

Community Case Study Toronto, Ontario

1. Introduction

This case study of Toronto is one of a series of case studies of communities participating in the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The case study first outlines community action related to homelessness prior to the federal government initiative. It then describes the planning and implementation structure the community put in place to respond to the NHI and lists projects undertaken to date. Finally, it notes some of the unique issues related to homelessness observed in the community and some of the lessons the community learned that could be useful to other communities responding to NHI or a similar federal initiative.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is producing the case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how NHI is working at the community level and the extent to which the objectives are being achieved at this mid-way stage of the three-year Initiative. Communities will thus have an overview of what is being done in their own community, and of what can be learned from the experiences in individual communities that may be applicable to others participating in the Initiative.

The case study is based on a review of Toronto's homelessness plan and other documents and reports relating to homelessness and a series of interviews with people representing the following groups (a complete list of the groups is attached to this report)

- local HRDC homelessness managers and staff
- provincial and municipal government officials in related program areas
- community planning steering committee and sub-committees
- community organizations active in service delivery for homeless persons and people at risk

Information from the community case studies done across Canada will be compiled with data on projects being funded and other information to give HRDC a national perspective on how the Initiative is working to date.

2. Homelessness Activities Prior to the Federal Government Initiative

Extent of overall activity, programs, facilities

Toronto has a long history dating back to the 1890s of commitment by faith-based and non-profit organizations to provide for the needs of impoverished and homeless individuals. At the turn of the last century, such organizations relied on the generosity of the community for financial resources, in the form of donations from local churches, fund-raising and foundations. In time, some organizations obtained monetary support from the government through provincial and municipal programs.

Throughout the 20th century, senior levels of governments legislated policies to provide for the poor elderly, persons with disabilities, the unemployed and people living in poverty. The provinces and municipalities shared the responsibility of service provision. In Ontario, the former General Welfare and Family Benefits Acts extended regulations for the provision of social assistance and social services. The

government funded agencies that offered food, shelter and other necessities to the poor and the homeless through provincial welfare programs.

Charitable associations have also served Aboriginal people in need. Most of Toronto's present day urban Aboriginals are Algonquin and Ojibway peoples from northern reserves, Cree from the James Bay area as well as Mohawk, Six Nations and Treaty Cree.

In 1997, the United Way of Greater Toronto decided to make hunger and homelessness one of four major funding priorities. The agency has maintained this commitment and has increased spending on the issue from year to year. The United Way has not been alone in this mission. Other groups that represent people who are poor and homeless have lobbied to have their interests represented on Toronto's city council.

In 1998, serious concerns about homelessness in Toronto led to the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force. The task force had a broad mandate to develop both short-term proposals for emergency services and recommend longer-term solutions to alleviate homelessness. The report, "Taking Responsibility for Homelessness, An Action Plan for Toronto," was published in January 1999. Soon after, groups such as the Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated People, the AlterAboriginal Housing and Services Committee and the Aboriginal Homeless Steering Committee were established to help implement the report's recommendations.

Involvement by federal, provincial and municipal governments

Prior to and since the inception of the NHI, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has participated in activities to support the maintenance and upgrading of facilities that serve the homeless by funding housing renovation projects through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). Among the organizations that benefited from the CMHC's involvement are the NA-ME-RES Aboriginal shelter in downtown Toronto and the Trellis Gardens transitional facility for refugees. CMHC also assisted other agencies in securing mortgage insurance for their projects.

HRDC has a history of working in partnership with the city, primarily with youth at risk, through programmes such as the Youth Services Canada and the Youth Employment Initiatives to support the transition of youth at risk into the labour market.

Prior to the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) stream of the NHI, urban Aboriginal organizations partnered with the federal government through Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements (AHRDA) to provide supports for employment and related social services.

HRDC is involved with the Toronto Homeless Community Economic Development Program (CED). Other partners include the province, the City of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto. The main objective of the CED is to invest in social purpose enterprises that will create both community connections and economic opportunities for people who are homeless or considered at risk. The CED is a three-year funding partnership program that will operate from 2000 to 2003. It is unique in that all three levels of government and the largest non-governmental funder of community and social services in Greater Toronto, the United Way, are jointly involved in direct funding for project delivery.

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) supports a number of initiatives designed to deal with homelessness. The Ministry has maintained funding for six homeless program streams in the community. For several decades, MCSS has shared the cost of operating emergency shelters with all its municipalities. The funding arrangement is a shared model (80 percent provincial/ 20

percent municipal). MCSS also funds the Provincial Homelessness Initiatives Fund program, which began in 1998, and the Hostel Redirection program, started in April 1999. Funding is provided for the Supports to Daily Living program to assist homeless individuals with mental health issues and to the Community Partners program that began in January 2000. The ministry's Domiciliary Hostel program that funds private boarding homes for those at risk of homelessness has also operated for several decades. Provincial/municipal funding arrangements for this program were revised in 1998. Finally, the ministry created the Off the Streets into Shelters program in January 2001 to assist agencies that offer services to hard-to-serve homeless persons. The city administers most of the funding for these programs.

The City of Toronto also plays a major role in serving the impoverished. The city's Shelter, Housing and Support division (SHS) manages 10 city-operated shelters and assists in funding more than 50 shelters managed by community-based agencies (funding is on a per diem basis 80/20 cost-shared by the province and the city). A recent cost-analysis of shelter services by city staff determined that the city's share of the cost is more than the established 20 percent. The division also has contracts with 12 motel owners to serve homeless families and assists 14 provincially funded shelters for victims of domestic violence.

Through its hostel services, the city cost-shares the funding of the Habitat program. This program helps to maintain more than 900 beds and 40 boarding home locations, mostly for persons with mental health and addictions issues. Since 1988, the city has assisted with the funding of the Out of the Cold program in Toronto. The city's contribution to the program includes staffing support and training.

City officials created the City of Toronto Homelessness Initiatives Fund (CT-HIF), a combination of provincial and municipal monies for homelessness projects. Some of the funding has supported the subsistence of drop-in services for homeless men and women throughout the city.

The SHS contributes to the development of affordable housing. It administers an \$11 million Capital Revolving Fund for affordable housing via the Let's Build program. They have also identified some surplus municipal lands for affordable housing and have waived the development charges for non-profit rental housing projects. The city established a Mayor's Homelessness Initiative Reserve Fund to develop transitional housing and recently endorsed an agreement with the province to build 1,110 new social housing units, mostly for the mental health community. The city's housing division also manages more than 30,000 social housing units through the Toronto Housing Company. There is a waiting list of 60,000 or more individuals and families.

SHS also participates in prevention programs aimed at helping vulnerable persons to maintain their housing. It funds several community-based agencies to assist this population to secure their housing for the long-term. SHS also participates in the provision of services to groups of individuals at high risk of experiencing homelessness. For example, they contribute to activities such as a rent-bank and a shelter fund to help families stay housed. They also support the Squeegee Diversion program for street youth and a housing help program for refugees.

3. How Toronto Has Responded to the Federal Government Initiative

Initial work by HRDC

Upon the announcement of the NHI for Toronto in June 2000, it was quickly agreed that the City of Toronto would be the appropriate community entity to administer the SCPI funds (the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative is the primary funding program under the NHI). HRDC in Ontario was aware that the city already had the expertise and infrastructure to assume the role. After a negotiation

process described as long and arduous by many participants, HRDC and city representatives signed an agreement in December 2001.

While the city made arrangements develop a community plan in keeping with SCPI terms and conditions, HRDC negotiated a contract with Miziwe Biik, a Aboriginal employment agency, to put together a community plan to address Aboriginal homelessness using Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) homelessness funds. HRDC retained the administration of the UAS funding and entered into an agreement with Miziwe Biik to allocate UAS funds. HRDC also administers youth homelessness funds in Toronto.

Community planning process

Toronto City Council created a council reference group made up of three city councillors to oversee the creation of the community plan. A steering committee with senior staff representatives from the three levels of government was also formed to help coordinate and implement SCPI.

The city's SHS, a division of the Community and Neighbourhood Services department, is responsible for SCPI. SHS has a number of committees and groups representing non-profit community sectors, various levels of government and the private sector for broad-based community consultative processes to take place, and so has an overall understanding of homelessness in the city of Toronto.

The city invited approximately 55 groups, including agencies working primarily with the youth and Aboriginal sectors, to discuss the allocation of SCPI funding. This group, known as the Community Reference Group (CRG), is drawn from community-based groups and coalitions, most of which had already been consulted about homelessness for the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force report. The CRG met twice during the summer of 2000.

The city also created an Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee and gave committee members the mandate to identify their homeless service priorities and share that information with the three city councillors mandated to oversee the creation of the community plan. This enabled the city to integrate the needs of Aboriginal homeless people into the overall planning for homelessness rather than regarding the Aboriginal population as a separate group with separate needs.

The Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force and recommendations from the CRG formed the basis of the SCPI Community Plan for Homelessness in Toronto. Contributions from HRDC and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and MCSS were also sought. Input from clients was solicited from CRG agencies. It was felt that the NHI's short time frame would make it difficult to include any meaningful participation of clients and that the front line staff could adequately advocate on their behalf during the community planning process.

The four main objectives of the community plan are to:

1. Support efforts that:
 - increase the supply of transitional and affordable housing in Toronto;
 - ensure everyone has alternatives to living on the street;
 - reduce the number of people who must rely on emergency shelters;
 - improve the well-being of people who are homeless;
 - help people leave long-term homelessness behind;
 - meet the needs of homeless people in communities across the city.

2. Build professional expertise at the city and in the community, and raise public awareness and understanding about homelessness.
3. Enhance homelessness prevention and support systems that:
 - are consistent with Toronto's Homelessness Action Plan;
 - build on community-based and public services;
 - build on homelessness service planning already underway;
 - result in more and better partnerships to address homelessness in Toronto.
4. Generate funding models that:
 - define clear priorities;
 - complement other funding sources;
 - offer sustained benefit beyond the three years of SCPI funding.

SCPI funding was coordinated to complement the city's existing funding structure under the CT-HIF and divided into the following envelopes:

- 40 percent transitional housing, funding is coordinated with the city's let's build program, mayors homelessness initiative reserve fund and RRAP
- 20 percent emergency shelter, no proposals submitted for this envelope, funding designated to go towards city's hostel capital budget
- 15 percent homeless programs and services
- 10 percent small capital projects
- 6 percent contingency fund; can flow to any envelope
- 6 percent administration costs
- 2 percent community plan and research
- 1 percent program evaluation

Youth

Initially, youth homelessness funds were only available through existing HRDC youth employment strategy programs, which limited their use in relation to homelessness. In June 2001, when the NHI Youth Initiative funding was altered to be more in line with the SCPI guidelines, HRDC presented the information to the Alternative Housing and Services Committee, one of the committees that work with the SHS. The committee then sent out an alert fax to all agencies informing them of the NHI youth funding changes. HRDC explained the changes at community consultations held in June and July, which helped to clear up some of the confusion related to the change.

During the second and third call for proposals, both HRDC and the city received requests for youth funding. Both groups looked closely together at the proposals to see whether they fit best under the SCPI or the youth homelessness funding envelope. Some proposals received did not fit under the NHI criteria at all, and were forwarded to more appropriate funders. HRDC made a conscious effort to target and work with youth Aboriginal and francophone projects.

Aboriginal community planning

Recommendations from the mayor's task force indicated a need to develop a distinct homelessness strategy for Aboriginal peoples. Task force officials hired an Aboriginal consulting firm to develop that strategy. The planning process included a literature review and interviews with key members of

Aboriginal agencies serving the homeless. Interviews were also conducted with homeless Aboriginal people to ensure their input. The Aboriginal homelessness steering committee used the data in the report, "A Planning Framework for Addressing Aboriginal Homelessness in the City of Toronto," (submitted in November 1998) to address the issue. In June 2001, the committee identified the following three major priorities to deal with homelessness among Aboriginal people:

- increase access to long term, transitional and emergency housing;
- improve Aboriginal health;
- increase access to meaningful and stable employment opportunities.

The Aboriginal homelessness steering committee recommended that 25 percent of Toronto's SCPI homelessness funding be targeted to homeless Aboriginals, as statistics seemed to indicate that Aboriginal peoples represented that proportion of homeless persons on the streets. City officials chose to integrate the Aboriginal committee's priorities into the broader community plan and distribute funds on that basis, rather than allocate a specific amount to the Aboriginal community.

Meanwhile, officials from Miziwe Biik conducted separate consultations with Aboriginal groups to develop a plan to use UAS funds. Miziwe Biik was one of the Aboriginal organizations in three cities that joined with the community to create joint action plans. The other two communities where this occurred were Hamilton and Ottawa. In each case, the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle (ALFDC), helped set up local Aboriginal homeless advisory councils. They also set up local delivery mechanisms (LDMs) to administer the calls for proposals, assess and select projects for funding on behalf of the local Aboriginal community.

Advisory council members assisted with local community agency workshops, focus groups, interviews with Aboriginal service providers and the composition of reports. A series of meetings were held, during which organizers involved participants in the generation of solutions to homelessness. Once consultations were completed, the ALFDC produced an Aboriginal community action plan. The plan identified the following priorities:

- transitional housing support services
- innovative outreach programs
- Aboriginal street patrol
- Community-supported capital projects
- supports and mental health services for the mentally challenged
- community-based partnerships
- access to emergency food vouchers and healthier foods
- culturally sensitive programming
- supports for agencies and shelter systems that are over-extended

Once the priorities were defined, the local Aboriginal homeless advisory council developed the project selection criteria, which included detailed information about sustainability, project evaluation, the communication strategy and the project funding conditions. The project submissions were reviewed by the LDM that approved project funding.

All of the Aboriginal respondents found out about the Initiative from HRDC, the City of Toronto and Miziwe Biik. Both the city and Miziwe Biik held public meetings to inform agencies about the Initiative. Aboriginal groups were welcomed at both of the community planning exercises.

Despite some efforts to encourage communications between the city and Miziwe Biik, the city and Miziwe Biik did not consult with each other much during the SCPI process, particularly in the first two rounds of calls for proposals. The executive director of Miziwe Biik did have an opportunity to comment on the allocation of the city's funding of Aboriginal projects during the third round of the city's funding process. Some Aboriginal agencies were reportedly intimidated by the SCPI application process, so staff from the city and Miziwe Biik did their best to help agencies with their proposals. Because there were two separate funding sources, Aboriginal groups could apply to both for funds. In their proposals, Aboriginal agencies were expected to inform the parties of the amount of funding they were requesting from each of them.

Proposal process

The majority of interviewees said that they found out about SCPI from the city. Others heard about the Initiative through fax transmittals from various groups they associated with and through word of mouth.

The review team, composed of staff from HRDC, the city and United Way, prioritise the requests for funding. Some of the criteria used in evaluating the submissions included how well the proposal fits within the established priorities, whether partnerships were enhanced or developed and the clarity of the proposal and budget. When required, people with additional expertise, such as city planners, are sought by the review team to help appraise the proposals.

The city hired consultants to work with those agencies that had submitted proposals or expressions of interests that fit within the SCPI criteria. The consultants met with approximately 65 agencies and supported them in identifying realistic objectives, activities and outcomes in their proposals. Roughly two-thirds of the proposals submitted required reworking. Improving their quality helps to minimize the time the city's staff need to administer the proposals.

Gaps and priorities

The community plan identified the following gaps, under particular strategies:

Strategy #1 Reduce poverty

- rent supplement programs
- City Council should advocate an increased minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour
- inadequate benefits for people on social assistance (shelter component to reflect rents)
- high need for transportation subsidy
- adequate incomes, childcare subsidies
- income supplements for the working poor (and drug cards)
- capacity building in suburbs and ethno-specific service areas re: proposal
- development, partnership development, etc.
- training skills development

Strategy #2 Preserve and create affordable and supportive housing

- a national housing strategy (broad consensus)
- reinstate rent controls
- not enough affordable, subsidized housing
- supportive housing
- need a continuum of quality housing that is monitored

Strategy #3 Shift from emergency to prevention responses

- alternatives to shelters, e.g., shared housing
- sufficient eviction prevention services to address rising evictions
- lack of rent subsidies

Strategy #4 Plan services and develop strategies for high-risk groups

- programs for ethno-specific groups
- equitable funding of services across the city-not just downtown
- high risk groups — gay, lesbian and transgendered youth

Strategy #5 Implement a comprehensive health strategy

- co-ordinate approach between addiction and mental health care providers and other service agencies serving homeless people
- need to be open to involving partners from other sections, i.e., health, mental health, and addictions (MoH)
- agencies need training on harm reduction strategies
- infirmary and discharge proposals are needed
- more detox space for Aboriginal women and men
- need to acknowledge hunger as a major health issue

Strategy #6 All levels of government must work together

- need more effective co-ordination between all levels of government
- we know what needs to be done — just do it, need a national housing strategy
- need a homeless facilitator as recommended by the mayor's task force
- need to get rid of inter-ministerial silos — need single stop for funding
- government initiatives that support development of affordable housing; land and PST rebates
- mortgage insurance
- need to address poverty and lack of affordable housing

Key observations

One of the hallmarks of the federal government's homelessness initiative is its flexibility to adapt to circumstances in individual communities. The community case studies highlight this aspect of the Initiative because participating communities all have unique ways of addressing homelessness according to their circumstances and preferred approaches, and all have different ways of adapting the NHI to their particular needs.

In Toronto, researchers developing the case studies reported the following key observations about the way this community is responding to the federal homelessness initiative to date:

- In the NHI's initial stages, some people expressed frustration at HRDC's request that the community "re-do the community plan." It was felt that the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force report (released in January 1999) was a comprehensive community plan that offered clear directions and made recommendations for future work in this area. Once the community plan was completed, however, it was agreed by most participants that the process had a benefit in enabling the community to focus on how best to allocate the SCPI funds, in the broader context of the Mayor's Task Force plan.

- Provincial officials were critical at the outset of the federal government's decision not to direct SCPI funding through the existing, provincially mandated 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM), designed to deliver health and social services in their jurisdictions.
- In Toronto, as in most communities participating in the NHI, the federal Initiative is widely viewed as a valuable contribution to helping serve homeless people, but limited because it does not address a clear and urgent need for more affordable housing. Even though the NHI is contributing more than \$60 million in Toronto over the three years of the NHI, it is important to remember that this represents only a portion of the resources being contributed on an ongoing basis by the province, the city and other private and charitable contributors.
- Agencies we consulted that serve distinctive groups, e.g., Aboriginals, refugees, gays, lesbians and transsexuals, expressed concern that little or no SCPI monies were set aside expressly to assist mainstream shelters with the specific needs of these groups, such as interpretation services and cultural sensitivity training.
- Some Aboriginal groups commented that, because of the lack of coordination between the city and Miziwe Biik, opportunities had been missed to coordinate funding for some urgent needs in the community, for example, a shelter with detox capacities for Aboriginals with addictions. Many Aboriginal respondents talked about the need to do more long-term and sustainable planning to address homelessness in Toronto. Aboriginal groups expressed an urgent need for dollars to pursue this exercise. Others said that more planning is needed between the City of Toronto and the Aboriginal community. Some Aboriginal agencies based in Toronto are open to partnerships with mainstream services, while others are more comfortable partnering with other Aboriginal organizations.
- Some agencies found the application process for SCPI, UAS and youth homelessness funding to be inordinately long and complicated. This view was reflected by the fact that after the first round of proposals the city brought in consultants to support agencies writing the proposals. Agencies that had submitted proposals under the Small Capital Projects envelope mentioned that most of their time was consumed with obtaining three different quotes for relatively inexpensive capital expenditures or renovations. Others complained about the tight time frames associated with the application process.
- Despite these concerns, there was a general appreciation among respondents for the assistance and advice offered by HRDC and city staff during the Initiative. Both HRDC and city staff were described as approachable, efficient, helpful and good communicators. Several people said they felt that the majority of the problems identified in the first year, such as the tight time frames and long waiting period to obtain the funding, were due to the three-year time restriction of the NHI. Community members mentioned that the process for the second round of proposals was greatly improved. Consultants helped to sort through the bureaucratic maze and the turn-around time for payment was shortened.
- Provincial officials stressed the importance of developing an "exit strategy" that would deliver a clear message to service providers that on-going funding of projects post-SCPI was not a provincial responsibility.
- Sustainability remains a major issue for both mainstream and Aboriginal agencies. Many are working to maintain their service levels once the initiative ends in 2003. Some agencies hope the funding from per diems from the province and the city for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal shelter

beds will help to prolong their projects. Others will rely on other sources of funding such as the United Way, community foundations and private and corporate donations.

- Government representatives from all three jurisdictions stated that SCPI had encouraged them to work more closely together. Indeed, some provincial officials said that for the first time in their careers, they had developed close working relationships with HRDC, city officials and the staff of Toronto's United Way. Many stakeholders acknowledged their efforts at cooperation, but most said that the three parties could still do a better job of working together. HRDC is making an effort to involve other federal departments in the area of homelessness but it remains difficult. Homelessness is not a stated priority for other federal departments, so it is hard for staff to find the time to attend meetings or commit to working on particular projects.
- In the Aboriginal community, respondents stated that agencies such as NA-MER-ES and Native Child and Family Services were already making a difference in the lives of homeless Aboriginals and Aboriginal youth prior to the NHI. Other Aboriginal observers credit the UAS and SCPI with the availability of more services, as well as an increased capacity in the community to respond to the needs of homeless Aboriginal individuals and families. There is also a potential seen for more partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies in the future. Respondents cautioned that these improvements are just a start and that much more will need to be accomplished to solve Aboriginal homelessness.
- When queried about the overall impacts of SCPI in Toronto, many respondents said that SCPI's legacy would be the existence of more major capital projects and as a result, more beds for the homeless. Stakeholders also credited the NHI with the city's resolution to work with shelters to develop a hostel standards policy. That policy would set norms that all service providers would be expected to respect in the operation of their shelters.

Summer 2002