



The Honourable  
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Mayor of Edmonton

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September 7, 2022

The Honourable Jason Luan  
Minister of Community and Social Services  
224 Legislature Building  
10800 - 97 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Luan:

As you likely know, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 2,750 people currently on Homeward Trust's By Name List, approximately 1,285 individuals are currently accessing emergency shelters or sleeping rough and can reasonably be expected to require emergency shelter this winter.

These challenges are not reflected in the current allocation of resources from the provincial government to Edmonton. For example, there are 1,758 permanently funded emergency shelter spaces in Calgary, yet only 622 in Edmonton. Homeward Trust is Edmonton's Community-Based Organization (CBO) that funds homeless prevention programming, housing, triage and diversion work, yet it also receives the lowest Outreach Support Services Initiative funding level per capita among Alberta's seven cities.

In addition to ongoing concerns around shelter capacity, there are other significant pressures. Drug poisonings continue to be a crisis in Edmonton. Over the first half of 2022, drug poisoning deaths were already higher than this time last year, which itself was a record year.

These deaths are tragic and devastating. But they also place enormous pressure on the municipal emergency protective services, ambulances, hospitals and social agencies that are needed to respond to accidental drug poisonings. Your government acknowledged the impact of the ongoing mental health and addictions crisis on Alberta's communities in the Alberta Mental Health & Addictions Advisory Council 2022 report, which highlighted the important role of housing with wrap-around services in responding to homeless populations with substance use and other mental health challenges.

The lack of provincial investment in Edmonton in shelters, supportive housing, addictions treatment and recovery, trauma and mental health is presenting a significant threat to the safety and well-being of residents and visitors to Alberta's Capital City, negatively affecting downtown vibrancy and the business community. Our business and development sectors have been calling for increased investments from higher levels of government, including more supportive and affordable housing and shelter capacity, as well as increased addictions and mental health supports (from prevention to intervention). These measures are necessary to address an escalating crisis in social disorder associated with unsheltered homelessness.

Community safety and well-being is a shared responsibility. The City has been responding to these challenges, working closely with partners to address immediate pressures while also improving long-term outcomes. To address the increasing number of drug poisonings, the City's overdose protection services have been integral services that are co-located at shelters. Our City also approved \$880,000 on a one-time basis to relieve some financial pressure on Edmonton women's shelters, and we will be exploring other ways our City can incorporate the housing needs of people fleeing domestic violence. The City has also led work in creating minimum shelter standards to create better and more accessible shelters, increase uptake of available space, and help more people exit houselessness by rapidly connecting them with housing.

Social disorder is also a symptom of a lack of affordable and supportive housing options. Over the last four years, the City has invested \$132 million towards affordable housing and supportive housing. We have also approved \$4.8 million for a bridge housing transition plan, which will extend a number of bridge housing sites until December 31, 2022. Providing transitional housing is historically outside of the City of Edmonton's jurisdiction so this is yet another example of us stepping up where the Government of Alberta is not. Our City also continues to partner with and provide significant funding of \$5.2 million over four years to other community organizations and those with lived experiences to promote mental health, support harm reduction efforts, and prevent addictions and suicides in Edmonton.

Addressing all of these urgent needs should not fall to any single order of government, **I ask for your leadership in confirming your government's support for the following three key requests:**

#### Funding for Emergency Shelters

We seek your support in immediately expanding emergency shelter capacity from the existing 629 spaces, so it more closely reflects the 1,285 people currently known to be accessing shelter or sleeping rough. The urgency of this need is corroborated by Community and Social Service Ministry data, which shows that Hope Mission's Herb Jamieson shelter – Edmonton's primary men's shelter – has been over-capacity every day this month. When shelter facilities are full or crowded, people are forced to sleep rough. The City of Edmonton has also received over 6,000 encampment-related complaints this year, a 33 per cent increase from last year. The lack of appropriate day and overnight facilities is putting extreme pressure on Edmonton's public transit system, central neighbourhoods and business districts. With cold months and life-threatening weather a few short months away. Edmonton needs an emergency shelter plan that keeps all Edmontonians safe. The City of Edmonton has also seen a large increase in transit ridership and I worry if we do not provide adequate shelter spaces, we will lose the restored ridership rates and economic development in our downtown core will also suffer.

Emergency shelters can save lives, particularly in extreme weather, but they are not the solution to houselessness itself. Shelters need funding to support individuals with complex needs and to help them make connections to housing and health services. This is crucial in preventing chronic houselessness. Increased and ongoing operating funding to Edmonton's shelter operators would also support their interest in implementing the City's Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards. We also ask that you invest in the creation or continuation of more existing bridge housing units so that those spaces can be available to those seeking to transition out of houselessness.



#### Funding for Supportive (Recovery-Oriented) Housing

We seek your support – \$11 million annually of additional Outreach and Support Services Initiative grant funding – to provide immediate and ongoing funding to Homeward Trust to ensure that 453 permanent supportive housing units on track for completion in 2022 and 2023 are able to deliver required wraparound services to houseless populations with complex needs.

#### Coordinated Release Plan for Vulnerable Persons

We seek your support, as a member of Executive Council, to champion a comprehensive and integrated release plan to prevent people with complex mental health and addictions issues from being discharged into houselessness by correctional facilities and hospitals. In conversations with community members and social agencies, we have repeatedly heard about individuals being dropped off in Edmonton near shelters or agencies without a proper plan. The individual accused of murdering two members of the Chinatown community was dropped off into our city with no proper plan or supports in place. These transitions to the community from health and correctional facilities are high-risk periods, and without proper supports, there are elevated risks of adverse outcomes for the individuals and the broader community.

Thank you again for your government's commitment to addressing these complex and challenging social issues, and we look forward to celebrating your government's increased support across these initiatives.

Yours truly,



Amarjeet Sohi  
Mayor

c: The Honourable Josephine Pon, Minister of Minister of Seniors and Housing  
The Honourable Tyler Shandro, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General  
The Honourable Jason Copping, Minister of Health  
The Honourable Mike Ellis, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
The Honourable Kaycee Madu, Minister of of Labour and Immigration  
Members of Edmonton City Council  
Andre Corbould, City Manager

