



# HOMELESSNESS

What's at Stake in Toronto's  
2023 Mayoral By-election



May 2023

# Homelessness: A Humanitarian Crisis



In May of 2023, Toronto City Council officially declared homelessness an emergency.

This crisis has been decades in the making. A long-term trend of population growing faster than the housing supply, coupled with recent inflation and rising interest rates, has had a disproportionate impact on major cities. As more and more Torontonians are pushed out of the city due to a lack of affordable housing, our unhoused population grows. The result: unprecedented rates of homelessness, and increased demand for social housing, shelter services and other support services that simply can't keep up.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) manages the second largest stock of public housing in North America. Toronto has more shelter beds per capita than any other municipal shelter system. Despite its size, Toronto's supportive housing and shelter systems are not meeting the needs of those seeking access. **From October 2022 to March 2023, an average of 128.8 people a night were unable to be matched with a shelter space.**<sup>1</sup> We cannot continue failing our most vulnerable citizens.

<sup>1</sup> [www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-requests-for-referrals](https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-requests-for-referrals)

# By the Numbers

As of March, 10,811 people were considered actively homeless — an increase of roughly 1,300 in the last year.<sup>2</sup>

This does not include those who do not access Toronto's overnight shelter services - an independent, significant number.

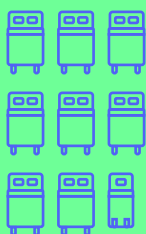
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Pre-pandemic, the City provided **6,000 shelter beds**, which increased to **8,500 in 2022**, while the **2023 Budget provides funding for 9,000 shelter beds**.<sup>2</sup>

2019



2022



2023



**28%** of Toronto's shelter clients are refugees.<sup>2</sup>



72 people on average were **turned away from shelter** every day in February.<sup>2</sup>

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In the 2023 budget, **nearly 11% (\$616 M) of Torontonians' annual property taxes** are directly invested in social and affordable housing services.<sup>3</sup> The 2023 Budget for Emergency Shelter, Overnight and Street Outreach Services is **\$298 million**.



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<sup>2</sup> City of Toronto. (n.d.). Shelter system flow data. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-flow-data/>

<sup>3</sup> City of Toronto. (2023). Budget Background Report on XYZ [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/bu/bgrd/backgroundfile-231127.pdf>

## The State of Homelessness in Toronto



Homelessness can take several forms. The most obvious of this are people who are living in shelters or on the street, but not all homelessness is visible. Many people sleep in their cars, on friends' couches, or in other temporary arrangements that lack the safety and security of a permanent address.

According to Statistics Canada, the factors leading to increased risk are complex and often interconnected, including both life events and structural (economic and societal) issues. These issues have taken root in the growing gaps among our city's lack of housing supply, its social housing network, a dramatically overstretched healthcare system, and inadequate mental health and addictions support.

Many of those seeking access to temporary housing in Toronto are those who arrived here after fleeing their home countries and promised a safe haven. **Today, refugees represent 28% of all clients across Toronto's shelters.**<sup>4</sup> Toronto's shelter system has more dedicated beds for refugees than any other Canadian city. In response to these pressures, the City has provided funding to refugee service providers and settlement services and allocated **\$34 million to support 500 beds for newcomers in 2023.**

The city's housing affordability crisis is preventing refugees from leaving the shelters that were meant to be temporary landing places, creating big pressures exacerbated by insufficient provincial and federal funding.

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4 [www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-refugees-asylum-seekers-make-up-nearly-a-third-of-torontos-shelter/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-refugees-asylum-seekers-make-up-nearly-a-third-of-torontos-shelter/)



## What's at Stake



**Amid severe financial pressures, every year the City of Toronto spends \$616 million on housing,** including its homelessness services, Housing First solutions, and social and affordable housing, reducing the burden on other levels of government.



**Toronto is the epicentre of Canadian growth and we expect to welcome up to 270,000 newcomers over the next two years.** These newcomers are critical to addressing our ongoing labour shortages, but they will not be able to live, work or thrive here if they cannot access affordable housing and appropriate settlement supports.



**Other models do exist across Canada.** In other jurisdictions, the province funds and operates housing support instead of municipalities. This is the case for BC Housing, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, Housing Nova Scotia, and Manitoba Housing.



**Ending chronic homelessness requires both local, innovative solutions and a steadier stream of funding from both higher levels of government.** The Province must step up with more support for affordable housing and more robust mental health and addictions services. Such investment benefits both levels of government, helping to end the cycle of homelessness while reducing costs for the health care system and other provincial services. Likewise, the federal government must commit to dedicated immigration supports for newcomers and multi-year funding agreements for refugee response initiatives.

## Questions for Candidates

- ① How do you plan to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto?
- ② What improvements to Toronto's shelter services would you like to see, and how would you ensure they are funded?
- ③ What mix of solutions do you think is necessary to provide people with safe, affordable, and permanent housing options?





“For those monitoring the symptoms, the homelessness crisis has been swelling for decades in Toronto and it's clear the city alone is not equipped to deal with it.

To tackle the root causes of this crisis the province must provide more support for affordable housing, social housing, income security, and robust mental-health, addictions, and social services — investments that reduce reliance on costly, provincially funded emergency services.”

**Jan De Silva**

**President & CEO – Toronto Region Board of Trade**

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“Homelessness is a crisis first and foremost for those experiencing it.

For many, being unable to access safe, adequate housing means grappling with new or worsened mental- and physical-health challenges, barriers to employment, social stigma and isolation, and heightened risk of violence. Homelessness is also a crisis for every Toronto resident, because it is symptomatic of trends that threaten our city's livability for all.”

**Daniele Zanotti**

**President & CEO of United Way**

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