



TO: **Economic and Community Development Committee**

DATE: Thursday, October 21, 2021

RE: Results of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment and Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's Homelessness Solutions Service Plan (**EC25.5**)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). The TAEH is a network of partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision of ending homelessness. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA).

The Alliance is in support of the recommendations in today's staff report for Item EC25.5. The Homelessness Solutions Service Plan builds on the experiences, learnings, and progress of the last years, including the dramatic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We support its priorities and believe they will achieve the City's goal to shift away from temporary, emergency responses to homelessness while increasing permanent housing solutions while also ensuring a strong emergency response that meets the needs of those in housing crisis. This is possible through a housing-focused shelter system and response as is detailed in this new Service Plan, and it is what we – people experiencing homelessness, community service providers and the City – need to accelerate our collective work towards a Toronto where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. For everyone.

The TAEH also supports the emphasis on collaboration with the Housing Secretariat, other orders of government and the community. This includes the critical inclusion of the voices and advice of people with lived experience of homelessness. The TAEH's governance structure includes a People With Lived Experience Caucus. This group, as the staff report notes, has informed the Plan before you today. We are working to further enhance the scope of our Caucus to contribute even more deeply to both the TAEH's input into SSHA's work, and to SSHA's implementation of this Plan's priorities in the next three years.

Drawing on the clear trends apparent the 2021 Street Needs Assessment (SNA) on who is becoming homeless and why, TAEH and our partners have identified specific priorities for more decisive action from all City divisions in implementing the Service Plan. These include the gross over-representation of some populations in homelessness relative to their percentage of Toronto's overall population:

- **Indigenous peoples' homelessness.** As 15% of all people experiencing homelessness and 38% of those staying outside are Indigenous, we strongly support the dedication of 20% of funds to an Indigenous stream. This is an essential element of the Plan that we urge you and fellow Councillors to approve.

- **An anti-racism, equity based and intersectional approach.** Given the overrepresentation of racialized people experiencing homelessness overall, and the 31% of black individuals over their 9% share of the city's population the TAEH supports, and will do our part in furthering, the Plan's implementation priority in this area.
- **Young people's homelessness.** 32% of people experiencing homelessness had their first encounter with it as a youth. This is consistent with the findings from the 2018 SNA and is a clear place for positive interventions that can prevent a large amount of future homelessness. Especially as the evidence shows that resolving a young person's homelessness successfully leads to their permanent housing and success in life.
- The fact that 18% of people experiencing homelessness have **past foster care experience** is also a stark reality we must address – and one that we can change to prevent future homelessness.
- **Women's and family homelessness.** There are specific characteristics of women's homelessness, and our understanding of it that we need to continue to explore, beyond simple gender difference in the overall homeless population. For example, 70% of families experiencing homelessness are led by women; and the data on women facing domestic violence is still not fully reported. Experts in the VAW sector estimate that the number of women in this situation facing homelessness are much higher than reported. The TAEH urges SSHA and the City to establish more formal ways to engage with the VAW and women's sectors to address these issues and knowledge gaps, including in the next SNA and through the Coordinated Access System.
- It is also important to **understand seniors' homelessness better**, including how the gaps in working with other governments and systems contribute to both their experience of homelessness and to the barriers to resolve it. It is encouraging to read throughout the Plan that ongoing collaboration between City divisions is stressed and will be helpful in furthering the response to seniors' homelessness.
- The finding that **homelessness continues to exist in all areas of Toronto** is also critical to emphasize. It is irrefutable evidence that we must, collectively, deliver responsive solutions in every neighbourhood and City ward.
- **Learning from and responding to the rise in outdoor homelessness.** The impact of COVID-19 here is clear, and the growth in people staying outside is an important thing to keep front in mind for both winter planning and for the transition strategies once the shelter-hotel programs begin being phased out as COVID-19 lessens.
- **The complex needs and barriers to permanent housing facing many people.** According to the 2021 SNA this includes half of those currently experiencing homelessness. It reaffirms the City's commitment to building 18,000 new supportive housing units by 2030. The Alliance is equally committed to this goal, and with our partners in the Toronto Supportive Housing Growth Plan and through other TAEH initiatives in partnership with the Housing Secretariat we will continue to help us all reach this goal.

The TAEH also supports the priority in this Plan to continue to solve system barriers to ending homelessness. This includes the gaps in the different systems that both create and can end homelessness. These challenges are real and exist in both government-funded areas and in the community-based service and housing sectors.

To achieve ultimate success here, we cannot stress enough how essential it is that SSHA has the tools it needs to implement this Plan. In particular, the department and the community sectors it works with, must be able to build and use a high-functioning Homelessness Management Information System. Today's staff report makes this clear.

The TAEH has advocated for data-informed systems change and has supported improvements over the last five years. We therefore urge this Committee and City Council to not only champion the report's identification that "implementing a HMIS is a necessary step in achieving the priorities outlined in the Service Plan;" and that "implementing a broader HMIS will provide the digital infrastructure needed to support a comprehensive homelessness response in Toronto," but to also use the upcoming budget process to make sure that SSHA has what it needs to do this, and to ensure the capacity of the community to fulfill their part too.

We look forward to continuing to work with, and contribute to, SSHA and all City divisions in implementing this Plan to increase our collective ability to respond to homelessness in Toronto in ways that lead to it becoming truly rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Thank you,
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