

COVID-19

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City of Toronto and United Way Greater Toronto partner to create COVID-19 Shelter Interim Recovery Strategy

News Release

June 1, 2020

The City of Toronto and United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT) have partnered to develop a COVID-19 Shelter Interim Recovery Strategy. When complete, the strategy will guide City and partner agency response to homelessness over the next six- to 12-month interim recovery period.

The City and UWGT have launched a new task force of key homeless sector stakeholders, and from now until June 30 will engage with community providers, Indigenous communities, health sector partners, regional municipal partners and the public about the actions needed to shape the next phase of our COVID-19 response for the shelter system in Toronto.

Over the course of the month, the City and UWGT will host virtual meetings, conduct surveys, and lead discussions with our partners in the health, housing, and shelter sectors. The interim recovery strategy will be developed in a consultative process with stakeholders who will play a central role in implementation. Activities will focus on:

- lessons learned from the pandemic response to date
- continued infection prevention measures needed to protect vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and how to enhance system resilience
- enhanced integration and collaboration on health care models for individuals experiencing homeless
- shelter system capacity needs and best practices for homeless services program models that include prevention and alternatives to shelter spaces

- leveraging opportunities to strengthen and further develop long-term solutions to end homelessness

The input and feedback gathered will shape the development of a COVID-19 Shelter Interim Recovery Strategy that equips the City, led by the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA) division, and community partners to continue to deliver the next phase of our homelessness response through 2020 into spring 2021. A public report on the strategy and what we heard through the engagement process will be released in July.

While our immediate focus is on the actions we need to take to ensure people experiencing homelessness are protected from COVID-19 during the next phase of the ongoing pandemic, the interim recovery strategy will also outline the opportunity for a path towards a 'new normal'. The pandemic has highlighted many of existing health and housing inequalities in our system that were previously identified as key challenges to the City's prosperity in the HousingTO plan approved last December. The interim recovery strategy will begin to lay a new foundation for a recovery effort that can end chronic homelessness in Toronto by leveraging additional investments in supportive and affordable housing solutions.

The strategy will also build on what has been achieved in the first 90 days of the COVID-19 response. Work done so far includes:

- screening and testing of clients at all points of entry (phone and in person)
- opening two recovery sites with medical supports for clients who are COVID-19 positive
- moving almost 3,000 people for physical distancing to additional temporary respite sites, hotels, interim and permanent housing
- achieving 100 per cent physical distancing of six feet between beds in 7,000 existing shelter spaces plus all 31 new temporary response sites soon
- redeploying and training additional City staff to work at 31 additional sites (hotels and community centres)
- securing interim housing with supports to move at least 166 individuals sleeping outdoors to their own apartments while working with partners to secure permanent housing
- continuing to permanently house and support people by helping at least 820 clients through the City's Rapid Re-Housing Initiative, as well as providing housing allowances and rent-geared-to-income housing
- working successfully with other City agencies and external partner agencies including United Way on best practices
- providing resources and weekly contact with external partner agencies to ensure a coordinated approach

This initiative continues UWGT's ongoing partnership with the City of Toronto, connecting local governments with the non-profit community service sector to address the issue of homelessness. By working together, we can help the shelter system manage during the COVID-19 crisis and learn from the experience to contribute to longer term solutions. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, UWGT has partnered with the City at 13 community coordination tables to ensure there are no gaps in essential services or emergency needs unmet.

More information about the housing and shelter COVID-19 response is available on the City of Toronto City Services webpage (<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/affected-city-services/>).

Quotes:

"The City of Toronto's partnership with United Way Greater Toronto to engage shelter and housing sector agencies and the Indigenous community will help inform how we can continue to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the homeless population. It will guide the City on how to build on our innovative solutions so far, learn how we can best move forward in the next 6 to 12 months and ultimately help our most vulnerable residents over the long-term."

– Mayor John Tory

"When you are dealing with a complex issue like homelessness, it is essential to take a coordinated approach that brings together multiple City of Toronto divisions and knowledgeable community partners such as the United Way of Greater Toronto. By looking at the issue through a regional lens, we will be able to broaden and strengthen the gains we have made and do a better job of establishing permanent solutions."

– Deputy Mayor Michael Thompson (Ward 21 Scarborough Centre)

"The City's Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA) has worked with many partners including United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT) since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to make important gains to reduce the spread of this virus in the shelter system. We know that our housing, shelter and health sector partners remain vital to us moving forward together in the next year and beyond to support and care for the homeless population."

– Mary-Anne Bédard, General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

"The non-profit sector plays a critical role in the solutions and service response for people experiencing homelessness during this crisis. As the largest non-governmental funder of social services in the GTA, United Way partners with local governments and our network of agencies to meet urgent needs and contribute to longer term solutions for homelessness. We're proud to stand with the City on this initiative and continue our

ongoing community coordination with municipal governments.”

– Ruth Crammond, United Way Greater Toronto Vice President, Community Investment & Development

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