



COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	December 7, 2021
SUBJECT:	Admission of Couples to Emergency Shelters Temporarily Paused (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Grace Mater General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

This update advises of some immediate changes to service for couples accessing hotel-based temporary emergency shelter spaces.

In response to increasing incidents of concern involving couples accessing hotel-based temporary emergency shelter spaces, including domestic violence, the Housing Services Division is temporarily pausing intake of couples into these emergency shelter spaces.

Today's decision, which is effective immediately, follows multiple incidents of concern raised by providers, including multiple incidents of domestic violence in hotels providing shelter in the past two weeks alone.

To ensure it can continue to accommodate people who need shelter, the City's hotel-based temporary emergency shelter will focus on increasing space for single women and ask men to access available spaces in the men's system. Couples who wish to develop joint housing plans to secure permanent housing together will be supported to do so. This existing process allows for the consideration of safety and risk assessments.

Prior to the pandemic there was not a dedicated couples shelter. Hamilton's homeless serving system began accommodating couples together within the system in 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. As a new addition in the emergency shelter system, couples had been served in hotel spaces operated by shelter partners.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

**SUBJECT: Admission of Couples to Emergency Shelters Temporarily Paused
(City Wide) - Page 2 of 2**

The City will be undertaking an evaluation to determine an appropriate model for delivery of an evidence based couples emergency shelter response that accounts for the needs of women in situations of domestic violence with aim to ensuring their safety.

The evaluation will consider advice from Indigenous partners, the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative, and the Violence Against Women sector. The current emergency shelter couples response was implemented during the pandemic and since implementation we have experienced increased issues of concern, including those of domestic violence. In addition, the evaluation will consider evidence-informed best practices including implementation of system-wide domestic violence risk assessments.

The City's hotel-based temporary emergency shelter spaces do not have the resources to adequately support couples together experiencing domestic violence, nor those experiencing acute mental health and addictions related challenges. As the City works to address the unique emergency shelter and housing needs of couples, the City will continue its advocacy to senior levels of government to address issues that do not fall within the City's authority including the provision of adequate acute mental health and addictions supports and increasing access to domestic violence supports. Effective housing solutions for individuals requires adequate resources across sectors to obtain and maintain housing.

Given the urgency of the situation, the Housing Services Division will be making an announcement via a media release and will be shared across the homeless-serving sector today.

We appreciate you may have questions about this change in service. At the December 9, 2021 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, the Housing Services Division will be presenting reports that propose a variety of short-term interventions that will both support short term emergency needs and support the transformation of the shelter system and increase shelter capacity through the winter.

Staff will speak to this issue at the meeting in context of the City's COVID-19 emergency supports and long-term transitions to a more responsive, resilient, sustainable and housing-focused homeless-serving system.

Should you require further information, please contact Edward John, Director, Housing Services at Edward.john@hamilton.ca or (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4860.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None