



April 16, 2010

New research: street homelessness in Toronto cut in half

2009 Street Needs Assessment: homeless people want permanent housing; more affordable housing is still needed

Street homelessness - people living outdoors - in Toronto is down by 51 per cent since the inaugural Street Needs Assessment in 2006, according to the newly released results of the 2009 Street Needs Assessment (SNA).

Overall, the estimated number of homeless people sleeping both outside and in emergency shelters administered by the City of Toronto declined slightly between 2006 and 2009.

"This is further evidence to support Housing First investments in Toronto," said Mayor David Miller. "They point, once again, to the fact that homeless people are frequent users of expensive emergency services. The math is simple: it's cheaper to house someone and provide supports than to do nothing."

If you include homeless people in Toronto's correctional facilities, provincially run Violence Against Women shelters, and health care facilities, there were an estimated 5,086 homeless people in Toronto on the night of April 15, 2009, almost unchanged from the estimate in April 2006.

"It is great news that there are fewer people sleeping outdoors, but of particular concern among the 2009 findings is the increase in the number of families using emergency shelter," said Janet Davis, Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee. "The main cause is not the recession. Almost three-quarters of the increase is due to more refugee claimants settling in Toronto with no access to appropriate housing."

The number of Aboriginal people sleeping outside has decreased significantly. However, they continue to be greatly over-represented among homeless people.

"With a response rate of 39%, people who are homeless in Toronto once again took the opportunity to have their voices heard," said Phil Brown, General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division, which conducted the survey with the assistance of 450 volunteers and 357 team leaders and City staff. "They have made it clear that they want permanent housing and have told us the services they need in order to obtain it."

A shortage of affordable housing continues to be the most significant barrier to ending homelessness. As in 2006, nine out of 10 homeless people want permanent housing. More people said help finding an affordable place and more money are what they need to find it.

The survey methodology and the calculations used to determine the outdoor estimate were reviewed by a third-party expert who confirmed the validity of the methods used and endorsed the results. This survey methodology is based on the approach used in New York's Homeless Outreach Population Estimate, which is recognized by the US government's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a model for statistically valid survey methodologies. Since the methodology is consistent with that used in 2006, results can be compared.

The Street Needs Assessment is a snap shot of Toronto's homeless population. It was conducted at a direct cost of about \$119,000, funded by the federal government's Homelessness Partnership Initiative. As is the case with almost all homeless surveys, it is not designed to include the "hidden" homeless (those living in overcrowded conditions or "couch surfing").

The City's Street Outreach Steering Committee, made up of representatives from many community agencies and City divisions, provided input and oversight for the 2009 SNA.

The detailed results of the April 15, 2009 SNA are available on the City's website.

The staff report can be found at: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-29122.pdf>;
the detailed results at
<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-29123.pdf>.

The report will be discussed at the April 23 meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee.

Results of the Street Needs Assessment reinforce the recommendations in the Housing Opportunities Toronto 10-Year Affordable Housing Action Plan, in particular the requests to the federal and provincial governments for long-term and fully-funded affordable housing plans, and a doubling of federal funding to address homelessness.

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.6 million people. It is the economic engine of Canada and one of the greenest and most creative cities in North America. Toronto has won numerous awards for quality, innovation and efficiency in delivering public services. Toronto's government is dedicated to prosperity, opportunity and livability for all its residents. For information about non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can dial 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

More information:

Media wanting to interview Phil Brown, General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, can speak to him in Committee Room 3 at City Hall, Friday, April 16 between 1 and 3 p.m.

- 30 -

Media contact: Patricia Anderson, Manager, Partnership Development and Support, 416-397-4328, 647-272-8935 (cell), panders@toronto.ca

2009 Street Needs Assessment Highlights

- Outdoor homelessness cut in half
 - Estimated outdoor homeless population on April 15, 2009 is 400-51% lower than the estimate of 818 on April 19, 2006
 - Estimated number of homeless people sleeping outside and in emergency shelters administered by the City of Toronto on April 15, 2009 is 4,390-1.7% fewer than in 2006.
 - Estimated number of homeless people in Toronto if you include all homeless individuals in health care and treatment facilities, incarcerated in Toronto area detention centres from a Toronto court, and in Violence Against Women shelters (administered by the province) on the night of the survey is 5,086.

- Family shelter use driven by federal immigration policy
 - Number of people staying in City of Toronto administered shelters on April 15, 2009: 3,990, 9.3% higher than in 2006.
 - Most of this increase is in the family (+39.2%) and youth (+16.2%) sectors. Single adult sector has seen a 1.4% decrease since 2006.
 - Use of shelters by families is largely determined by geopolitical circumstance and therefore driven by federal immigration policy, with some occupancy influenced by women and children being turned away from provincially administered VAW shelters because those shelters are full.
 - About 72% of the 39% growth in family occupancy between 2006 and 2009 is attributable to the increase in the number of refugee families, with the remainder the result of other factors, including economic.

- Aboriginal people still over-represented in homeless population but fewer sleeping outdoors
 - Aboriginal people continue to be over-represented in homeless population (15.4% compared with 16.2% in 2006), but fewer are sleeping outside. The estimated number of Aboriginal people living outdoors has fallen significantly since 2006. It is estimated at 115 in 2009, compared to 211 in 2006, a 45% reduction. 28.7% of the outdoor homeless population self-identified as Aboriginal, slightly higher than the 25.8% in 2006.

- Panhandling down, employment up
 - Panhandling is down as a source of income (9.7% in 2009, compared with 17.4% in 2006), while employment-related income increased to 28.8% from 23.2% in 2006.

- More homeless people may be able to access ODSP
 - More homeless people may be able to access the Ontario Disability Support Program, which provides more income than Ontario Works (welfare): 34.5% of those who are not now receiving ODSP reported they believe they are eligible, but nearly two-thirds have never applied.

- Homeless people are frequent users of costly emergency services
 - More evidence that homeless people are frequent users of emergency services-this substantially more expensive to the taxpayer than housing-based responses to homelessness.

- Homeless people want permanent housing
 - Once again, 9 out of 10 homeless people reported they want permanent housing
 - Although more people say they are on the waiting list for subsidized housing (45.4% in 2009, versus 36.6% in 2007), work is needed to get more people on the list.

- Other key findings
 - 51.8% of homeless people said they needed at least one addiction, health or mental health related service in order to help them find housing (54.3% in 2006).
 - Overall average length of homelessness has decreased to 2.9 years from 3.4 in 2006, with people living outdoors being homeless the longest on average. The number of people homeless for more than 10 years has decreased to 6.7% in 2009 from 12.2% in 2006.
 - After shelters, drop ins remain the service most used by homeless people (51.6%).
 - The top five things that would help an individual find housing remain the same as in 2006:
 - Help finding an affordable place
 - More money
 - Transportation to see apartments
 - Help with housing applications
 - Help getting identification

Close Window