



To the Budget Committee,

With 60% of people sleeping rough or in shelters using their services, daytime drop-ins are the most frequently-used service by people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> They are very frequently the first and only access point for health services and supplies for many unhoused and underhoused people, including thousands of menstruating-age Torontonians and people experiencing incontinence who use their services every month. Unfortunately, daytime drop-ins have told us at the Toronto Drop-in Network that they are not adequately resourced to meet the demands of these participants for menstrual and incontinence supplies.

In a survey conducted by the Toronto Drop-in Network of ten drop-ins, all of them told us that they distribute menstrual hygiene and incontinence supplies – up to 2,400 products per month. Yet, while every drop-in surveyed distributed supplies, nearly two-thirds were unable to meet people's demands. These drop-ins identified one key barrier: cost, both for participants, and for themselves.

With a single box of tampons easily costing \$8.99, hygiene products are expensive. Incontinence supplies like adult diapers are even pricier, costing upward of \$24.99 for a pack. People who use drop-in services are largely low-income, with many participants accessing social assistance through OW. We know that for a single person on OW, the basic needs allotment is just \$337 per month. This means \$337 to purchase all of your food for the month, or to buy medications. For Torontonians that are housed, we also know that 23% of tenants actively spend more than 50% of their earnings on rent.<sup>2</sup> Affordability is a crisis in Toronto, and drop-ins support those struggling to afford the cost of living. As one drop-in told us, "with limited income, people will prioritize their spending on ... any other item ahead of hygiene products." In fact, drop-ins have anecdotally told us that participants sometimes use maxi-pads as a lower-cost substitute for incontinence products. This is incredibly inadequate, undignified, and unhealthy: the health impacts of human waste in clothing include infection, as well as the transmission of diseases like hepatitis. With 37% of unhoused Torontonians aged 50 and older, and understanding that unhoused people experience incontinence at a much younger age than the general population, this is a personal and public health issue.<sup>2 3</sup>



Drop-ins themselves have limited budgets that have not matched the cost of living. Yet, 70% of the drop-ins we spoke with purchase hygiene products from their own budgets, otherwise augmenting their supplies through donations. Even then, they struggle to meet the needs of participants. When drop-ins run out of supplies, they also struggle to source more: 20% of drop-ins surveyed reported no strategy for securing more products once they ran out, either waiting for a windfall donation or else referring people to other agencies.

Because they are often unable to freely provide products to participants, drop-ins have to determine “emergency need” and employ tactics such as limiting participants to just one product. As anyone who has ever menstruated or experienced incontinence knows, not having easy access to hygiene supplies is an emergency in-itself. Drop-ins are being forced to restrict Torontonians in need because they simply do not have enough supplies to give, and the only way to mitigate this is to ensure that there is enough supply to ensure easy and dignified access to products. The City of Toronto has an opportunity to provide this in the 2022 budget as a specific allocation, and support the health of unhoused and low-income Torontonians, as well as human rights and dignity, in the process. It is a small ask, with profound and positive health implications.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 2006 Street Needs Assessment: Results and Key Findings. City of Toronto. 20 June 2006. P. 15.  
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/cms/cms060705/it023.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Street Needs Assessment: Results Reports. City of Toronto. 14 October 2021. P. 21.  
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-171729.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> University of California - San Francisco. "Homeless people suffer geriatric conditions decades early, study shows." *ScienceDaily*. ScienceDaily, 26 February 2016.  
[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/02/160226085720.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/02/160226085720.htm)