



2012 City of Toronto Budget: Analysis

Cuts to Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Issue:

- City of Toronto 2012 Budget¹ outlines a proposal to close three City operated shelters: Birchmount Residence, Downsview Dells and Bellwoods House. Their closure would represent the elimination of 97 beds from the shelter system in the city.
 - Birchmount Residence²: Provides a home for men over the age of 55. There are 23 bedrooms and the Residence can house up to 60 men. Residents are offered nursing, counselling and mental health services.
 - Downsview Dells³: Provides a home for 30 men who have stopped using alcohol and drugs. The men attend a treatment program at Humber River Regional Hospital. Staff assist the men explore future opportunities and develop personal goals. Clients from Seaton House can go to Downsview Dells when space becomes available.
 - Bellwoods House⁴: A flexible, respectful long-term shelter for women over the age of 50 who are long-term shelter users and who have a history of mental illness. Staff on-site work with each woman to help her set goals and deal with challenges. Clients come from Women's Residence shelter

Facts:

- Shelter and housing are key determinants of health, as “housing is a crucial nexus for the operation of a wide range of socio-economic factors that fundamentally shape the character of everyday life for people across the socio-economic spectrum, including people from vulnerable subgroups.”⁵ Homeless men and women have far worse health than others. They are 5 times as likely to have heart disease, 4 times as likely to have cancer, 3 times as likely to have arthritis and twice as likely to have diabetes⁶. They are also at greater risk of death than the general population⁷.
- Substance abuse treatment programs – such as those accessed by men living at Downsview Dells – can be an important part of addressing homelessness⁸.
- Stable housing is often essential before addressing chronic mental illness⁹, which is more common in the homeless.

Analysis:

- Impact on older men and women who are homeless: Without these unique supportive housing programs, these men and women will likely have worse health, have worse control of their chronic illnesses, and be at greater risk of death.
- Impact on the health care system: Losing the 60 beds at Birchmount and the 27 beds at Downsview is expected to have a direct impact on Seaton House, the source of most referrals to these shelters. This will increase occupancy at Seaton House. This in turn may delay transfers from hospitals who often discharge homeless patients back to this shelter.
- Impact on homeless men who are getting treatment for substance abuse: It is expected that fewer homeless men will be successful in completing substance use treatment programs. This will likely put more pressure on existing already limited substance use treatment programs, and more people are expected to use emergency rooms for the acute stages of alcohol and drug withdrawal.

HPAP calls on Toronto City Council to make the healthy choice and stop the cuts to vital community programs!

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- ¹ <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/bu/bgrd/backgroundfile-42560.pdf>
 - ² <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/sock/birchmount.htm>
 - ³ <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/sock/downsview.htm>
 - ⁴ <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/sock/bellwoods.htm>
 - ⁵ Dunn JR et al. (2006) Housing as a Socio-Economic Determinant of Health. CJPH.
 - ⁶ Khandor, E. and Mason, K. (2007) Street Health Report
 - ⁷ Cheung AM, Hwang SW. (2004) CMAJ; 170: 1243-7. Hwang SW. JAMA 2000; 283: 2152-7.
 - ⁸ Frankish CJ, Hwang SW, Quantz D. Homelessness and health in Canada. CJPH 2005; 96: S23-S29.
 - ⁹ Tsemberis S et al. Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals With a Dual Diagnosis. Am J Public Health. 2004;94:651–656