

#MakingCentsTO

Housing and Homelessness

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Kristyn: Right. Thank you very much everyone. Welcome to our series discussion around Making Cents. This is a discussion that we've actually set forth with the City of Toronto but also with notable panel discussions. We are trying to do everything we can to bring forward the issues that the City of Toronto will be facing during the budget process. I know that many of you are just as interested in understanding what the recent budget announcements have been about and, of course, the City is facing historic challenges this year. As we head into the 20/21 budget process, we know that we're going to start that fiscal year with a very large deficit sitting in the quantum of \$1.5billion.

Before I introduce my panelists, I'd like to start by providing a land acknowledgement and also to set forth this discussion in a way that will allow us to ground ourselves. To take a look at who we are and where we are and then to understand how can we, each and every single one of us, participate in this discussion and some of the challenges in advance. But also recognizing that we can also be part of the solutions. The land acknowledgement I would like to offer – and I apologise because you may hear my child in the background and that is real life these days when it comes to online virtual meetings.

But I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Indigenous people of all lands that we are on, is it belongs to the indigenous people and while we meet today on a virtual platform, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the land which we each call home. We do this to reconfirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and improving our own understanding of local indigenous people and their cultures. From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and see the territory of all Inuit, Métis and First Nations people that will call this place their home.

Please take a moment and reflect upon how each and every single one of us can acknowledge the harms and mistakes in the past but also recognize that that work does not necessarily sit exclusively in the history; we know that this work has to continue in the present day and in the days ahead and in the years ahead and in the seven generations ahead as we move forward as Canadians in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration. So thank you very much. And, of course, land acknowledgements are how we now open all our meetings at the City of Toronto and I think it's becoming a very good place for us to start with the conversation by centering ourselves in those discussions so that we can see ourselves as

part of the context of the challenges in the past, challenges in the present, challenges in the future, but also how can we actually be also part of the solution.

We have some incredible speakers who are here with us and we want to acknowledge that each and every single one of them are extremely busy. We recognize that they are also subject matter experts and we're honoured to have them here to join us today. Today we're having a discussion around homelessness and housing and in particular, the housing crisis that is facing Canadians, the housing crisis that has ripped cities and have brought forward incredible challenges and, of course, we need to find out how do we work together to end homelessness, chronic homelessness, and to bring forth a strategy to build as much affordable housing as we can in a wide spectrum of those housing options.

I'm going to begin by just suggesting that when I introduce our panelists, if they don't mind just sort of waving so therefore we know who each one is on the screen and we can just take a moment to recognize and acknowledge that. So I'm just shifting my screen here and for those viewers who are with us, the panelists will have full bios on our website and, of course, you can find all our past recorded Making Cents budget series panel discussion online. But if you want to know more about our panelists today, you can actually visit our website and their bios are also there.

I'd like to begin by saying hello to Patti Pettigrew. She's a member of the Algonquin's of the Pickwanagen First Nation. Patti is a founder and executive director of Thunderwoman Healing Lodge Society. Thunderwoman Healing Lodge Society is a project designed to address the challenges faced by indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ women who've been negatively impacted by the Canadian Correctional system. Thank you so much Patti for taking time to join us today, we can't wait to hear from you.

We also are joined by Dr Trevor Morey. He is a family physician who works in palliative care for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. I know he's also a pretty prolific writer; he's been penning op-eds and if you haven't checked out his writing you really should. He is able to sort of tell us exactly what we need to know to understand the structural challenges that have forced people onto the street and have caused poverty and homelessness. Dr Morey is very passionate about developing healthy public policy that improves the health and wellbeing of structurally vulnerable people and he prefers the pronouns He and Him.

Kira Heinrich; Kira thank you so much. We know you very well here in our office and also in the City of Toronto. You are the executive lead of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness; an innovative, collaborative impact initiative, and the Alliance mobilises citywide collective efforts to

end chronic homelessness. Kira has been doing this work, I know personally, for decades now and she sits on a number of key advisory roles to the City of Toronto and her voice is also heard nationally on this issue.

And then finally we have Mina Fayez-Baghat. He is the Director of Program Support for the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration division at the City of Toronto. If you don't know what that division does I'll tell you they do everything related to shelter services and supports for people who are experiencing homelessness. Mina has been working there for 12 years in senior leadership in the housing sector and he continues to be an economic social development strategist for municipalities and organizations including areas such as Waterloo Regional Housing. He has worked with Toronto Community Housing and of course, we know him at the City of Toronto.

It is with some regret that I will tell you that for those who are tuned in because they wanted to hear Dr Kaitlin Schwan, so did we. We tried everything we could to bring her online with us but unfortunately Dr Schwan was not able to join us because of a technical matter. Perhaps we'll try to find a way to have her be piped in for a future discussion because we know the issue around homelessness is not going to be resolved in one day. But we were very regretful that she's not here with us at this point in time.

So let me try to set the context for this discussion and I think it's important for us to recognize where we are in the City of Toronto. So what we know is that Toronto is facing a massive homelessness crisis of historic proportions, we recognize that people are also living under threat of eviction, that the pandemic has changed everything that we know that is happening in the city with respect to economic livelihoods being wiped out. Landlords having unbearable power and control over their tenants; that continues to happen especially with a provincial government that continues to erode tenant protection and rights.

There are approximately 10 000 people who are staying in shelters, respite systems, as well as 24 hour drop-ins including those who are sleeping outdoors in encampment sites or perhaps in door wells. The safety and, of course, stability of neighbourhoods have to be taken into consideration in the context of the fact that people are structurally placed in homelessness and we recognize that homelessness is a public health crisis and we should be attracting and tracking as well as devising the solutions that actually can get to the core root of poverty and homelessness.

So, that's a lot and it would be a falsehood to say that we've got it all covered and certainly this particular discussion is critical to us at the City of Toronto because as I stated at the beginning of the conversation here,

is that we will have to adopt the budget in 2021. And our opening fiscal pressure is sitting at \$1.5 billion while we are facing a global pandemic crisis, while we are living with an opioid crisis, while we're seeing diminishing supports for mental health services, while we're living with a chronic housing crisis.

So I guess the question would be how can the City, working with the other orders of government, begin to even tackle this issue; where do we start? And I'm going to place this question directly with Patti as someone who is from North but also for someone who has been working on this issue for some time. This is not a challenge exclusively to the City of Toronto, we know that urban centres across Ontario and across Canada are facing very similar challenges and, of course, for indigenous populations those challenges can be compounded even further.

Patti: OK thank you. So I'd just like to say [foreign word] which means welcome in the Algonquin language. I have construction going on in my house right now so you might hear a bit of banging and hammers and saws. So I guess what I'll start out by saying first is I'm the founder and visionary of Thunderwoman Healing Lodge is scheduled to be built on Kingston Road near Cliffside. It's a section better known as the Section 84 Healing Lodge for indigenous women and we'll have 12 correctional beds and 12 transitional apartments once we're built. When COVID hit I couldn't help but think about the women who are being released from the institutions and especially the women who were being released and had no family to go to.

And so we started up a COVID response program basically out of a van is how we started. And what we were doing was, we go to the institutions when women are getting discharged and we were bringing to be COVID tested and then we put them up in hotel rooms. That sort of, I guess, you know petered out with the City of Toronto and we found ourselves really in a conundrum because I don't know – getting housing for these women is next to impossible. So we've just rented a five bedroomed house for women who are before the courts to get bail. We'll be housing them in the house. I don't know how else to explain this. We have the house as of November 5th but our funding will run out, of course, at the end of March and I don't know what I'm going to do to help protect these women.

You know, I mean Vanier Centre for Women, a month and a half ago, discharged an indigenous woman at 10 o'clock at night. And I don't know if you all know where Vanier is but just for any woman to be discharged at 10 o'clock at night is absurd. And when you consider the statistics for the missing and murdered indigenous women, discharging an indigenous woman at 10 o'clock at night was just unthinkable. So we've been giving housing supports, food supports. We've handed out over 400 backpacks with PPE and personal care items for people who maybe are on the street

and we're just continuing on and I'm just – I'm really worried about the women.

If we had the lodge built, you know, if everybody who should have stepped up to the plate, that's 24 women we could've protected during this pandemic. But, you know, COVID came on and it somewhat slowed things down for the build of our lodge. But I have found out that within five weeks we'll be submitting to site plan approval and hopefully we'll have this lodge built by next year. It's been a real learning experience and it's been a real struggle and our lodge will be the first of its kind in Ontario and the third across the country. And we're aiming for a zero carbon footprint. So I don't know if you know about Thunderwoman Healing Lodge but please go online and check us out. So the other piece I told you about is what we're trying to do to get our boots on the ground. That's all I have to say.

Kristyn: Patti, thank you. I think you've raised some really important points especially hearing the story about the woman who was released from a correctional service in the middle of the night in Vanier. Vanier is a neighbourhood in Ottawa and it sounds to me that she was released without a pathway to housing so meaning that perhaps there wasn't anybody to help her into own –

Patti: She was – I'm sorry to interrupt you – she was released from Vanier Centre for Women.

Kristyn: Oh I'm sorry, thank you.

Patti: Yeah, at 10 o'clock at night and she had to make her way to Toronto. Yeah, just for clarity, yeah.

Kristyn: Yeah. Now Patti so you just gave us a glaring example of system failure about how someone wasn't able to navigate the system because she was sort of left on her own. Which I think is a pretty poignant discussion point about, you know, what causes homelessness and how do people get out of it? So maybe if I could just turn to Kira and Kira, with respect to the cause of homelessness and how to give people pathways out of homelessness, your organization has been doing a lot of this work. Can you share with us some of those learnings so far?

Kira: Ok, so thank you, it's great to be here today too and thank you for sharing your story and your work with us Patti. I was thinking, as you were telling the story about, A) how it's an example of some of those system failures that has real impact on people's lives but also that the lodge, once it's you know – I understand the frustration with the delays on COVID – but once it's built is very much the solution that we advocate for which a permanent housing solution to people's homelessness and not an emergency response. So that will be a very valuable resource once it's up

and I'm sure we will learn a lot more about the model and how maybe to replicate it beyond your lodge once it's going.

So in terms of some of the learnings from our work which really is to take a systems approach to ending homelessness and we've been learning from and working with cities and communities across North America. Some larger than us, some smaller, but all practicing and trying to bring this more co-ordinated and data informed approach to ending homelessness. So it means that we are able to learn more about who is homeless, why, what are the particular circumstances both for that individual and creating a matching housing plan or an exit from homelessness plan depending on what their circumstances are. But also on a broader sense, what are the contributing factors in our own community to homelessness.

Because we need to understand our situation better in order to design a Made In Toronto system solution to ending homelessness. We do that by making sure that – and we don't have this right in the city but we are certainly much further ahead than we were a few years ago – but making sure that as – that there's this few uncoordinated access pathways into homelessness. We call it a coordinated access system. Mina and his team at SSHA have started to do some really good work there and it means that everyone who first experiences homelessness is assessed with the same tool, is given a score that allows the system to better match that person to possible housing and support services. Of course there's always a discussion there. We know from Housing First approaches that a person needs to have some agency and decision making on where the new home will be but to start with, we can provide some options that match their particular needs. And it means that we also then can track that person's experience through the system and know when they're housed and how long they will stay housed.

Because there's lots to learn about how we can ensure success for people once they do exit homelessness that'll help us again, use that data to inform the system. So in a nutshell, it's really about taking a very fragmented and disparate sense of supports in the city. I mean there's a ton of people working really hard to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness but we haven't done it in a coordinated way all using the same system and focusing on the housing rights of those solutions. That we can understand more when we have better data to do that. So I'll leave it at that. I don't know if we're doing questions and answers but there's a lot of new ways of thinking about responding to homelessness and a systems approach. The models are built for zero because we want to get to a place where we have zero chronic homelessness and be able to track the progress and demonstrate that we are learning along the way on what works.

Kristyn: Kira, thank you. I think you raised some really excellent points and oftentimes we have to ask government officials, office holders – I know I've said it – is being able to understand that baseline of where we are today meaning that we need metrics and data sets. We need to understand how many people are we talking about, what type of individual needs that they have and how do we actually tailor a solution to them. Because of course we've learned they had that one size fits all approaches is not going to resolve the matter for anyone not in a sustainable fashion.

Trevor, in your work, you are actually dealing with folks who are oftentimes already on the street. So it's not a matter of them struggling to keep the roof over their heads, they are unfortunately living with a whole host of new threats and challenges. But it also means that sometimes, once they fall through the cracks, you know, they end up staying there for a number of years if not decades. And I've actually heard – I mean I actually read in your article – that you're ascribing the medicine for homelessness is actually a prescription to housing. Can you explain that concept even further please?

Trevor: Absolutely. So just everybody, I work with an outreach team that provides [unintelligible 00:23:4] homelessness. So our group team or nurses and physicians and social workers, we work with people who are experiencing serious illness and the life expectancy of people experiencing homelessness is significantly reduced compared to the baseline of Canadians and their mortality rate is about 2 to 3 times higher than our population. So I think what becomes difficult is that you have not only a lot of serious medical issues – say if someone has a new diagnosis of cancer, lung disease, heart disease – and you're also trying to find a place to live. That provides a serious barrier to finding stable housing. And I think just as Kira was mentioning, having permanent housing rather than some emergency shelters or a system, sort of people are moving from place to place. Say, having somewhere where you can store your medication, somewhere where you can get kind of at a baseline where you're able to have a cellphone that you can answer for appointments from specialists. Especially now in COVID-19 many of the specialists are doing their appointments over the phone or video chat and many of our clients have difficulty accessing things that way.

I think that – one of the things that I appreciate about Toronto is that is the priority access to housing for people with terminal illness, I think for our clients we often are able to get people placed especially if they have a reduced life expectancy. And we on the ground are able to see what the difference is when somebody's housed or somebody who may have been moving between different shelters, between living on the street and sleeping rough and then when they find a new home in a place that they can feel comfortable. And maybe it's the first time that they have had that in their life and especially when dealing with a life limiting illness it certainly is a game changer.

And I think as somebody who prescribes medicine to help treat people's symptoms and make them comfortable especially near the end of life, I think one of the biggest things that I've seen is that when we are able to get people secure housing that that certainly makes a huge difference in both their care but also in treating their symptoms as well.

Kristyn: And Doctor, if you write this prescription – and I know it's somewhat abstract – but still, if I had a prescription from a doctor I would take it to a drugstore. And doctors who are providing medical supports and services to people who are homeless, if the prescription to ending the homelessness is a home, where does that prescription go

Trevor: That's a great question and I think that prescription right now comes to all different levels of government and I think that, you know, there are a few things that I think anyone who works with people experiencing homelessness to see and I think that is an increased supply of supportive housing and permanent housing as Kira had been mentioning. But also income supports to help people afford that housing because I think if you're living in a city like Toronto and you have a disability and your income is coming through Ontario Disability Support program, being able to afford an apartment in Toronto means that all of your money is going to rent. You don't have money for medications, you don't have money for transportation, you don't have money for food. And those are all the things that help keep us healthy as well.

And I think that if I was writing a prescription, that I think that the main things that I would like to see would be, you know, flexible approaches to permanent housing. I think everybody's story into experiencing homelessness is different and I think that, like we have been talking about, there's no one size fits all approach. I think recognizing that there's a lot of unique needs as Patti was mentioning that there are people with the experience in the correctional system, people who are indigenous, Black Canadians, people of colour; I think everybody comes to homelessness in a different way. and I think having solutions that help to get people out of homelessness in individual ways is important as well. And I think really what some tangible things would be that we can do a better job of reaching out to these folks, meeting them where they're at and kind of learning what strategies they think will be helpful to getting them out of this crisis that we're in right now.

Kristyn: Trevor, thank you. Mina, I'm just going to put you in the hot seat for a little bit just because our guests are obviously not workers with the City of Toronto and yet the crisis is, you know – for a lack of a better word or perhaps a lack of a better owner – this city is going to have to own its housing crisis. I don't think that we're going to have to rely on the provincial and federal government exclusively and, of course, we should engage them but if they don't come to the City and work with us, the

problem around homelessness and housing crisis is only going to get larger.

So Kira has spoken about the need for understanding who is homeless and being able to understand how to utilise data. Patti has so succinctly started us off sharing the frustrations and challenges that her organization has in trying to even build housing with supports for particular populations. And Trevor has just written a prescription that needs to be somehow brought to somebody who's going to fulfil that prescription. What can the City do that's not being done right now given the conversation where we are today knowing that the problem's only going to get worse.

Mina: Yeah, I mean I do agree that the City has to own housing as a service. While it's funded provincially and federally and from different orders of government, it's on us to deliver it. so to Trevor's analogy I would say we are the dispensary where that prescription would come to be filled. Really to answer your question Councillor Wong-Tam it's basically – the answer is we need a By-Name list. We need – and we're very close to having it and it's something we haven't had before but it's literally the list that – on the homelessness side it's the list that prioritises everybody who's experiencing homelessness by those measures that Kira was mentioning.

By doing that assessment and understanding the depth of need and the array of services and support one person may need in order to successfully be housed and maintain that housing. So one of the things we're doing in our budget process – and this goes kind of to the larger point of the panel – is in this year's budget that we're submitting as a part of the City of Toronto's budget, we've created three outcomes that are tied to the results or, what we call – they're tied to a process called Results based Accountability. And essentially it's a new way to measure our outcomes and really those outcomes are as plain spoken as we try to get them.

So one outcome is the experience of homelessness is very brief and non-reoccurring and in that outcome, the new matrix that we want is not only a By-Names List but a baseline to tell us how long someone's experience in homelessness is. And then how often is it reoccurring, how often are they coming, getting housing and then returning back into homelessness. And we want to lower those numbers, we want to lower the number of recidivism or reoccurring homeless experience. And then of course we want it to be are and brief meaning shorter in time. so those two are the baselines we want and having a By-Name List is we can travel and track people's experience as they get closer to housing as they secure housing and as they maintain housing.

And then on the housing side, you know, another thing we're doing is we're creating a choice based waitlist and this is a more dynamic waitlist rather a chronological wait with some provincial priorities. This one's designed to address people based on their need and their choice. So as you know, the waitlist is long and cumbersome and your life may change several times over while you're waiting for that original unit that you applied. Your household may grow, your needs may differ, your health may change. So this is a way to travel with the person as they wait and try to match them better to a housing outcome that's more relevant to their current day need not what they originally anticipated their need may be.

So I think those are the two things; a By-Name List and a more dynamic waitlist are the two ways. And, of course, that is the co-ordinated access kind of notions that we work together as a community, including the City, to try to support people in a way that prioritises them based on depth of need and by choice in appropriate types of housing.

Kristyn: Thank Mina. I mean based on what you've just said Mina; it sounds to me the system is trying to respond to the needs in the community. So let's put that to the test right now. Patti and Trevor, as what I would call direct service providers, those who are interfacing day in and day out with people who really need to get access to housing, how would you respond to what Mina has just provided us as a policy and system shift at the City of Toronto? Maybe Patti if you want to pipe in first?

Patti: You know I'm not involved outside of the indigenous community and so I pretty well just know what's going on in my community. But here's what I want to say about this; that sometimes – I'm not a bureaucrat so my mind doesn't think in those ways. And sometimes some things are just stupid. For instance – and I don't know who does this but, you know, isn't there some kind of control, some rent controls period. Like you move out of a \$1200 apartment and the landlord can just jack it right up to, you know, 18 \$2000 a month. No problem. And the barriers, like all these buildings that are going up in Toronto, it just tells me there's money somewhere here. And then we have indigenous people living in Toronto who are on the street and it's really hard to find housing.

I mean I've had to take COVID, the COVID money, and go rent a house so I can house women who are really vulnerable when they get released. And I just – I mean I moved outside of Toronto. I moved out because, you know, the rent, even for me, a working person, are off the Richter scale. So we need to address it on all levels. All levels because we're just not – I don't know who can afford those apartments. And when you are challenged economically, my god, you don't stand a chance. So I don't know if what the City is proposing is going to work; what I do know is if the City is going to deal and work with us as indigenous people, all those

assessments and all these studies, you need to be working hand in hand with indigenous organizations in the city.

To talk to us about your assessments because a lot of times people come up with assessments that just don't fit for us. They just don't fit. You know, I worked in addiction for years and there's all these new assessments and ... but they don't apply to indigenous people. And so what I would say too is – and I'm grateful to be here but I think that the indigenous people in the city from organizations should be really heavily engaged in this process. In the process of a assessments and also in the process of the money. You know, we need to have – any money that comes down the tubes needs to be with an indigenous organization that can disperse it amongst us.

You know, I'm not a genius, I don't know what will work. I know what works when I work with my people and that is getting them housed, helping to address their trauma and letting them know that they have a community here in Toronto. So I don't know how else to answer the question; I'm sorry.

Kristyn:

I think the way you answered the question is with a lot of heart and also with a lot of lived experience. I don't think any one of us will ever fully understand what it's like to do the work that you do and how you carry on day in and day out. And it's a real inspiration because, you know, the structural inequities are not something that manifests overnight; it's generations. And so I just want to say thank you for sharing what you did and I think that we should probably try to get you an answer. And maybe what we can do is – Trevor, I want to get you into this conversation again but before I do that, Mina let's just talk a little bit. If I can just ask you to respond to Patti's point because I think it's a really excellent one.

And even as you were describing the By-Name List and changing how we provide choice to people on waitlists, it just means a couple of things; one is that there has to be a choice so therefore people can say "I want three-bedroomed housing or I need this or I'm living with a disability therefore my unit needs to be accessible." But if those options aren't there, that's one thing, but Patti is also talking about discrimination and the effects of colonization when it comes to naming, collecting data about making sure that we can deliver our services in culturally competent and sensitive ways and just because I think it's important.

How would you respond to what was just placed in front of as what I see as a system challenge?

Mina:

Yeah, absolutely. I think some of the things that we see and we study across other communities that are doing well is obviously the coordinated access that's coordinated through agencies who support the individuals. So there's customized ways you can allow an assessment or deliver an

assessment or conduct an assessment with a client that is better reflective of the needs. Secondly, as well, it's not just one thing; it's a combination of many things including the assessment that does help not only tell the story but define the level of need and the depth of need.

And then there's also a third part of this is that anything we do, we do it with an equity lens meaning that we try to apply a lens to all our different communities and community members to better understand how do customise better a service delivery. And this is something we do even through a budget process but normally speaking, you know, SSHA has kind of worked on – in 2018 and 19 they come together with a document for specific – like as to the example that indigenous people documented called Meeting In the Middle. Where we've made some certain commitments to ensure that not only do we have representation and a process of creating something but also not it just being a portion of what we do but it's something that we bring to a table and have a discussion and come to a collaborative agreement when we make a decision on a service delivery specific to indigenous communities.

So I think going with that spirit of how we're trying to build better relationships and better process steps so that a coordinated access system is truly coordinated and it's not just the City doing something and applying it to all. But designing things that are not only unique but also like culturally specific to the needs of the individuals we're trying to serve and support.

Kristyn: Mina, thank you. Trevor, just coming back to you for a moment; Mina has just described and said that if there was a prescription you can bring it to him – not him exclusively – but him representing the City of Toronto and that the City has a responsibility to dispensing the medicine and the medicine to homelessness is housing. I think it's quite well known that indigenous population as well as Black and racialized communities are over represented in the populations that are homeless. And oftentimes this comes with traumatic events or perhaps structural inequities, the effects of colonization.

We know some of the social determinants of health – we're also living in a society and a place and a neighbourhood and a community that is free from discrimination, free from racism that allows people to gainfully and willingly participate in civil society. If they don't get full and equal participation they are simply going to be shut out. In your work and based and based on what you're seeing, will what has just been described as potential one system shift, the By-Name List or the reorganizing of waitlist – meaning we try to meet people where they are – is that enough of a system shift in order for you to be able to do your job which is to help people get off the street?

Trevor: I think what's tricky and I think one of the things that we've all been talking about is that having a one size fits all approach can be very challenging. And I think recognizing the nature of what brings people into homelessness or causes them to experience homeless during their lifetime is many of the factors that were mentioned. Like structural vulnerability and systemic racism and other issues within our society that lead to some of these structural problems. And I think that one of the concerns I have, especially from seeing many people who have a distrust of institutions based on histories of colonialism and racism within Canada, is that forming a By-Name List or collecting data on people certainly has links to historical issues that rightfully people will distrust.

And I think that part of what the City can be doing is doing outreach or reaching out organizations that are providing services on the ground. So right now we have an in-camp and support network, we have street health nursing agencies that are doing excellent outreach work with people experiencing homelessness and see these issues everyday. And I know that, you know, we have one issue which is a lack of supportive housing and affordable housing within the city which would be the ideal permanent solution, and then we have a bunch of Band-Aids that are, you know, [unintelligible 00:44:42] get into the cold months of the year.

And I think now we're seeing that our emergency response, our Band Aids, are starting to turn into, almost by default, permanent solutions. We have people who are staying at 24-hour drop-in centres all of the time as if they were a regular shelter. And I know that there are some colleagues that call 311 who are looking for emergency shelter for issues that are happening right now and are having trouble finding beds. So I think, you know, we have to be able to not only fill a prescription that will be preventative for the future of homelessness but also have a prescription that deals with the issues that we're facing right now as well. And I think that part of that can come from some outreach from the City to meet people where they are at in 2020, right now during the pandemic as well.

Kristyn: Trevor, thank you. I want to turn the conversation – and thank you Trevor, you raised a really important point especially around the immediate response time. For some folks, they can't wait and we know that winter is coming. Kira, in your work, and advocacy, I know you sit down at the table with three orders of government. You are an organization – you belong to an organization that has national reach from coast to coast to coast. Do you think the three orders of government are all, 1) collaboratively and working with a full on understanding of how complex the issue of homelessness is and that the prescription of housing has got to be wide range of housing? And because this is a very time sensitive matter and some of the time that's required is just the construction and better time as Patti has noted too long.

What are you seeing at the national, provincial and city level that gives you hope as well as giving you nightmares?

Kira: Oh yeah. Well, that's a huge question but I'll take it on. I have to say that it's one of the odd silver linings of COVID-19 is that we do have increasing resources at our disposal to help pivot from an emergency shelter response to a housing delivery response to homelessness. And I think we'd better take it now and run with it and make sure that we don't waste this opportunity because it will allow us to build a lot more new supportive and other deeply affordable housing stock that we didn't have before. So I'm speaking in particular of a federal program that was announced a couple weeks ago called the Rapid Housing Initiative, the billion dollars across the country for capital acquisition.

And I know that City staff worked with our organization and others to really quickly put a list together of possible assets in the city from the non-profit and supportive housing sector that could be transformed quickly to permanent housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness. So, you know, what's really been I think important as well – a bit of a segue – but important as well with COVID is that thousands of people move from crowded shelters, dormitory style shelters, into hotel rooms. And the sector itself, the folks serving people every day, have seen either what they previously felt to be true or believed in or have come to see with their own experience how much people would do in their own homes, their own units.

And there's no-one I talked to in the hundreds of organizations that make up our alliance and are on the frontlines everyday who wants to see those people go back to shelters from the hotel programs. So this federal money which the City was a big advocate for as were we in the community, will allow us to make sure that we can have permanent homes for folks when the hotel programs shut down. The other part that gives me hope in that is that we can also look at those resources to convert shelter spaces. There's a lot of shelters that may no longer be viable because we have suddenly a commitment to a different standard of space and people per each space.

And if we could take advantage of the federal resources that are there to allow us to convert some of that shelter space into housing, we'll also have more new housing that people can live in. so that gives me hope that we have that. The resources themselves aren't enough though. You know, money has been thrown at this problem for decades and we haven't sort of collectively been able to really turn the ship on it. But in the City of Toronto there was some really good work done with the community on the interim shelter task force where there was again – in my experience anyway – a real pivot towards a collective commitment to a housing solution. And taking what resources – the new ones that are available thanks to COVID – but also existing resources that are currently invested in shelter, pivoting those to housing and building new housing.

And critically Council last month did approve that all the outstanding resources to reach that thousand shelter bed standard that was put into place a couple of years ago, that we could use that money now for housing. So there's a real shift and change in how we're thinking about this from government and in the community that I think bodes very well for the future. What worries me is, I guess, where the province is right now. I think it's one thing to have an understanding of how complex homelessness is and what we need to do to solve it, another is the will or the interest or the prioritization of that goal. And I think we have some more work to do with the province.

I think there are elements that we can start with and we have a Minister who recently – Ministry of Housing Ontario did recently sign a zoning – you know was able to quickly get a zoning reorder done so we could build some modular housing. And he seemed to learn from that experience and be pleased to do so and understand that if we move quickly with modular housing and supports that we could create new permanent homes for people who are experiencing homelessness right now.

So I think – but they haven't been at the table in the same way that the federal government has been and I should say, in terms of coordinated access and By-Name List, that is now a federally mandated goal for communities in Canada that receive Reaching Home dollars. And so that is also a big shift that gives me hope. This isn't just to people thinking it's a cool idea or a good idea, it is now what we must do because the evidence is there that it works and it's the best shot we've had in a while.

So that's also hopeful. I know that the province is also looking at perhaps supporting By-Name Lists and coordinated access across Ontario. But I think our work is there with the province. And one thing – and I'll stop talking soon – but one thing that I think is really essential from assistance perspective is that as we're taking advantage of these new opportunities and our shift in thinking and our current collective commitment to move the needle, that there's also great intersectoral and interministerial coordination that needs to happen. And Mina's right, there's been no traditional historical role for municipalities in funding housing and supports.

The support dollars have largely been with the province, the capital dollars with the feds but there is an opportunity for Toronto to start to bring some of that down and control it and coordinate with the other sectors to make sure that all the supports that are available for a person that Trevor would serve, or Patti, that doesn't matter if it's a provincial rent supplement or a municipal housing benefit that we can put them together around a persona and really wrap all that they need around them which we learn from the By-Name List.

And that again, the latest round of work with the City does call from a City directed supportive housing fund that would be a historical first step for the City to actually take responsibility for developing supportive housing here to meet our needs. With the resources from other orders but being the one that is directing it. And I think that's also another hopeful place for us to be working together.

Kristyn: Kira, well said and thank you. you've given us certainly a lot to think about and that's also a place where we are going to have to take a pause on this discussion. I said at the beginning that we were never going to be able to get to all of it but certainly I think you've teed up the conversation as we head into the 20/21 budget process that 1) there are big existing challenges for all of us as residents of the City of Toronto but also as people who care about wanting to end homelessness and wanting to see right by the solution provided. That can be provided by having a wide range of affordable housing. And of course, we know that budgets are not necessarily are non-living documents, they're living documents. They actually set out for us very clearly our values and values are contained in the budget process.

So I want to thank every single one of you for taking time from your busy day. We're a little bit over the 40'clock mark but we also think this was a critically important conversation. This particular series is really about making sure that we can provide some background context to some of the important issues that citizens will be debating and councillors will be voting on as we try to manage the City's finances but also to be able to do that with a proactive solution creating lens. So therefore we find a way out that will allow people a pathway to dignity by making sure that they have the services that they need in the City of Toronto.

Whether it is recreation services for young people or making sure that we're able to adequately fund a whole host of other social agencies that perhaps have been traditionally unfunded or underfunded in the past. Making sure we fund Transit so that people can get around and build this economy and build up the city. But housing; housing is the big issue that I hear about day in and day out has become the biggest challenge and the biggest line of cost of living for everybody. And I'm glad that you were all able to give us your time and energy in helping us have a better understanding of how the needle needs to move in order for us to actually help a lot more people. And also more [unintelligible 00:57:02] so they can then help themselves.

So thank you very much everyone. Stayed tuned and we look forward to connecting with you as we get ready for our big budget town hall but until then, be safe and see you on the.

[End of recorded material 00:57:15]

City Councillor

Kristyn Wong-Tam

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