

Overview of Winter 2022/23 Supports for Edmontonians Experiencing Homelessness

During winter 2022/23, Administration's support for Edmontonians experiencing homelessness focused on five key areas:

1. Extreme and cold weather activations;
2. Connecting people experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities to supports;
3. Permitting and logistical support for Government of Alberta (GoA) funded shelters;
4. Funding the West End Shelter and Bridge Housing site, operated by Jasper Place Wellness Centre in collaboration with Tipeemso Development Limited Partnership; and
5. Other sector supports (e.g. day shelter operations, Shigella response, etc.)

Summary of Winter 2022/23 Expenses (\$000)	
Extreme and cold weather activations	\$1,108
Supports for people experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities	\$290
Support for Government of Alberta funded shelters	\$69
Funding the West End Shelter and Bridge Housing Site	\$7,500
Other sector supports	\$5,154
Total	\$14,121

1) Extreme Weather Activations

To date, there have been 45 days of extreme weather activations this winter season. The City of Edmonton's Extreme Weather Response encompasses a number of activities:

ETS Extreme Weather Bus

- Operates bus routes between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. to help transport people to shelter. Buses are staffed with two Transit Peace Officers and outreach workers (when the capacity of agency partners allows).
- Staff shortages among agency partners, ETS and TPOs to support the transportation of people from transit facilities to shelters was a significant operational concern during the past winter which requires reevaluating the operating model. For example, out of 117 requested shifts for

outreach workers on the extreme weather buses, 23 were filled. Of those 23 filled shifts, 12 were filled by external partners. There are a number of potential factors impacting the limited uptake of outreach shifts, including:

- sector-wide human resource challenges for social service providers,
- the difficult nature of these shifts, such as being in addition to full-time regular hours for many staff,
- working overnight and on short notice, and during extremely cold conditions.
- Administration is exploring opportunities to use existing Extreme Weather Response funding to help agency partners build staffing capacity for next winter.

Boyle Street Warming Bus

- With funding support from the City, Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) operates a bus from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week. This support provided basic necessities, services, and transport to shelters, if requested.
- The bus is staffed by two support workers, accommodates 30 passengers, visits regular locations known to have large congregations of people experiencing homelessness and integrates with the City's weather-related activities as much as possible.
- From December 2022 until the end of February 2023, the team interacted with clients on 2,803 occasions and transported 214 individuals to drop-ins and shelters.

Al Rashid Mosque

- Funding to support 50 to 75 temporary, overnight shelter spaces at Al Rashid Mosque.
 - This funding included support for: support staff, the provision of essential supplies (e.g. food, bus tickets), private bus transportation at the close of the location each morning, security services, janitorial staff and supplies, and shelter volunteer/staff training
- The City provided permitting and logistical support to assist operations.
- Al Rashid Mosque reached 100 per cent capacity the majority of nights it was activated.

- Informal feedback received from Al Rashid staff indicates that clients prefer the smaller shelter site and overall approach to shelter provision offered by Al Rashid, over the more centralized and larger shelter sites.

Encampment Response

- Encampment Response teams conduct wellness checks and only address high-risk encampments.

City of Edmonton Facilities

- All City of Edmonton recreation facilities and Edmonton Public Library locations are open to the public for warming purposes during hours of operation.

2) Connecting People Experiencing Homelessness in ETS Facilities to Supports

Through extensive City of Edmonton coordination with both internal and external partners, such as shelter agencies, the Government of Alberta, and others, Administration supported people in ETS facilities by offering transportation to shelter facilities.

Transit Peace Officers (TPOs) check on the well-being of Edmontonians experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities on a daily basis. TPOs ensure vulnerable Edmontonians have access to crisis diversion, arrange transportation to shelters, well-being, and medical aid, offer referrals to the Community Outreach Transit Teams, and social services.

Multiple ETS facilities are locked nightly, requiring everyone to leave the facility at the end of service. TPOs ensure those who may not have the capacity to look after their own well-being are connected with crisis diversion, Emergency Medical Services or any other available form of transportation.

In the 2022/23 winter season, the City s took a two-staged approach to extreme weather and protecting the City's vulnerable community in transit facilities.

- *The Winter Response* was activated when the weather fell between -10°C and -20°C . One ETS shuttle bus operated on call from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. and was a transportation resource to be utilized by ETS and the TPOs. Two TPOs and an ETS Bus Operator were assigned each night, which were increased overtime for transit operators and TPOs.
- *The Extreme Weather Response* was activated when the weather fell below -20°C including windchill for a period of 72 hours or longer. Two ETS buses operated as warming buses and shuttles on designated routes to

transport vulnerable Edmontonians from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. including supporting the TPOs during station lock-up.

For the 2022/23 season, Transit Peace Officers allocated \$290,000 in overtime costs to support nightly lock-ups, the Winter Response, and Extreme Weather Activations.

Between January 1 and February 28, 2023, an average of 225 individuals were removed from ETS facilities every night during lock-up procedures. January 2023 marked the first complete month of data collection in a new format. December 2022 did not have a complete month of data collection and lock-up procedures were not able to be completed on all nights due to staffing limitations and weather conditions. On evenings during which lock-up procedures were not completed due to these limitations, City facilities which are otherwise secured for the purposes of security and after-hours maintenance remained unlocked and insecure.

- Nightly removals ranged between a low of 143 individuals at -9°C and a peak of 390 individuals at -8°C. No direct link was found between the highest removal numbers and the coldest temperature.

There were 69 weather-related responses (Winter Response or Extreme Weather Activation) documented between December 8, 2022 and February 28, 2023. One shelter shuttle bus operated when temperatures were between -10°C and -20°C and two buses operated at -20°C and below.

- 89 individuals were transported to shelters on average, per night during weather-related responses.
- 106 individuals refused transportation to shelter on the shuttle bus per night, on average, when offered during weather-related responses.
- Two Transit Peace Officers per bus, per night of activation, supported the responses, resulting in approximately 1,396 hours of overtime
 - On 15 nights in December, three nights in January and six nights in February there were not enough TPO staff to fully staff the shelter shuttle using overtime resources. In those cases, regular duty Transit Peace Officers were reassigned, creating deficits to regular service which included the inability to complete the station lock-up process and respond to complaint calls made to the Transit Safety Dispatch.
 - TPOs were asked to sign up for over 12,000 hours of overtime in 2022, much of which supported winter support and overnight lock-up processes, which subsequently

increased sick time for TPOs by 72 per cent compared to the prior year.

- Given this trend, TPO shift schedules for winter 2023/24 will be adapted to mitigate some of the need for nightly overtime shifts, which may impact daytime service levels.

Anecdotal information is available regarding non-destination riders on ETS buses at the end of service and individuals who do not wish to attend shelters.

- The majority of individuals choose other options over shelters due to perceived and real safety concerns. Many will stay awake overnight and sleep during the day in public spaces.

Five of the planned seven Community Outreach Transit Teams are active, providing coverage from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. across various shifts. These teams have supported individuals by connecting them with resources, providing them with food and supplies, offering first aid care and providing transportation options in support of improving their situation. The remaining two teams are anticipated to be active in Q2 2023.

3) GoA Funded Shelters

On October 1, 2022, the Government of Alberta (GoA) released *Alberta's Homelessness Action Plan*. In addition to commitments towards system modernization, the plan includes five commitments for Edmonton:

1. Creating 450 additional temporary emergency shelter spaces for winter 2022/23 and winter 2023/24, increasing shelter spaces in Edmonton to 1,072 total spaces during the winter months
2. Expanding all provincially funded shelters to 24/7 access.
3. Piloting a service hub model at shelters, focused on recovery, housing and emergency financial support.
4. Equalizing funding between community-based organizations in Edmonton and Calgary.
5. Improving data collection and reporting to support innovation, inform decision-making and better understand homelessness.

The GoA funded 627 permanent and 575 temporary emergency shelter spaces for winter 2022/23, exceeding the 450 spaces to which it committed. This resulted in a total of 1,202 emergency shelter spaces for Edmonton in winter 2022/23. This funding will continue for winter 2023/24.

These 575 temporary emergency shelter spaces were funded at:

- Trinity Lutheran Church - 45 spaces

- Hope Mission South Side Warehouse - 160 spaces
- Hope Mission Main Building (Basement and overflow areas) - 300 spaces
- Hope Mission Herb Jamieson (additional spaces) - 70 spaces

GoA funded shelters were routinely above 75 per cent capacity during extreme weather events and saw a peak shelter usage in February of 1,028 spaces being used at one time. Additionally, discussions with the GoA highlighted that women's shelter spaces routinely were near or at full capacity all winter and that intox spaces were also routinely near full capacity. Smaller scale shelter options, such as Al Rashid or The Mustard Seed Trinity Lutheran Church were also generally at capacity during extreme weather events.

City Administration supported the funded agencies with permitting activities and expedited all aspects of the permitting process, such as permit submission reviews and inspections. This extensive support also included:

- pre-application meetings and site checks;
- advice and feedback on draft permit applications;
- expedited review of applications; and
- prioritized inspection dates.

Support was provided to Hope Mission South Side Shelter and The Mustard Seed Trinity Lutheran Church.

Through the GoA Service Hub Model, funding has been provided to Hope Mission shelter to allow for increased prevention and diversion work. Diversion work helps to quickly connect individuals to more stable housing. Key elements of this model include:

- Increasing the number of housing workers in shelters, providing Alberta Support workers (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and income support), and increasing Indigenous cultural support.
- Allowing for better connections with emergency rooms and hospitals, allowing medical staff in shelters to provide better care.
- Improved and coordinated releases as a result of Correction and Community Probations involvement.

Some early successes include Hope Mission housing close to 50 individuals in the month of February. This has steadily increased since the beginning of the pilot, as historically there have been only a handful of individuals housed per month.

A third-party evaluator has been hired to review this pilot's system-wide impact, specifically on hospitals and the justice system. These findings are expected to impact possible provincial spread of this approach.

4) City-Funded Shelter

On November 23, 2022, Administration brought forward CS01603 - Update on Emergency Shelter Situation in Edmonton, to Executive Committee.

Subsequently, on November 30, 2022, City Council approved \$7.5 million in funding to Jasper Place Wellness Centre (JPWC), in relation to bridge / transition housing and shelter spaces at the former Bedford Inn, located at 15540 Stony Plain Road NW, Edmonton, Alberta.

In respect of this project, 58 transition/bridge housing beds opened on January 20, 2023, and the emergency shelter spaces opened on February 17, 2023, with a phased launch of the spaces. There are 150 shelter spaces, 11 of which are low mobility spaces, with full beds for clients and access to accessible bathrooms.

Bridge/transitional housing spaces have been well used, with full occupancy since the beginning of March and around three individuals being connected from the bridge/transitional housing spaces into permanent housing solutions per week.

The shelter space occupancy has varied, but over time has reached 80-90 per cent capacity, even during non-extreme weather periods. Operators report that some guests are better served by the location and prefer its smaller size. Others who primarily access services in the city centre have been reluctant to travel to the west end. However, the site is easily accessed by transit, being close to the Jasper Place Transit Centre and the site is on the Extreme Weather bus route.

The agreement has been extended from its original expiration of May 31, 2023 to December 31, 2023. This means that the site will operate until the City's funding support for project operations ends. At this time, JPWC is forecasting up to \$1.9 million in unspent funding by May 31, 2023. This is due, in part, to the delay in opening the site and lower than anticipated operational costs. The unspent funds will provide the potential for an extension of the agreement related to the bridge/transitional housing spaces, up to December 31, 2023, although the operator is forecasting funding will provide four months of operations until September 30, 2023.

5) Other Sector Supports

The City of Edmonton provided funding and supports to the larger sector on a number of projects and initiatives, which support vulnerable Edmontonians:

Shigella Response:

- In October 2022, Alberta Health Services (AHS) requested that the City continue its summer washroom program into the winter months, while also supplying and maintaining additional accessible washrooms and showers.
- The City provided five temporary washroom facilities and one “hygiene hub”, a site that included washroom, laundry, and shower trailers (with the laundry trailer being provided through a private donation). These sites had a cost of \$215,000 per month.
- These sites are staffed with attendants from Hiregood who are trained in overdose response and also offer water, clean clothing, and peer support.
- On February 16, 2023, AHS declared the shigella outbreak over but the outbreak was reopened on March 10, 2023. The City of Edmonton will continue to fund the washroom and shower sites until April 30, 2024; under the direction of AHS.
- The washrooms were frequently accessed. As of March 19, 2023, 189 daily visits were made to the six washrooms funded as part of the shigella response. An additional 12 people per day make use of the two shower facilities.

Day Shelter Services

- Day services for people who are experiencing homelessness have been identified as a gap in the homeless-serving system of care. Day shelters ensure that individuals have somewhere to go for essential services (showers, laundry, clothing, meals) and connections to housing and support services during the day.
- Not all emergency shelters in Edmonton operate 24/7 and the level of services available during the day varies. The shelter sites that do not have 24/7 hours are the South Side Shelter operated by Hope Mission and the Trinity Lutheran Church shelter, operated by the Mustard Seed.
- Since May 2021, the City has funded additional day shelter space as a response to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.
- Over Winter 2022/23, Edmonton had 280 day shelter spaces, 627 permanently funded 24/7 shelter spaces, and 90 temporarily funded 24/7 shelter spaces, for a total of 997 24/7 spaces.
- Between November 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023, there was a monthly average of 8,368 visits made by 1,771 unique individuals to Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society). In addition, the agency Housing Intake & Referral Coordinator had on average 475

- interactions with 304 existing and potential housing participants per month within the same timeframe.
- Currently, Administration is funding Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) (\$750,000) and Bissell Centre (\$2,660,000) to augment their day shelter operational hours and programming.
 - Day service funding agreements are in place to support operations until April 30, 2023 and May 31, 2023, respectively.
 - The Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) funding was sourced from surplus funds from the 2022 Social Development Branch operating budget and the Bissell Centre funding was sourced from the COVID-19 funds appropriated within the Financial Stabilization Reserve.
 - In lieu of funding day services, the GoA has converted all permanently funded overnight shelters to operate 24/7 to ensure that individuals are not required to leave the shelter during the day.
 - Permanently funded overnight shelters include:
 - Hope Mission: Downtown - 125 spaces
 - Hope Mission: Herb Jamieson Centre - 400 spaces
 - E4C: WEAC - 57 spaces
 - Mustard Seed: Neighbour Centre - 45 spaces