

Emergency Shelter Standards Review: Project Background and Inputs

Emergency Shelter Context

In Alberta, the Government of Alberta funds, regulates and monitors emergency shelters.¹ The City's role in emergency shelters is clarified in Objective Three of the City of Edmonton Housing and Homelessness Services Plan². "The City supports the development of Community Plan interim housing program targets and continuous improvement of emergency shelter services", achieved through continued support of efforts led by the Government of Alberta.

Under the Homeward Trust System Planning Framework, emergency accommodations help address homelessness by supporting or facilitating inflow activities (which refers to interventions aimed at prevention by reducing entries into homelessness) and outflow activities (which represents strategies to facilitate successful exits from temporary housing programs into stable, permanent housing). Emergency shelters act as an essential intervention to provide immediate supports for shelter and basic needs, and provide a physical location and entry point to access services. Individuals diverted from shelters may decrease inflow into chronic homelessness. Although these accommodations do not address the root causes of homelessness, they serve an important function in preventing the immediate risk of unsheltered homelessness.

In the recent Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness³, stewarded by Homeward Trust, this Best Practices Guide and the living document of Emergency Shelters Spotlight of Innovative Practices are in alignment with two recommendations in the Community Plan:

Recommendation 3: Develop a sector-wide exchange to establish and share best practice, key data, and facilitate regular sector collaboration.

Recommendation 9: Increase access to, and quality of, shelter services.

In the past year, there have been significant changes to Edmonton's homelessness response system. In fall 2023, the Government of Alberta

¹ Government of Alberta, Action Plan on Homelessness (2022)
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/5601187b-7dfc-45ab-8238-8f4c0be3c634/resource/0e21de0d-1248-4594-8268-0d96860723a0/download/css-action-plan-on-homelessness.pdf>

² June 17, 2024, Community and Public Services Meeting.
<https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=225595>

³ May 21, 2024, Community and Public Services Meeting.
<https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=222670>

committed ongoing base operating funding to increase emergency shelter capacity and as of April 18, 2024, there is funding for 1,801 emergency shelter and transitional spaces, including two new emergency shelter providers to increase shelter options for women and Indigenous peoples.

The Navigation and Support Centre, funded by the Government of Alberta, opened in January 2024. The Centre delivers integrated service delivery from a variety of providers to help individuals transported from encampments secure ID, obtain income support, receive referrals to health and cultural resources and be screened onto housing waitlists before being offered emergency shelter services. On March 26, 2024, the Government committed permanent funding to this service.

2021 City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards - Background

On March 15, 2021, Council passed the following motions:

That Administration look at options to mitigate emergency shelter impacts on communities and provide better service to clients, including the development of minimum emergency shelter standards and operating requirements that can be expected of shelter operators, including orienting service to best support transitions into housing in order to better support clients and communities, and an analysis or options to deal with people who are evicted, or banned from shelters, and provide a report back.

That the report makes recommendations for policy tools and/or municipal bylaw regulatory authorities and the actions the City may take to ensure these standards are met, including but not limited to licensing and conditions and suspensions of licences.

In response to this motion, Administration partnered with Homeward Trust to engage a consultant to research homeless encampments in Edmonton, identify the root causes behind their growth and identify options for reducing them (May 8, 2019 Community and Public Services report CR6674). The researchers found that there was a relationship between the conditions of available emergency shelter and the incidence of unsheltered homelessness, and the way in which shelter was provided can create barriers to access for people experiencing homelessness and undermine efforts to connect them to housing.

This work, along with jurisdictional best-practices research, contributed to a set of recommendations for addressing unsheltered homelessness, which included the creation of the City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards,

adopted by Council on August 30, 2021 (Community and Public Services report CS00506). The report found that the shelter standards could be regulated through the City's business licencing or permitting processes; however, limitations were identified in adopting these approaches and Administration ultimately did not recommend this approach.

Jurisdictional Scan and Literature Review

The jurisdictional scan followed two streams. One stream scanned for the presence or absence of municipal shelter standards in different Canadian municipalities. The other scanned for shelter trends, emerging best practices, and changes in shelter ecosystems.

Municipalities with shelter standards are concentrated in Ontario where they have legislated authority over shelters. Meanwhile, in the West, it is less common for municipalities to have their own distinct standard as shelters are funded and standardized by their provincial governments.

Where shelter standards are in effect, the funding body (generally the provincial government or in Ontario the municipality) sets the standards and outlines the required alignment to the shelter standards in individual funding agreements with emergency shelters.

The literature review also followed two streams. One stream focused on shelter best practices since 2021 and the other focused on research and trends relating to the size and location of shelters. The literature review found a number of frameworks, guides, and projects relating to shelter infrastructure (like site criteria or building guidelines) and services (like operating requirements and program guidelines). Sources collected in the literature review have been cited in the updated Best Practices Guidelines.

| Jurisdictional Scan - Presence or Absence of Shelter Standards and Trends | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| Jurisdiction - Province | Shelter Standards (Yes/No) | Details |
| British Columbia | Yes | The Government of British Columbia maintains the Emergency Shelter Program Framework (2018) ⁴ and BC Housing Shelter Design Guidelines (2017) ⁵ . |
| Alberta | No | The Government of Alberta administers funding agreements to shelter operators across the province. All funded shelters in Alberta are required to adhere to the Homeless Shelter Accommodation Expectations, which is attached to funding agreements. The Shelter Accommodations Expectations Document was updated in 2024, however this document is not available publicly. |
| Saskatchewan | No | The Saskatchewan Provincial Approach to Homelessness (2023) ⁶ , outlines the Saskatchewan Government's investments in shelter operations. The Approach also outlines the establishment of Complex Needs Shelters, which provide a secure and medically supervised place to go for up to 24 hours for individuals who are intoxicated and exhibiting behaviours that present a danger to themselves or the public. |
| Manitoba | Yes | The Government of Manitoba has Emergency Homeless Shelter Standards ⁷ , but it does not appear that they have been updated since 2009. |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | Yes | The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, in partnership with OrgCode Consulting, developed new Standards for Serving People Experiencing Homelessness in Shelters ⁸ in July of 2024. |

⁴ <https://www.bchousing.org/publications/Emergency-Shelter-Program-Framework.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bchousing.org/publications/Shelter-Design-Guidelines.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/-/media/news-release-backgrounders/2023/oct/path-back-grounder.pdf>

⁷ https://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/hah/docs/homeless/2009-emergency-shelter-standards.pdf

⁸ <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/files/2024/07/NL-Shelter-Standards-July-2024.pdf>

Attachment 1

| Jurisdiction - Municipality | Shelter Standards (Yes/No) | Details |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Calgary | No | <p>The Calgary Drop-In Centre, Calgary's largest emergency shelter, in collaboration with OrgCode, recently released the Person-Centred and Trauma-Informed Considerations in Housing Focused Shelter report (2023)⁹.</p> <p>The City of Calgary maintains a Planning Principles for the Location of Care Facilities and Shelters (2011)¹⁰ document.</p> |
| Saskatoon | No | <p>The City of Saskatoon established emergency shelter site criteria (2023)¹¹ after the provincial government asked the City to find land for two shelters.</p> |
| Winnipeg | Somewhat | <p>The City of Winnipeg released Guidelines for Buildings used for Temporary Overnight Shelters (2022)¹².</p> <p>End Homelessness Winnipeg also prepared an Emergency Response Manual¹³ in 2022 which included recommendations for staff (including shelter staff) to be trained in how to identify and respond to the signs of heat-related illness.</p> |
| Toronto | Yes | <p>The City of Toronto, in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, authored the</p> |

⁹

<https://calgarydropin.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PERSON-CENTRED-AND-TRAUMA-INFORMED-CONSIDERATIONS-IN-A-HOUSING-FOCUSED-SHELTER-FINAL-NOV-7.pdf>

¹⁰

<https://publicaccess.calgary.ca/lldm01/livelink.exe?func=ccpa.general&msgid=XTTrqKyrKeP&msgAction=Download>

¹¹

<https://www.saskatoon.ca/services-residents/fire-emergency/education-awareness/lifefire-safety-education/shelter-spaces>

¹²

<https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/ppd/Documents/InfoCentre/InformationBulletins/2022/2022-012-BEFZ.pdf>

¹³

<https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/202206-Homelessness-Emergency-Response-Plan.pdf>

Attachment 1

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| | | <p>Shelter Safety Action Plan¹⁴.</p> <p>The City of Toronto publishes the Toronto Shelter Standards¹⁵ (Last revised in 2022).</p> |
| Ottawa | Yes | <p>The City of Ottawa developed the Ottawa Shelter Standards¹⁶ which were first released in 2005, and released again in 2022. The Standards will be updated every five years.</p> |
| County of Simcoe | Yes | <p>The County of Simcoe publishes the Homelessness Service Standards: Emergency Shelter¹⁷ in 2023. The Standard contains guiding principles, detailed operating standards, and training competencies.</p> |
| Region of Waterloo | Somewhat | <p>The Region of Waterloo publishes the Emergency Shelter Program Framework¹⁸ which includes specific direction for shelter policies (2023).</p> |

¹⁴ <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/shelter-safety-study>

¹⁵

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/9828-Toronto-Shelter-Standards230328AODA.pdf>

¹⁶ https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/oess_en_aoda.pdf

¹⁷

<https://simcoe.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/FINAL-Emergency-Shelter-Standards-October-2023.pdf>

¹⁸

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/Housing/Region-of-Waterloo-Emergency-Shelter-Program-Framework-March-2017-access.pdf>