

News Release

January 2, 2018

Update on City of Toronto homelessness services

City of Toronto staff continue to actively monitor and respond to the need for homelessness services across the city.

"It is the expectation of the City of Toronto that anyone who requests City-funded and/or operated homeless support and respite services, receives it," said Paul Raftis General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration. "Service requests for homeless support and respite services are not to be refused during the cold weather season."

City staff has connected with the Ombudsman's office and is currently reviewing how information about homelessness services is being communicated by frontline staff to clients. It is particularly important when individuals with specific requirements or needs cannot be immediately assisted that staff work with them to offer alternative service and to assist with transportation requirements.

"Our focus right now is on emergency response to the extreme weather conditions and ensuring people can come in from the cold," said Raftis. "We are monitoring demand closely and considering additional options as necessary."

Demand for services continues to rise. There has been a 30-per-cent increase in average nightly use of shelter beds compared to a year ago. The City's longer-term goal is to expand the permanent shelter system with appropriate services that help people reconnect to community and to housing.

At its December meeting, City Council directed staff to provide 400 additional spaces as soon as practically possible and authorized the spending of \$10.6 million for this purpose. Half of those spaces are open now and the remaining spaces will be opened in the coming weeks.

On top of the additional 400 spaces, more than 290 shelter beds will be opened in 2018 as part of five new shelter programs serving men, seniors, youth and LGBTQ2S youth, including 60 beds at the new Salvation Army Hope shelter, opening in the next 10 days. Council also voted last month to direct City staff to expedite the opening of three additional new shelters in 2018.

Occupancy levels change and fluctuate throughout any 24-hour period and for consistency, the levels are measured daily at 4 a.m. This morning, system occupancy was 94 per cent. At 4 a.m., there were two people in street respite at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre. The respite program can hold up to 25 people.

Outreach teams were also on the streets overnight offering assistance and responding to concerned citizen calls; they recorded encounters with 22 people, four of whom accepted transportation assistance.

It was a busy night at the six 24-hour winter respite services. People come and go from the facilities at all times, so staff count people on a regular basis during the day and night to ensure they do not go over capacity. For reporting purposes, the City uses 4 a.m. statistics to be consistent with shelter system counts. At 4 a.m. this morning 333 spaces were being used; there is capacity for 379 in the respite services overall. At the Better Living Centre, 81 cots were in use of a total of 110.

There was also some available capacity last night in the two year-round 24/7 programs for women.

Extreme Cold Weather Alerts activate additional services that focus on getting and keeping vulnerable residents inside. These include additional shelter beds, notification to community agencies to relax any service restrictions, availability of transit tokens in some drop-ins, and overnight street outreach and transportation to services. Winter respite services are available continuously until April 15 at six winter respite drop-in locations across the city, operating 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Call 311 for locations or check the web app at [toronto.ca/homelesshelp](http://www.toronto.ca/homelesshelp)<<http://www.toronto.ca/homelesshelp>>.

Toronto is Canada's largest city, the fourth largest in North America, and home to a diverse population of about 2.8 million people. It is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture and is consistently ranked one of the world's most livable cities. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can visit <http://www.toronto.ca>, call 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or follow us on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/TorontoComms> and on Instagram at <http://www.instagram.com/cityofto>.

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