



January 17, 2023

Budget Committee

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen St. W, 10th floor, West Tower
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Via electronic mail: buc@toronto.ca

Dear members of the Budget Committee,

Casey House appreciates the opportunity to comment on the City of Toronto's 2023 Budget.

As a specialty hospital in Ward 13 that provides care for people living with and at risk of HIV, Casey House serves clients who face multiple barriers to having their basic needs met. We build relationships through our harm reduction approach, and in 2021, Casey House became the first hospital in Ontario to provide supervised consumption services (SCS) on-site, which now includes an indoor space for supervised inhalation substance use. Our hospital is committed to understanding our clients' health concerns in the broader context of their lives – including their housing and income situations, which continue to be areas of high need.

With the continuing drug poisoning crisis, housing crisis, and rising cost of living, the need to address the social factors that determine health and well-being is beyond urgent. While progress has been made, there is much more work to do to – particularly to support the **estimated 18,000 people experiencing homelessness** in our city, while they continue to wait for more safe, affordable, and supportive housing.

We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the city's financial position, and appreciate the current budgetary constraints as well as the need for action by other orders of government. However, for people in highest socio-economic need the current state of front-line services is insufficient, and merely maintaining them is not enough. **As a hospital, we encourage you to consider the following:**

1. Increase and improve access to emergency shelter spaces and homelessness services, including 24-hour drop-in spaces, respite sites, warming centres during winter months, and fixed-site cooling centres during summer months

Casey House strongly urges the City of Toronto to prioritize resources in the 2023 Budget for *Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA)* to increase and improve access to the following:

- Emergency shelter spaces, including non-congregate spaces, with citywide locations that enable people to remain geographically close to their support systems and networks
- Low-barrier 24-hour drop-in spaces, respite sites, warming centres during winter months, and fixed-site cooling centres during summer months
- Storage services for personal belongings, including medications and critical documentation

It is well known that chronic homelessness has long been at a crisis point in Toronto. While the city continues to work towards the long-term, sustainable solution of safe, affordable, and supportive housing, enhanced support for people experiencing homelessness is still essential.

The constant **lack of emergency shelter spaces** affects the ability of hospitals like Casey House to safely discharge unhoused patients so they can manage their health beyond their stay. As one long-time Casey House nurse expressed, *“We call Central Intake, and no beds are available...I’ve never seen it worse.”* While our nurses, social workers and physicians make every effort to find a safe place for our clients to land, the whole situation is unsustainable. It negatively impacts people’s health and well-being, which is worsened by inclement weather, and could increase visits to emergency rooms.

For people experiencing homelessness, the absence of a safe, stable place to sleep and access to the necessities of life makes it difficult to attain stability and adhere to a daily routine. As a result, complex physical and mental health challenges are exacerbated and have a cumulative impact: chronic physical pain can intensify, emotions may become less regulated, and medication routines are easily disrupted – all of which can also make it difficult for people to have the wherewithal to access available care and services.

In addition, the **lack of storage spaces for personal belongings** can lead one’s medications and critical documentation, including health cards, to be misplaced or stolen. This can negatively impact people’s adherence to treatment plans, which subsequently exacerbates chronic illnesses, and hinder their ability to attend to follow-up support – all of which disrupts the continuum of care.

2. Increase and improve access to income tax clinics and identification (ID) clinics to enable more people to apply for long-term housing opportunities and income support programs

Casey House is pleased that the *Toronto Public Library* is proposing a new *Social Service Team (SST)*, to support people in spaces where they already gather and feel welcome. We encourage the SST to include as part of its offerings income tax clinics and identification (ID) clinics, to equip people living in poverty to apply for long-term housing and income support programs.

For people living in poverty, their situation is further aggravated by **obstacles to obtaining, or replacing, important personal documentation** that is required to apply for housing that the city is determinedly working to build, as well as income support programs provided by all levels of government. Our social workers see these roadblocks far too often: *“getting ID is a nightmare for people”* because of the limited services available, and *“it can be difficult for people without housing to get their taxes done regularly”*.

Many community organizations step up and join forces to help fill these gaps in service; for instance, at Casey House we opened a weekly tax clinic as part of our outpatient services. In the clinic’s first six months, we supported 30 clients to file tax returns, which enabled them to: access housing supports; have their community housing rent reduced; and/or apply for income support benefits. Despite these positive results, the need for tax filing services – as well as ID clinics – is far greater than the capacity of any one community organization.

Casey House strongly encourages the Budget Committee to meaningfully consider these lived realities when making its final recommendations to the Mayor. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these items further and look forward to the final 2023 Budget.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Joanne Simons.

Joanne Simons
Chief Executive Officer