



NATIONAL ADVOCACY.
COMMUNITY ACTION.



January 26, 2024

Attention: Budget Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen St. W.
10th floor, West Tower
Toronto ON
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By email to: buc@toronto.ca

YWCA Toronto's 2024 City Budget Submission

YWCA Toronto is the city's largest multi-service organization serving women, girls, and gender diverse people. From Etobicoke to Scarborough, the more than 13,000 people we serve across the city depend on our services to escape gender-based violence, access safe and affordable housing and emergency shelter, and secure employment. We also work tenaciously to challenge gender and racial inequities and engage in systemic advocacy. Many of our programs are funded by the City of Toronto, a partnership that we are grateful for.

To learn more about our Association, please refer to our [2022 Annual Report](#). To access our budget deputation to the Budget Committee given on January 22, 2024, [please click here](#).

The 2024 budget makes strides to address many impacts felt by the communities we serve, including increased shelter support, freezing transit fares and a significant investment in life saving and life stabilizing services. We are particularly glad to see the monumental contribution of new and enhanced funding from the City of Toronto and support the increase in property tax to fund critical services our city needs. However, we worry there has been an oversight of a gendered analysis throughout the budget process that directly affects women, girls and gender diverse people in Toronto.

Addressing Gender-based Violence

In July 2023, City Council passed a motion declaring intimate partner violence and gender-based violence an epidemic. We were thrilled to see the motion pass unanimously, and have been thankful for continued efforts on the matter, but we are deeply concerned about the lack of funding for the issues that an epidemic-level response demands. Gender-based violence is a public health epidemic and disproportionately impacts women, girls, and gender diverse people



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in our city every day— and particularly those with intersecting identities including people with disabilities, without permanent immigrant status, who are First Nations, Inuit and Métis, Black, racialized, or newcomers. The funding and support to address this crisis is crucial, it must be holistic and cross-divisional, and the City’s budget should reflect this priority. We are happy to see the expansion of 211, the Toronto Community Crisis Service, something we have long advocated for. In particular, we would like to see the expansion consider supporting a supplemental response for gender-based violence-related calls, where callers can connect with trauma-informed assistance and referral services immediately.

Fulfilling Strategies

We have not seen any additional funding allocated to the rollout of Toronto’s Gender Equity Strategy (GES) in Budget 2024. As an organization that partnered with the City for the development of the GES, including leading several internal and external consultations, this is highly concerning. A fully funded and supported GES has the potential to deliver transformational gender equity across Toronto. Implementation and adequate funding for the City’s strategic equity initiatives is integral to ensuring their most fulsome impact. We encourage the City to continue collaboration and funding commitments for its strategic plans including the GES, Reconciliation Action Plan, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism and that all strategic initiatives work that support communities impacted by systemic inequity, across the city.

Funding the TTC

As advocates for safe and affordable transit, we support the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) fare freeze. However, service still remains a concern. While services across the city may be increasing, more crowded transit during times outside of rush hour makes travel more challenging for those with mobility devices and parents with strollers and small children.

Importantly, Budget 2024 does not present funding for the Scarborough Busway, an integral transit line connecting Scarborough to the rest of the city including for those accessing our [Employment Centre](#), [Girls Centre](#), and [Teen Mothers Program](#) – which the City funds – in Scarborough.

Further, the 2024 City Budget proposes a TTC fare freeze but does not make transit more affordable. While the Fair Pass program is intended to make transit more affordable for people within the Low-Income Measure for Toronto, any reduction in eligibility risks transit access for



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current fare pass users, the majority of whom are Ontario Works recipients and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients, and people receiving Child Care Fee Subsidy and housing supports.

We encourage the City to ensure the TTC Fair Pass continue to be available to all those within the Low-Income Measure plus 15% (\$31,455 for a single person) and an expansion of the program to ensure all those within the Low-Income Measure plus 15% are eligible for Fair Pass.ⁱ

Shelter & Housing

Recognizing the uptick in demand for shelter services in 2023, we support the increased funding for shelter beds. However, the gap between shelter service levels and unmet shelter demand is only growing and we are deeply concerned about the framing of this issue being caused by refugees and asylum seekers alone.

Shelter services, including our two Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and two emergency shelters have long been operating at maximum capacity. Our staffing needs are higher now than ever as our shelters continue to be impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks, staff burnout, and rigid funding structures. While the City funds our two emergency shelters, we do not receive enough funding to pay our shelter workers as much as city-operated shelter workers; in turn, we are losing our workers, leaving us in an ongoing staffing crisis. We encourage the investment of flexible and transparent funding for shelter services across the city and increased support for pay equity amongst providers.

As the City's largest gendered housing provider, we also see firsthand the impacts of the lack of access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing. We are concerned to see both the City's Rent Bank program and Eviction Prevention in the Community program (EPIC) being under their 2023 projected targets. Programs such as these must be adequately resourced and increased to maintain affordable housing and prevent evictions amidst a housing crisis.

While our shelters are at capacity and subsidized housing waitlists crater over 80,000, the City must reconsider its proposed 50 percent cut to the Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition Program (MURA). MURA offers an important and effective way to support affordability in private housing, another important program that must be maintained and adequately resourced help address the housing crisis.



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Responding to Community Needs

Regarding funding distribution, in the public consultations leading up to the budget, we know that [43% of survey participants](#) called for a decreased investment in policing services. Yet still, the prepared budget reflects a \$25 million increase in property tax-based funding for police services. With an anticipated diversion of emergency services through 211, and the public's calls for decreased police funding, this level of investment does not respond to communities' needs. We know that to address meaningfully the compounding issues facing our communities today, we need to see greater investment in mental health services, transit, affordable housing, and other life-saving and stabilizing community supports, not a greater police presence.

Toronto Aboriginal Service Council (TASSC) led their own pre-budget consultation processes and learned that Indigenous services was a top priority for City investment, next to affordable housing and shelter.ⁱⁱ Ensuring the budget reflects the priorities of the Indigenous communities in Toronto is an essential piece to upholding truth, justice and reconciliation efforts.

Child Care

One such funding increase needed is child care. Currently, the budget does not lay out enhancements or improvements to child care in the City. The 10-year capital plan only creates 1,600 new child care spaces—that is less than 10% of the City's target of 18,200 as committed in the Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care agreement.ⁱⁱⁱ Drastic investment is needed to meet the essential service of child care. Access to child care is a key tenet of gender equity and women's labour market participation. Families should not have to choose between raising a family or having a career.

Addressing Growing Poverty

Skyrocketing levels of poverty are disproportionately impacting women, girls and gender diverse people; gendered wage gaps, caregiving responsibilities, and other systemic barriers such as those faced when fleeing violence impact our ability to prosper. Implementing the above outlined recommendations would help address elements that perpetuate poverty in the City, but work to end poverty must be multi-faceted. Considering the availability of rental supports, income supplements, and food insecurity is critical when addressing poverty.

The level of poverty facing Torontonians today is growing exponentially and critical supports are needed urgently. Frontline organizations, such as our own, are struggling to meet the increasing



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demand for services as Torontonians navigate a housing and cost of living crisis. Community Partnership and Investment Program (CPIP) inflationary increases do not match the City Finance reports of inflation (4.2%) leaving community organizations in a precarious position. We urge the City to increase CPIP funding and provide an inflationary increase that matches the aforementioned report in order to ensure community organizations can meet the heightened demand for service we are navigating today.

1 in 10 Torontonians rely on food banks, this is up from 1 in 20 in 2022, with one in four food bank clients being children or youth.^{iv} The City must seriously consider its outlined commitments in the Poverty Reduction Strategy to address the deeply impactful effects of food insecurity and poverty. The City must consider actionable steps to address poverty and food insecurity, including adequate financial provisions to women and families so they can purchase healthy foods, and greater investments in food banks and other accessible healthy food programs.

Conclusion

We applaud the steps Council has taken to address the City's strenuous financial situation and appreciate that the process has been transparent and intentional.

We encourage the City to continue exploring new and revised revenue tools to address the substantive backlog of State of Good Repair, and to meet funding needs for essential services such as transit, gendered shelter and housing services, and child care, and address the epidemic of gender-based violence.

We know that when nonprofit service providers work hand-in-hand with the City, we can create a thriving, equitable, and just city. We will continue to advocate alongside you to see increased support from our provincial and federal governments to meet the City's critical needs, and we need your support, dedication, and commitment to equitable funding and partnership with nonprofits to enable a thriving city.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input.

For more information, please contact:

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ⁱ <https://www.ttcriders.ca/2024budgetbackground>

ⁱⁱ https://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/pre_budget_consultations

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-236633.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/research/whos-hungry-report/>