



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 21, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards (HSC23007) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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COUNCIL DIRECTION

N/A

INFORMATION

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the update to Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards (Appendix "A"). Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards ("the Standards") highlight the City's and emergency shelter operators' commitment to best practice and to ensure high quality and standardized expectations of care across the system of emergency shelter providers. The Standards is also a public document for people who access emergency shelters, their supports, and the community that provide clarity on the roles, rights and responsibilities of shelter users and shelter providers within the emergency shelter system.

Background

In 2008, the Hamilton Emergency Shelter Standards were designed to provide a transparent framework of consistent shelter services for all individuals accessing men's serving emergency shelters in Hamilton. In 2023, the revised Standards builds on its foundation to provide a more comprehensive breadth and depth of minimum operating, service-delivery, and facility standards, as well as expands to include all emergency

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shelters. Appendix "B" illustrates the improvements from the original version to the 2023 version.

This updated document was developed in partnership with Hamilton's emergency shelter operators, Indigenous community organizations, wider community consultation, research, and best practices from the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network and other jurisdictions across Canada and adapted to a local Hamilton context. This document serves as a tool to support quality, consistency, and transparency in the provision of emergency shelter services in Hamilton.

The Standards apply to emergency shelter operators within the homeless-serving sector in Hamilton. Other services such as Violence Against Women, short-term/transitional housing, drop-in programs, and supportive housing programs are all essential components of addressing homelessness; however, these services have their own distinct service delivery requirements.

The Standards are intended to set a baseline of rights and responsibilities as well as minimum expectations of quality across all emergency shelters, which means emergency shelter operators may have their own policies and procedures in addition to the expectations laid out in the Standards which act as a baseline. The Standards are also not intended to be exhaustive as our homeless-serving sector works from a continuous quality improvement perspective to adapt to changing circumstances, demands, and challenges. For issues not covered within the Standards, it is expected that emergency shelter operators will exercise reasonable judgment and/or consult with City staff where necessary. In addition, some shelters are accredited and as such will have standards that they must meet through the accreditation body.

As part of the emergency shelter systems commitment to continuous improvement, the Standards will be reviewed and updated no less than every four years in order to reflect and adapt to evolving research and the needs of people within the city of Hamilton. The City of Hamilton, emergency shelter operators, and Indigenous leaders are committed to reconvening as needed to adapt to changing circumstances between the four-year review point.

The successful ongoing implementation of the Hamilton Emergency Shelter Standards depends on a reciprocal process between the City, emergency shelter operators, and Indigenous community partners. Collaboration to support a coordinated system is essential for improving service integration and effectiveness.

Consultation for Updating Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards

The Standards were written in collaboration with the community. The City sketched out an initial rough draft of the Standards based on Hamilton's 2008 Standards, a

jurisdictional scan of the standards from other municipalities, and best practice documents. Based on this rough draft, the City initiated two parallel consultation processes. A working group made up of emergency shelter operators and Indigenous representatives formed and met weekly to write the Standards. Also, a consultation group was formed between the City and Keeping 6 peer workers to engage people with living experience. People accessing each of the City funded emergency shelters plus three drop-ins were engaged in open-ended small group discussions about the Standards, and what was important to them. Appendix "C" summarizes the expertise shared from people with living experience. The expertise of these two groups, emergency shelter operators and people with living experience, are foundational to the Standards. A first draft was completed and brought to several community groups with expertise related to specific standards. The suggested edits were brought back to the shelter operators' steering committee to draft a final version of the Standards. See Appendix "D" for a summary of the City's consultation efforts.

The expertise of people with living experience is invaluable to shaping programs, facilities, and policies in the emergency shelter sector. Positive client outcomes are a critical accountability measure, but more than that, people with living experience know how the system works, they know what their needs are, and experience the system at work every day. They can bring to light perspectives that may be unknown or unknowable at the staff or senior leadership level. Their expertise can and should have a foundational impact on policy formation, and this is being recognized more and more in policy and research settings. Throughout the process of writing the Standards, City staff brought forward feedback from people with living experience and integrated responses from people with living experience into the updated Standards. Many sections of the Standards were expanded on in ways that reflect suggestions from participants or attempts to address gaps identified by people with living experience.

Next Steps

The City intends to return to stakeholders including people with living experience to show how their expertise was used in updating the Standards. The City will also hold an informational community event to roll out the Standards and celebrate the milestone. Each shelter is committed to implementing the Standards as part of their ongoing work. New and ongoing staff will comply with the expectations set out in the Standards and will work collaboratively with the City and each other to establish training and business practices in the coming year. The Standards will be a part of each shelter's contract with the City and is intended to be a living document that is updated in no more than 4 years. Related to this process is the Client Complaints Process (see Report HSC23053) which guides clients through the complaints process if they feel the shelters are not meeting the expectations established in the Standards.

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APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report HSC23007: Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards

Appendix "B" to Report HSC23007: Summary of Improvements Between 2008 and 2023 Shelter Standards

Appendix "C" to Report HSC23007: People with Living Experience Consultation for Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards

Appendix "D" to Report HSC23007: Consultation for Updating Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards