

HOMELESSNESS IS A NATIONAL CRISIS THAT REQUIRES AN IMMEDIATE AND URGENT RESPONSE

HOMELESSNESS IS A CRISIS

- On any given day over 10,500 people in Toronto are experiencing homelessness. At least 235,000 people across Canada experience homelessness in any given year.
- It is estimated that 20,000 unique people go through Toronto's shelter system annually.
- As of May, over 200 people making over 1,000 calls a day are trying to find overnight shelter through Central intake and failing to secure a bed. Many others have given up calling because of a lack of space.
- Close to 85,000 households are on the City's social housing waiting list.

HOMELESSNESS CAUSES HARM

- In 2022, 187 deaths of unhoused people were reported to Toronto Public Health.

HOMELESSNESS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTS MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

- Historically and systemically marginalized communities also experience more homelessness.
 - Although Indigenous peoples are up to 2.5% of Toronto's population, 15% of those who are homeless are Indigenous.
 - According to the City of Toronto's 2021 Street Needs Assessment, 31% of those identifying as homeless identify as Black – the largest out of any racial group – despite this demographic being less than 10% of the city's total population.
 - 10.1% of newcomer youth experience homelessness.
- Each year, the City of Toronto budgets for 500 beds for refugee claimants per night. In May 2023, there was an average of 2,800 refugee claimants requesting a shelter space each night.
- Currently, over 3,000 people seeking shelter in the City's shelter system are refugees.
- Across the country, newly arrived refugee claimants are sleeping in airports, transit shelters/stations, and on the street because there is no space for them in city shelters or claimant-specific transitional housing.

THE HISTORICAL FIGHT TO DECLARE HOMELESSNESS A STATE OF EMERGENCY

- The shelter and support emergency facing recently arrived asylum seekers in Toronto is in part a result of the historical failure to address the broader shelter and housing crises.
- Advocates have called for action for decades. Lack of adequate and sustained response to the growing affordable housing and homelessness crisis has made the situation more dire.

- On October 8, 1998, the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee called on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster.
- 20 years later, in December of 2018, homelessness and housing advocates, health-care workers and shelter providers came together to demand that the City of Toronto declare a state of emergency in response to the growing number of people facing homelessness.
- In May 2023, the City of Toronto via City Council voted to declare a homelessness emergency in Toronto.
- Earlier in 2023, both Niagara Region and Hamilton declared a state of emergency of homelessness.

FORCED MIGRATION IS ON THE RISE

- In 2000, some 173 million people lived outside of their countries of origin. Twenty years later, that figure had risen to 281 million.
- There are 103 million forced migrants across the world.

PLANS TO ADDRESS THE BARRIERS FACING ASYLUM SEEKERS ALREADY EXIST

- The City of Toronto approved a Refugee Capacity Plan in 2019 to support housing access and orientation for refugee claimants. This plan was paused indefinitely during COVID.

PRECARIOUS STATUS CREATES BARRIERS TO ACCESSING BASIC SUPPORTS

- Ontario is estimated to be home to the largest population of people without immigration status, including denied refugee claimants.
- Very few supports exist for asylum seekers who have yet to be granted refugee status.
 - The only available resource that assisted refugee claimant families and singles to move out of emergency shelter to long-term housing is the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB).
 - The COHB was suspended as of May 2023 as allocated funds were already spent. The benefit was only accessible through homeless shelter staff and clients.

ALL THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING THE EMERGENCY SITUATION FACING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THE GROWING SHELTER AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISES.

Each component of Toronto's shelter system has a specific and critical role in addressing the needs of individuals and families seeking shelter.

The system must be resourced to be able to respond to the unique needs of different populations experiencing homelessness, including refugee claimants and undocumented people.

We call on:

1. All three levels of government to immediately request and fund the Red Cross or another humanitarian crisis organization to set up emergency shelter options, with a full range of legal, health care, and housing supports.
2. The federal government to increase shelter capacity by funding new hotel spaces in Toronto that provide legal, health care, and other supports for refugee claimants.
3. Business and City officials to work together on an urgent and creative search and acquisition of buildings that can be used to shelter people now, including the many vacant office buildings, college residences, vacant homes pending demolition, banquet halls, and city-owned buildings.
4. All three levels of government fund the Refugee Capacity Plan that was adopted by the City in 2019 and establish and fund a Reception Centre and program for asylum seekers arriving in Toronto.
5. The City of Toronto to support community-based refugee housing programs like those of Open Homes, Hamilton, Romero House, Matthew House, the African Centre for Refugees, FCJ Refugee Centre, and People's Church.
6. All three levels of government to remedy the historical underfunding of Black-led, Black-serving agencies and immediately build their capacity to appropriately support African refugee claimants and asylum seekers in Toronto.
7. The federal government to urgently introduce an immigration status regularization program that will allow those without or with precarious immigration status to access permanent residence in Canada.
8. The federal and provincial governments to increase funding to Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) and ensure access to this funding for refugee claimants.