



TO: Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC)
DATE: Tuesday April 30th 2024
RE: EC12.13 - Multi-Methods Study on Shelter Safety

Thank you for receiving our comments on the **Multi-Methods Study on Shelter Safety (EC12.13)**. The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is a network of partners from across Toronto united in our vision to end homelessness. We act as the non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board for the City's housing and homelessness service planning, co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) and the Housing Secretariat, and alongside the Toronto Shelter Network (TSN), TSSS, and the Housing Secretariat, co-convene a Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee that brings together housing and homelessness service agencies to provide feedback and input into system planning.

We commend TSSS for their proactive approach in addressing the ongoing issue of shelter safety by engaging the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to undertake the Shelter Safety Study, and for dedicating resources to developing recommendations that will lead to safer shelter spaces for those who access services and those who provide critical supports and services within the Shelter System.

This study fills a crucial gap in our understanding of the challenges facing individuals experiencing homelessness and the dedicated staff who support them. As we all know, homelessness is a complex issue that is deeply intertwined with systemic inequities, economic disparities, and mental health challenges. Despite tireless efforts of the frontline workers and service providers who are the backbone of our sector, violence and service restrictions within shelters remain significant barriers to achieving the fundamental goal of realizing the right to safe and dignified housing for all.

Moreover, the pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities within the shelter system, amplifying the risks faced by those who are already marginalized and underserved. As we continue to face the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic on our shelter system - including increased unemployment, housing instability, and strained healthcare resources – the need for evidence-based solutions to address shelter safety has never been more urgent. The findings of this Study offer a data-driven roadmap to begin navigating these complex challenges with compassion, empathy, and a commitment to justice.

The collaborative nature of this study exemplifies the change-making power of partnerships and collective action in addressing systemic issues. By bringing together researchers, service providers, and individuals with lived experience, the Study embodies a holistic approach to knowledge generation and solution-building. It highlights the expertise and insights of frontline workers and service users,

centering their voices in problem-solving and system planning recommendations. In doing so, it fosters our collective values of collaboration, transparency, and accountability that are essential for creating lasting change in our shelter system, and beyond.

This collaborative effort has been driven by a commitment, that we share, to understanding and addressing the complex challenges faced within Toronto's shelter system. The findings offer invaluable insights into the factors that contribute to violence and service restrictions within the shelter system, as well as actionable recommendations for improvement. The implications of these findings are profound, and demand immediate action.

TAEH stands in full support of the recommendations outlined in the Shelter Safety Study, recognizing them as crucial steps towards enhancing safety, promoting equity, and improving housing outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness within our community. We are writing to confirm and amplify the need to develop a plan to implement these recommendations across the system and offer the TAEH and our community partners as collaborators to contribute to the plan. We urge the members of the Economic and Community Development Committee to prioritize action planning to ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to support the execution of these recommendations.

TAEH, TSN, and many others have noted that the shelter system is at a breaking point, and as this study has revealed, there are critical concerns with how system pressures in the past few years have impacted unhoused Torontonians. TAEH and its partners remain firmly committed to increased permanent housing opportunities as the only real solution to homelessness, and to ongoing work towards homelessness prevention. However, until permanent housing options are available for everyone, our community must remain responsive to the immediate needs of unhoused people and ensure that the shelter system is a place that offers safety to those who need it most.

This report is not just a presentation of findings; it is a call to action for all of us to work together in pursuit of a more equitable, just, and compassionate system. It presents an opportunity for us to demonstrate a commitment to ensuring safety and care are at the core of the Shelter System by prioritizing a plan to urgently address the issues that have come to light through this study. By doing so, we can work together to create a shelter system that is safe, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of our most vulnerable community members.

TAEH urges that the report be received and that a plan to implement the recommendations be developed. As a long-standing partner to the City of Toronto, TAEH and our partners look forward to opportunities to support the City in adopting the comprehensive recommendations set forth by the Study.