Community Voices Pave the Road to Recovery

In partnership with the City of Toronto, Social Planning Toronto supported community-led consultations on how we should recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic. This report summarizes the voices of over 1,457 people from Indigenous, equity-seeking groups, and/or vulnerable populations.

Personal Impact of COVID-19

- 70% said they felt sad, anxious, overwhelmed, or lonely
- 42% said they lost employment or income

Changes in Services Needed

- 24% accessed income supports before the pandemic but 47% identified this as an urgent priority for the next 0-6 months
- 15% accessed affordable housing before the pandemic but 36% identified this as an urgent priority
- 22% accessed mental health supports before the pandemic but 38% identified this as an urgent priority

How to Approach Recovery

- Investment in services, programs, and communities
- Improving equity so Toronto becomes a more liveable city for all its residents
- Bottom-up model of engagement with those who have lived expertise
- Intergovernmental collaboration between all three levels of government
Recommendations

1. HOUSING
   - Halt evictions and develop an eviction prevention plan for the long term
   - Apply and expand rent control
   - Provide rent relief and ban late fees for nonpayment of rent
   - Expand the supply of deeply affordable, transitional housing and shelters, with the goal of ending homelessness
   - De-commodify housing; prioritize housing for people, not for investor profits
   - Introduce more "missing middle" housing, review zoning to allow for more housing types
   - Develop more affordable, accessible, and supportive housing for seniors and people with disabilities
   - Increase supply of subsidized and co-operative housing
   - Review/revise definition of affordable housing to be based on income level

2. EMPLOYMENT
   - Offer more programs, support and entry-level positions for youth and recent graduates
   - Provide more decent work opportunities for skilled immigrants, newcomers, and other equity-seeking groups
   - Increase access to work opportunities through job banks and resources in multiple languages
   - Increase minimum wage to account for the high cost of living in Toronto
   - Provide second career opportunities for those looking to re-enter the workforce

3. MENTAL HEALTH
   - Provide more funding to expand mental health services and reduce waiting lists
   - Increase information, outreach, and publicity for mental health programs
   - Increase recreational, fitness, and outdoor opportunities as a key component to supporting positive mental health and wellbeing
   - Use a community-driven approach to service delivery that is culturally relevant and sensitive
   - Change how police intervene in mental health crises

4. INCOME SUPPORTS
   - Enhance existing programs to a liveable benefit that increases annually with inflation
   - Expand coverage of income support programs so that everyone can access them
   - Implement a universal basic income program
   - Simplify and streamline the process for applying for and receiving income supports
Civic Engagement

Enhancing the participation and inclusion of Indigenous, equity-seeking groups, and vulnerable populations in the City’s decision-making processes is key to building a better city for everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide residents consistent, ongoing involvement and direct access to City Councillors and City Hall
- Always use social media and online platforms in conjunction with other forms of consultations to ensure a variety of options
- Hold consultations in partnership with resident leaders, grassroots groups, and community organizations who have strong connections in the community
- Offer civic and political education, including updates on current, relevant issues being debated and training to support civic participation
- Provide accessibility supports including the use of plain language, translation/interpretation services, ASL interpretation, and technical and access assistance. To facilitate participation, consultations should also offer honorariums, transit support, childcare, and food
- Increase the number and diversity of City Councillors and staff
- Listen to, acknowledge, and trust people’s life stories and ideas, and then show action
- Undertake more surveys like this one, allowing less privileged residents to have a say in our city’s decision-making

TAKE ACTION AND SHARE YOUR VOICE

Deputation Webinar: Learn to influence the City’s recovery and rebuild process
Friday, October 16, 2020, 1–3pm. RSVP to: maria-saroja@socialplanningtoronto.org

Depute at the October 21 Executive Committee Meeting/Make a Written Submission
- Contact Cathrine Regan to get on the deputation list. Email exc@toronto.ca/call 416-392-4666
- Specify that you want to speak to agenda item EX17.1 - "Towards Recovery and Building a Renewed Toronto"

Other ways to take action: Write to your Councillor and the Mayor to tell them what you want to see in our city's recovery. Or organize an action with a community group, coalition, or network!

Access the complete "Community Voices Pave the Road to Recovery" report at socialplanningtoronto.org