces must be designed to transition into permanent housing quickly and efficiently, when needed.

We must ensure that Toronto has enough deeply affordable housing to prevent and end homelessness – only then will we achieve our shared goals in the *Housing TO 2020-2030 Action Plan*. To that end, it is critical that City-owned real estate be maximized, and that shelters be housing-focused, and include the range of supports and services that meet the variety of needs for

those who enter the shelter system. Harm reduction, primary health and mental health services, as well as client-centred case management should all be integrated into these shelters' operational design, keeping with the best practices identified in the New Homelessness Services Model.

This move will no doubt result in a safer and better designed shelter system, but we must emphasize the funding and service disparities that currently exist and which could potentially be further exacerbated by this Strategy. Shelters that are currently described as base level must be upgraded and provided with adequate funding so that all services are consistent throughout the sector. The per diems in the report show the disparities very clearly.

We must recognize that it is the responsibility of the whole of Toronto to ensure that there are safe and adequate shelter spaces across the city. As the City investigates availability of space for these new purpose-built shelters, it is critical that all wards ensure that there are not just shelters, but also supportive housing options within them. We must urgently move beyond community consultations towards community engagement that will generate support. NIMBYism has no place in this crisis.

As the report states, HSCIS is a living document and workplan for delivering this strategy must be co-designed with homelessness service providers, community partners such as TSN and TAEH, people with lived experience, and multiple City Divisions including the Housing Secretariat, Corporate Real Estate Management, CreateTO and City Planning.

Like the City, TSN and TAEH are both committed to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring through housing solutions, but we continue to see twice as many people entering the shelter system as leaving it and over 10,000 people without housing in our community. It is therefore critical that there is adequate space for people who are homeless today.

While we are energized by this planned response to meet people's needs as they are experiencing homelessness, we know the only solution to this crisis is to make sure people have housing. Affordable and supportive housing is the only long-term solution but until we can achieve that, we need a stable, effective, supportive, low-barrier, housing focused shelter and allied services system that supports people experiencing homelessness and transitions them into housing. The recommendations in this report help to move us towards this goal.

Thank you,

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