

Conditions for success aimed at ensuring the seamless integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in Montréal neighbourhoods



Positioning document

Prepared by Montréal for the public consultation held by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal

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The city and the homelessness crisis

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people experiencing homelessness has increased across Canada. In Montréal, homelessness is now considered a major crisis. The current situation is intrinsically linked to structural factors, such as rising poverty and the housing crisis. Resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness are essential to reducing homelessness, meeting the basic needs of vulnerable people and fostering their inclusion. However, the deployment of these same resources sometimes leads to issues¹ of sharing public space.

While most people agree that it's essential to offer services to people experiencing homelessness, there's little consensus on where these services should be located. The concerns of different social groups in relation to safety, integrity, peace of mind, access to public places, social assistance, and housing are often at the heart of these issues. This is a complex issue, since it involves reconciling concerns that may sometimes seem at odds with one another. So, how is it possible to address the legitimate concerns of all groups and resolve disputes when they arise?

Unable to meet the needs of the homeless and housed populations on their own, Québec's cities are asking for help from other levels of government to resolve a social and humanitarian crisis whose sources and issues go well beyond municipal jurisdiction. Constructive collaboration between stakeholders is crucial for resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness to integrate seamlessly into the neighbourhoods where they're located.² These stakeholders include governments, the health and social services network; various municipal services; community, public and

¹ Social cohabitation refers to the peaceful coexistence of people or groups who do not have the same characteristics, needs or perspectives, provided that these differences or disputes are linked to social vulnerabilities (such as homelessness, residential instability, mental health or substance abuse issues) or to the marginalization of certain groups, namely due to socio-economic status, migratory status or age.^(a) The simultaneous presence of different people in the same public space leads to different uses and different perspectives on how it should be shared, which can either cause tension or conflict or be experienced harmoniously thanks to various actions or arrangements.

² Stakeholders refer to the actors (organizations, affected or interested parties) who are affected by a situation or project and whose actions can influence that situation or project. Some stakeholders can be partners too. Partners refer to actors who contribute to the implementation of actions or projects. Homelessness partners hail mainly from the community organizations, health and social services network, and municipalities.

parapublic organizations; civil society³, as well as the private sector and the general public, including both housed people and those experiencing homelessness.

This document is a follow-up to the [general information document](#) (in French), which includes background information and details on the resources targeted by the consultation, as well as various definitions. The purpose of this document is to present Montréal's position on the conditions for the seamless integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in the city's neighbourhoods, in preparation for the public consultation led by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM) on this subject.

Please note that when the document refers to Montréal, this includes all 19 city boroughs, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

³ Civil society refers to all non-governmental, not-for-profit movements or associations whose aim is to transform policies, standards or social structures through concerted efforts. This includes, for example, neighbourhood associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, the media, religious groups, and other similar organizations. It's about the self-organization of society, outside or parallel to the institutional policy, administrative or commercial framework.

Key issues related to poverty and homelessness

1

1.1 Portrait of poverty and homelessness in Montréal

As mentioned above, Montréal has not escaped the significant increase in homelessness seen in all major Canadian cities in recent years. This phenomenon is mainly linked to structural factors, such as the rising cost of living and its impact on poverty, the shortage of affordable housing and the increase in evictions. The situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting social and economic changes.

1.1.1 A high concentration of poverty in Montréal⁴

While the island of Montréal accounts for 24% of Québec's population, it's home to 41% of those living in poverty in Québec, which in 2019 represented more than 280,000 people.^(c) According to Centraide, one in five households in Greater Montréal lacks the income to pay for housing and meet basic needs.^(d) Published in October 2024, Moisson Montréal's Hunger Count provides a better understanding of the extent of the situation.^(e) Its findings are particularly alarming: Over the past year, Montréal's food aid agencies responded to nearly a million requests each month from more than 239,000 people.

For its part, the Institut de la Statistique du Québec [Québec statistics institute] found the Montréal area to be the only place in Québec where there are more renters than there are homeowners (60% renters compared to 40% homeowners).^(f) Owning your own home is an important protective factor when it comes to residential stability, especially in the context of a severe housing shortage like the one currently facing the

4 To learn more about Montréal's vision in this matter, refer to the brief submitted in 2023 as part of the public consultation for the government action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion.^(b)

city. The census of people experiencing homelessness carried out in 2022 supports this finding:^(g) 23% of respondents cited eviction as the reason for losing their last home.

1.1.2 Homelessness and health risks

The counts carried out in Montréal in 2018 and 2022 have allowed us to estimate that the number of people experiencing visible⁵ homelessness has increased by 33% in the space of just a few years.^(g) The 4,690 visibly homeless people counted in the city in October 2022 represent close to half (47%) of all visibly homeless people in Québec. People experiencing homelessness report a higher incidence of various health problems. According to data from the latest census conducted in Montréal, nearly half of all respondents reported suffering from a medical condition, mental health disorder or substance use problem.^(h) Addiction issues also make some homeless people vulnerable to the violence associated with drug trafficking and sexual exploitation.⁽ⁱ⁾ Homeless people are also more likely to be victims of violence and to die prematurely. According to recent data from the Coroner's Office, the number of deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Québec has tripled in recent years. Since 2023, there have been 72 deaths, compared with around 20 between 2019 and 2022. This is just the tip of the iceberg, as not all deaths are the subject of a coroner's inquest.^(j) The health problems reported by people experiencing homelessness may be exacerbated by the fact that they have little access to the healthcare system. This is particularly true for people who sleep outdoors, for whom there are more health problems compared to those who use shelters or housing services.^(k) Studies show that the life expectancy of people who sleep outdoors is 10 to 20 years lower than that of the general population.^(k) In addition to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness, the resources dedicated to them help limit the health consequences of homelessness.

⁵ Homelessness can be visible (e.g. a person housed in a resource, a person in detention or hospitalized without a home upon release, or a person sleeping on the street, in a tent or in their car) or hidden (e.g. a person housed temporarily with others, in a hotel or motel, or a person living in overcrowded, unsafe or unsanitary housing).

1.2 Social cohabitation and urban safety

It's important to emphasize that social cohabitation is not always an issue when it comes to resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. Most of these resources have been well integrated into the urban fabric – some for several decades – and are rarely mentioned. When issues arise, they're sometimes widely publicized, which can contribute to feelings of insecurity, polarizing rhetoric, and the stigmatization of homeless people and the resources dedicated to them.

1.2.1 Feelings of insecurity and stigmatization

People in vulnerable situations have been known to occasionally commit incivilities in the public space. This can reduce the sense of security and raise the housed population's fear of people experiencing homelessness. Among the fears and issues most often reported by residents who live near a resource dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, or those who fear the arrival of such a resource in their neighbourhood, are the following:

- Aggressive, intimidating or disorderly behaviour and situations that are potentially dangerous or perceived as such.
- Drug and alcohol use, as well as extreme public intoxication.
- The sale of drugs in public places and related crime.
- Garbage, accumulated personal belongings, discarded needles and other drug use equipment and human excrement.
- Disrespect for private and commercial property (e.g. sleeping in a lobby, parking lot or garage; unauthorized use of a business's washroom or persistent solicitation of customers).
- Crowds and noise pollution.
- Fear of a decline in residential property values.

When they arise, many of the above situations stem from the lack of housing, which leads people experiencing homelessness to perform private acts in public spaces (using drugs or alcohol, sleeping, urinating, having sexual relations, etc.), appropriate a public space to store their personal belongings, and occupying public space in a different way than what's generally perceived as permissible.⁽¹⁾ Resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness are therefore essential. By offering adapted services, they help resolve social cohabitation issues, particularly in a context where the availability and accessibility of housing are major challenges.

1.2.2 Recourse in connection with social cohabitation issues

Issues related to the sharing of public spaces can lead people to seek recourse to resolve them. Community organizations offering resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness are often the first to respond when problems arise near their facilities. Some organizations have put in place mechanisms such as a dedicated telephone line or e-mail address where staff can respond to people's concerns. Residents can also report issues by calling 311. The files are then assigned to the municipal department best able to resolve them. For example, in the case of unsanitary conditions, the complaint would be forwarded to Public Works. Reports concerning social cohabitation are forwarded to the social development teams. Follow-up is carried out by the borough, the Mobile mediation and social intervention team (ÉMMIS), the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) or, in some cases, a community organization.

When a person believes they have been wronged by the city's decisions or actions, they may also have recourse to the [Ombudsman de Montréal](#). This independent office can investigate the situation that is the subject of a citizen's complaint and assess whether, in its opinion, there was any resulting harm to the citizen. If necessary, the city will take measures to rectify the situation.

Although all these recourses are available to the general public, homeless people rarely make use of them. The data from these different sources therefore only gives us a partial view of the issues actually experienced. In addition, complaints made to the SPVM about homeless people increase their risk of being brought before the courts, which can complicate their potential reintegration.

1.3 Homelessness: a shared responsibility

The fight against homelessness is first and foremost the responsibility of the Québec government, which is also responsible for delivering health care and social services to the public, as well as for community action. In fact, it adopted the [Politique nationale de lutte à l'itinérance](#) (in French), which aims to provide Québec with a comprehensive, coherent and sustainable strategy to prevent and combat homelessness.^(m) It reflects the government's determination to act on the social, structural and individual dimensions of this phenomenon. Moreover, under the leadership of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and in collaboration with several other ministries and government agencies, the Québec government is rolling out an action plan, namely the [Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance](#) (in French), which focuses on three major themes: prevention, support and intersectorality.⁽ⁿ⁾ As part of this action plan, the Québec government provides funding to community organizations that manage resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, and the federal government contributes through Canada's homelessness strategy, Reaching Home.

By virtue of its role as a major city and local government, Montréal is on the front lines for all citizens in the jurisdictions conferred upon it by the province in various laws, including the Charter of Ville de Montréal, metropolis of Québec (CQLR, c. C-11.4),^(q) the Municipal Powers Act (CQLR, c. C-47)^(r) and the Act respecting land use planning and development (CQLR, c. A-19).^(s) These powers include occupancy of public property, disturbances, land use and urban planning, the environment, and safety, as well as authority over certain assistance and subsidy programs. The city therefore has limited powers to act on the phenomenon of homelessness, and no funds to directly support the mission of organizations offering services dedicated to people experiencing homelessness.

Nevertheless, the city supports a number of community organizations working in the field of homelessness, namely through its Homelessness and inclusive communities 2023-2025 (in French) program, which provides support for cohabitation and social inclusion projects.^(o) Several boroughs also have resources dedicated to homelessness. However, the Québec government generally provides the bulk of funding for organizations under various budget envelopes, including the Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires (PSOC) and support programs arising from the Plan concerté montréalais en itinérance (PCMI) 2021-2026 (in French).^(p) Private and philanthropic funding is also an important source of financial support for community organizations.

Until the mid-2010s, resources for people experiencing homelessness in Montréal were mainly located downtown. Since 2015, there has been some decentralization of services to better meet needs in different neighbourhoods. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major turning point for the city in terms of homelessness. In fact, given the extent of the health situation and the threat it posed to the public, a local state of emergency was declared in Montréal under the Civil Protection Act (CPA). This gave the city exceptional powers that it wouldn't otherwise possess. These powers made it possible to requisition hotels and award contracts to provide emergency accommodations and services for people experiencing homelessness. So, in collaboration with health and social services workers and community organizations, Montréal set up several emergency food distribution sites, mobile canteens, warming stations, a day centre, some 20 emergency shelters and over a hundred sanitary facilities. At the end of the state of emergency, the majority of temporary sites closed their doors, with the exception of a few emergency shelters, some of which now have to be relocated.

1.4 Resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness

According to projections by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec [Québec statistics institute], Montréal's population is set to increase by around 3.4% by 2050, to approximately 2,084,400 people.^(t) Faced with the assumption that the number of people in highly vulnerable situations will continue to grow as Montréal's population increases, how will the city meet the needs when resources are already insufficient? Emergency beds are full night after night, and several day centres each provide hundreds of meals a week to vulnerable people. At last count, some 800 people were sleeping outdoors, despite an increase in the number of accommodation beds from around 900 to 1,500 between 2018 and 2022.⁶ And it's widely acknowledged that the situation has deteriorated since then. And yet, despite a visible, quantified increase in homelessness, Montréal faces a number of obstacles to supporting the development of assistance resources and resolving the crisis.

1.4.1 Difficulty finding a suitable location and premises

It's increasingly difficult to find suitable premises that meet the needs of community organizations that manage resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. They must be large enough to accommodate all the people requiring the organization's support and be equipped with kitchens and sanitary facilities that comply with the relevant standards. Organizations looking for premises to set up their services sometimes must undertake major work to bring their facilities up to code. The more constraints placed on organizations, the more difficult it becomes for them to find buildings to develop their services and meet the growing needs of people in highly vulnerable situations. In most densely populated neighbourhoods, it's virtually impossible to find a suitable location that isn't close to a school, daycare centre or park.

⁶ This figure varies during the year due to winter measures, as well as the opening of temporary resources.

In some areas, there are no buildings available that would be suitable for housing a resource. According to an article published in *La Presse* on October 28, 2024^(u), 200-metre exclusion zones around schools and daycares would reduce the potential space for the establishment of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness by almost 30% across the island of Montréal, and this without taking into account the other criteria that must be considered (zoning, building availability, etc.). In some central boroughs, this reduction in available space could be as high as 60%.⁷

Community organizations are autonomous in their search for and selection of premises that meet their needs. In view of the difficulties outlined above, the city sometimes offers its support to organizations that manage resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, in particular to help them find suitable premises to offer shelter services. This support, which has grown in scope since the pandemic, is offered at the request of the organization concerned and/or the health and social services network. A number of municipal services can be called upon to assist organizations in their efforts, which may include visiting buildings, negotiating agreements, seeking financing, obtaining permits, adapting the premises, etc. The city can also help organizations ensure their chosen space complies with applicable regulations (e.g. building or fire safety standards). In certain exceptional situations, the city has made a surplus building available or acquired a building so that an organization can offer services there. The property management and planning department has carried out an exhaustive study of the buildings available to the city. In many cases, however, they're not suitable for community services such as a shelter or a day centre because they're former incinerators, pergolas, cottages, or buildings requiring major decontamination work. When the city has a building available that meets safety standards and service needs, it makes it available to organizations, as it did in the case of the former Hochelaga-Maisonneuve YMCA and Jardins Gordon in Verdun. Finally, boroughs can support community organizations and other local partners in the development and deployment of a social cohabitation plan designed to facilitate their establishment in a given neighbourhood. This plan can include a variety of measures, such as social mediation, neighbourhood meetings, urban security operations, maintenance brigades and so on. Once put in place, these measures can be adjusted on an ongoing basis according to the challenges encountered.

The city is also banking on the development of innovative projects such as modular housing, with support. The city is currently working on two pilot projects of 30 units each, including shared services such as toilet blocks, a kitchen, laundry facilities, and a

⁷ Refer to the interactive maps produced by *La Presse* for three scenarios: one at 200 metres from elementary schools and daycare centres, another at 250 metres and a third at 500 metres: <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/ou-installer-les-refuges-pour-sans-abri/2024-10-28/trois-scenarios-testes-par-la-presse.php> (in French).

storage space for individual belongings, as well as community support. These projects are scheduled for completion in 2025.

To address the homelessness crisis and the resulting social cohabitation issues, the city can act on two different but complementary fronts:

- It must continue to work with its partners, including the Québec government, to improve homelessness services in all boroughs. More specifically, the shelter capacity must be increased, including shelters adapted to special needs, and assistance services, to reduce the number of people sleeping outdoors.
- The city must step up its efforts to promote social cohabitation, personal safety and the sharing of public space.

1.5 Case studies: examples that illustrate the limits of the city's powers

It's sometimes necessary for an organization offering services dedicated to people experiencing homelessness to relocate, for a variety of reasons beyond the city's control: for example, the premises are no longer suited to the organization's needs (increase or change in service offering or clientele); the landlord is converting the building or putting it up for sale and terminating an organization's lease; the building has become obsolete and no longer meets compliance standards, i.e. it needs to be renovated or demolished. In such a case, although the city's powers are limited, it can take certain actions:

The City can:

- help in the search for or acquisition of suitable premises (technical or financial support).
- When the zoning does not allow the organization's intended use, the borough can sometimes support the organization in a process that would allow the project to be implemented under certain conditions (e.g. special construction, modification or occupancy projects or PPCMOIs).⁸

The city cannot:

- requisition a building, except where permitted by law; for example, when the requisition is carried out as part of a state of emergency (s. 57, CPA^[V]);
- force an owner to rent or sell a building to a community organization;
- directly prevent the acquisition of a building or the establishment of an organization in a sector where the urban planning bylaw authorizes the intended uses;
- require a public consultation prior to the establishment of any organization offering homelessness services in a given area.

⁸ The purpose of PPCMOIs is to allow work that doesn't comply with urban planning bylaws to be carried out. They are particularly useful when it comes to large-scale or complex projects. A PPCMOI is an exceptional measure.

Although the city is involved in assessing the needs on its territory based on the data it possesses, it doesn't determine the number or types of resources required to help people experiencing homelessness in Montréal. This is the responsibility of the Québec government, the MSSS and the health and social services network (RSSS), which are responsible for health and social services, as well as clinical approaches. Shelter and support services for people experiencing homelessness are provided by community organizations based on funding provided by the Québec government and distributed in Montréal by the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CCSMTL). Nonetheless, the city strongly encourages organizations offering services to people experiencing homelessness to develop a social cohabitation plan.

The city can:

- through social development advisors, collaborate with community partners in the development of cohabitation plans, and support cohabitation or social mediation projects through funding programs.

The city cannot:

- directly require an independent community organization funded by the Québec government to modify its service offering or clinical approach, or to carry out social cohabitation activities when there is an influx of people near a resource.

Implementation of resources for people experiencing homelessness

2

Reminder – This consultation focuses solely on issues related to social cohabitation near the following resources: emergency shelters and transitional housing services, warming stations and respite sites, day and evening centres, and temporary modular housing with support.

For resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness to integrate harmoniously into the neighbourhoods where they're located, stakeholder involvement must be maintained and strengthened by taking advantage of the different but complementary levers at their disposal. This includes governments, the health and social services network; municipal services; community, public and parapublic organizations; civil society; the private sector; and the general public. This second section presents three general principles and six courses of action based on the observations made by the city and the lessons learned to date in managing the homelessness crisis. This is a first and certainly imperfect proposal for the city's position on the conditions for success to ensure the harmonious cohabitation of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. The city wishes to present these principles and courses of action so that they can be amended, improved or repealed in light of the activities that will be held as part of the OCPM's consultation process, as well as the resulting report.

Principle 1 – Social and territorial equity

Principle 2 – Social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness

Principle 3 – The collaboration of all stakeholders

2.1 General principles

Principle 1 – Social and territorial equity

Land management must contribute to improving people’s health, well-being and sense of security, while reducing social inequalities and discrimination. The principle of social and territorial equity seeks to ensure that everyone has the same conditions of access to goods and services of collective interest, such as transport infrastructures, green spaces, health and social services, job opportunities, culture, etc. This principle also aims to correct situations marked by spatial inequity (e.g. a less developed or revitalized area), by paying greater attention to people and territories with cumulative vulnerabilities.⁹

The Land Use and Mobility Plan (PUM),^(w) slated to take effect in 2025, will guide the city’s future choices and decisions regarding the quality of living environments by establishing a vision for the development of the territory and the guiding principles that should help shape it. The PUM has legal standing and must be reflected in the urban planning regulations of the city and its boroughs. Three major principles guide the PUM’s intentions across the board: 1) ecological transition and biodiversity; 2) urban health and safety; and 3) social and territorial equity. The development of urban planning in Montréal therefore aims to offer equitable services to all citizens. To reinforce the inclusivity of collective life environments and their appropriation by all, Montréal relies on planning tools related to universal accessibility, universal design, Indigenous design, the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness and, more generally, the integration of intersectional gender-based analysis (GBA+), among others.¹⁰

Equity also means facilitating the integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness or vulnerability within all of the city’s boroughs. In fact, the lack of social and territorial equity can lead to problematic situations. Some boroughs still don’t have a day centre, emergency shelter or transitional housing service, which

⁹ Although it doesn’t target homelessness directly, the Living Environment Equity Index is an example of the implementation of the principle of social and territorial equity in Montréal:

<https://services.montreal.ca/indice-equite-milieux-vie/#10.75/45.5263/-73.6467> (in French)

¹⁰ The city uses intersectional gender-based analysis (GBA+) to capture the realities and discrimination experienced by the population. This information enables it to take measures to ensure gender equity. GBA+ makes it possible to anticipate and prevent the effects of adopting a gender-specific policy, program or service. The approach also considers other forms of discrimination, such as those based on social class, disability, age, skin colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion.

can have repercussions on neighbouring boroughs, which then take in people seeking health, food and housing services. One of the aims should be to achieve equitable distribution of services within the various boroughs to avoid overcrowding in certain resources, which could lead to an overflow into the public space.

In addition, integrating resources into neighbourhoods where a range of complementary services are offered facilitates the reintegration of the people they serve. This enables people experiencing homelessness to settle in the part of the city where they feel they can ensure their personal development, support network and socio-economic security.

- **The development of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in all boroughs is necessary to ensure social and territorial equity, as well as support for vulnerable people.**
- **The distribution of resources throughout the city's boroughs facilitates the social reintegration of people experiencing homelessness and vulnerability.**
- **Resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness must be located close to other essential services to facilitate access for the people who need them.**

Principle 2 – Social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness

When they are publicized in the media, social cohabitation issues generally raise the concerns of housed people. While these concerns must be taken into account, it's also important to consider those of homeless people themselves. In this sense, they need to be included in decisions concerning the location of resources dedicated to them.

Montréal and the CCSMTL are currently working to set up a committee of people who've experienced homelessness.¹¹

¹¹ The establishment of this committee is planned within the framework of the Plan concerté montréalais en itinérance 2021-2026.

The aim of such a committee is to enable regional homelessness governance to count on the voice of people who have lived on the streets in the planning of various homelessness projects.

It's important to increase the participation of people experiencing homelessness in the planning, management and decision-making surrounding the integration of resources dedicated to them.

Principle 3 – The collaboration of all stakeholders

Through its various communication, mediation, social cohabitation and urban safety initiatives, the city aims to create safe, inclusive environments where everyone can live, work and get around in safety. Our experience over the past few years has shown that stakeholder involvement is essential to consider the various challenges of integrating resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in neighbourhoods where none existed before. Stakeholder participation, support from other levels of government and effective coordination of the actions of each partner are essential to have a structuring impact in the fight against homelessness.

The implementation of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness requires a comprehensive communication and social cohabitation plan that defines the roles and responsibilities of all partners and includes stakeholder participation.

2.2 Courses of action

Montréal proposes six courses of action that could guide municipal commitments in the pursuit of a harmonious integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness in neighbourhoods. The aim is to enable people experiencing homelessness to access the services they need, while reducing the potential impact on safety and improving quality of life for all. The proposed courses of action are as follows:

- Collaborative resolution of cohabitation issues.
- Stronger security presence.
- A range of homelessness services.
- Community engagement and transparent communications.
- Space management around homelessness resources.
- Regular monitoring and impact assessment.

The city is already implementing and supporting a number of measures that are in line with these courses of action:

- Some measures are going well, have proven their worth and need to be strengthened and consolidated (e.g. joint SPVM-health services teams, such as the *Équipe mobile de référence et d'intervention en itinérance* [ÉMRII] or the cohabitation brigades around specific resources).
- Some initiatives are under development (e.g. the Mobile mediation and social intervention team [ÉMMIS], to be extended to all 19 boroughs).
- Finally, the city must continue to work with all its homelessness partners to improve or implement certain actions (such as communications to the public). In some cases, the city doesn't have all the competencies to act and must rely on its partners (e.g. to intervene with people presenting with mental health or addiction issues).

Course of action 1 – Collaborative resolution of cohabitation issues

The sharing of public space and cohabitation around resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness can cause tensions. The city promotes an awareness-raising and mediation approach to improve relations between people experiencing homelessness, housed people, and businesses or institutions, and to prevent the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness.

- **The mobile social mediation and intervention team (ÉMMIS)**, created in 2021, is a Montréal initiative funded by the Ministère de la Sécurité publique [public security ministry] and the city as part of a five-year pilot project. The mandate of the ÉMMIS is to provide an immediate and non-urgent municipal social response to social cohabitation issues related to the sharing of public space.¹² Thus, it isn't a long-term response team, a role that falls more appropriately to street or outreach workers in the community, or to the Centres intégrés universitaires de santé et de services sociaux (CIUSSS). The ÉMMIS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The team is currently made up of around 50 people and is deployed in 4 of the city's 19 boroughs, as well as in the metro.
- **Community building, mediation and social cohabitation projects of community organizations:** Through its funding programs, the city supports several projects aimed at improving social cohabitation. As part of these projects, some community organizations have set up teams that reach out to neighbourhoods, businesses and other local players (schools, daycares, organizations, etc.) in an attempt to resolve recurring conflict situations in public spaces and raise awareness of issues specific to homelessness. Their actions can also include working with the people they serve.
- **Intersectoral collaboration:** Partnership work is essential to identifying and supporting people in dire straits. Resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness often work with the health and social services network, the SPVM and the city to address issues of social cohabitation or access to services, and to plan priority actions. To be effective, intersectoral collaboration requires the active involvement of all partners. Within the boroughs, local social cohabitation and homelessness committees are ideal forums for sharing information and coordinating actions on the ground.

¹² The ÉMMIS does not only intervene on issues related to homelessness.

Prospects for improvement

- Improve the coordination of teams working on the ground to improve social cohabitation, strengthen the sense of security and reduce problems around resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. It's always a challenge to organize municipal, community and health and social services interventions, which operate differently and each have their own limitations.
- Further the deployment of the ÉMMIS to cover more boroughs. Eventually, it will be deployed in all 19 of them, and a call centre will be made available to the public. The ÉMMIS works in concert with its partners and complements the ecosystem of the area in which it is deployed.
- Implement innovative approaches for better collaboration between organizations. For example, the rapid integrated action for vulnerable persons (ARIV) mechanism, based on risk analysis, is currently being developed in Montréal. Inspired by a hundred similar mechanisms elsewhere in Canada, this collaborative model promotes the exchange of information between organizations to better support vulnerable people in the public space.

Course of action 2 – Stronger security presence

Urban security takes many forms and requires the coordinated commitment of a variety of partners. Resources dedicated to the homeless alone cannot ensure safety in the public spaces (parks, public squares, streets and alleys) of a neighbourhood. What's more, vulnerable people may need help in the public space but not use the resources available, such as health services or homelessness organizations.

In collaboration with a number of partners, the SPVM aims to ensure a safe living environment for all by preventing disorder or uncivil behaviour that affects the quality of life in the city. The SPVM is in a position to implement visibility and police presence strategies based on the full range of local problems experienced by the citizens of Montréal's various neighbourhoods. The SPVM wants to build positive and meaningful relationships with the community by engaging in regular interactions and participating in neighbourhood life to establish open communication and better understand citizens'

concerns. The SPVM recommends that each neighbourhood station have an action plan adapted to the realities of its area and the concerns of its residents.

Prospects for improvement

The SPVM is a nimble organization that constantly monitors best practices regarding emerging social issues. In terms of social cohabitation, the prospects for continuous improvement depend on, among other things, the ability to mobilize the various stakeholders with a role to play in these issues.

Course of action 3 – A range of homelessness services

The resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness offer first and foremost a response to the basic needs of people in vulnerable situations: respite, rest, food services, sanitary facilities, shelter and listening. Support services have a major impact on the inclusion of vulnerable people, as well as on their interactions with the neighbourhood. They include activities that enable people experiencing homelessness to have positive experiences, socialize, accomplish themselves, participate in the community, or find housing or employment. These activities encourage people experiencing homelessness to stay on the path to reintegration. They also help to prevent their criminalization and limit potentially disruptive behaviour in public spaces. Green and clean-up brigades, alternative work paid by the day (TAPAJ), and leisure or socio-professional integration activities and outings are just a few concrete examples. These programs are funded by a variety of sources, including government departments, the city and philanthropic organizations.¹³ The city's prospects for improvement in this area are limited, since health and social services aren't municipal responsibilities. So, while the city supports various initiatives, it can't demand specific measures from its partners in the health and social services and community-based sectors.

¹³ See Appendix 1 for more information on the Service de la diversité et de l'inclusion sociale's funding programs, as well as the programs offered at the Municipal Court, which can also be levers for social reintegration.

Prospects for improvement

- Work with other funders to identify ways of increasing and sustaining funding for social inclusion and support projects.
- Reduce the administrative burden on non-profit organizations (NPOs).
- Set up communities of practice to facilitate the exchange of expertise in homelessness.

Course of action 4 – Community involvement and transparent communications

Community involvement is crucial to the successful integration of a resource dedicated to people experiencing homelessness into a community. People living near a resource need to be informed, able to contribute to its successful implementation, and able to count on services that promote their sense of security and peace of mind. Several awareness-raising and communication initiatives can be deployed, depending on needs and situations. They can take the following forms:

- Raising neighbourhood awareness of homelessness issues, the sharing of public space and the realities of homelessness.
- Raising awareness of homeless people and including them in responses to social cohabitation issues.
- Good neighbour committees to discuss issues as they arise and explore solutions that can be implemented quickly.
- Citizens' meetings to discuss local issues and present local action plans on a variety of topics, including urban safety and social cohabitation.
- Open-house or thematic activities, exploratory walks, information booths and meetings that bring residents, businesses, organizations, the city and other

players together to present projects, answer questions and discuss avenues for improvement.

- Invitations to the housed population to become volunteers at resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness and to get involved in inclusion solutions.

The City of Toronto, in collaboration with local support resources, has implemented a community engagement approach that has proven effective in changing public perception and creating a welcoming environment for all.^(x) This includes a range of public dialogue initiatives, communication tools, facilitators, and a willingness to work collectively to resolve any problems that arise.

Prospects for improvement

- Plan actions to bring residents and resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness together to raise awareness of their contributions, create links and foster support for projects.
- Develop an intersectoral game plan dedicated to social cohabitation that includes sufficient staffing for the implementation of any new homelessness resource. This plan must define the roles and responsibilities of all partners.
- Identify funding opportunities to enable community organizations that manage resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness to carry out communication activities.

Course of action 5 – Space management around homelessness resources

Urban development in the vicinity of homelessness resources should both meet the needs of the homeless people who use them and ensure the safety of the general public. Depending on the configuration of the site, the regulations in force and the potential issues at stake, suitable planning may consist of:¹⁴

¹⁴ Some tools can be consulted to promote more inclusive and safe development. For example, the Architecture Without Borders Quebec catalogue^(y), which presents inclusive practices for designing and developing public spaces near resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, as well as the guide *Créer des lieux publics où l'on se sent en sécurité – Aide-mémoire sur les principes d'aménagement sécuritaire*^(z).

- Ensuring the availability of, and access to, toilets and drinking water.
- Adding garbage cans and lighting.
- Reviewing the positioning of the entrance and waiting area so as not to impede pedestrian traffic and reduce crowding.
- Soundproofing outdoor areas (e.g. by creating an inner courtyard).
- Securing enclosed, secluded or dark spaces.
- Ensuring accessibility and provide inclusive furniture.
- Including spaces that can be used by the whole community (e.g. a thrift shop, café, community garden, etc.).

Prospects for improvement

Consider the various aspects that may give rise to social cohabitation issues when developing outdoor spaces near homelessness resources.

Course of action 6 – Regular monitoring and impact assessment

Social cohabitation and urban safety call for continuous improvement to adjust actions and learn from past mistakes. It's therefore necessary to regularly assess the impact of the measures put in place on the sense of safety and well-being felt by the public, both the housed and the homeless. Aid resources, mediation teams and the SPVM could set up incident-tracking systems, that respect the rights of people, to detect problems early and implement solutions. To this end, local social cohabitation and homelessness committees enable the exchange of information to better assess the situation.

Prospects for improvement

- Improve the compilation and analysis of data collected by the various stakeholders.
- Provide regular monitoring of the results of actions taken to ensure public safety and peace of mind.
- Continue collaborating with the research community.

Conclusion

The values of respect, justice and equity are at the heart of our shared desire to collectively promote the dignity and physical, social and economic security of all Montrealers. For people experiencing homelessness, this means having access to shelter, food and housing support services, opportunities for social inclusion, and living with dignity, free from stigma and discrimination.

The city's positioning is one where every person experiencing poverty, homelessness or social exclusion has access to quality services and support adapted to their needs, in their own neighbourhood. A city where everyone can realize their full potential and participate in social and economic life, and where no one is left behind. All in neighbourhoods where people feel safe and enjoy a good quality of life.

Its implementation requires a balanced approach to everyone's concerns, based on principles that meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness while addressing safety and quality-of-life considerations.

The positioning set out in this document is in line with that of an inclusive city determined to meet the social challenges of the 21st century. In November, Montréal unveiled its 2025 budget plan, as well as its ten-year capital works program (PDI) highlighting six major priorities, including homelessness and housing.^(aa) In concrete terms, the city committed to:

- Quadrupling direct assistance to non-profits (NPOs) between 2018 and 2025, bringing the annual homelessness budget to \$12 million.
- Abolishing financial compensation for NPOs that support people experiencing homelessness, own their own building and are recognized by the Commission municipale du Québec, reducing their financial burden by up to \$1 million.
- Implementing strategies to develop non-market housing in order to prevent homelessness and provide adapted housing.
- Developing innovative projects such as modular housing with support.

This ambitious approach aims to build a more cohesive and resilient city. That said, the city can't do it alone. Indeed, the multifactorial and structural aspects of homelessness make it essential to mobilize all of society to respond to the crisis we're collectively facing. The city's positioning and the prospects for improvement set out in this document constitute a draft that can be improved on further to the consultation led by the OCPM. The contribution of all stakeholders in this social discussion is needed to define a common framework for the seamless integration of resources dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, for the benefit of the entire population. Drawing on the conclusions of the consultation, as well as detailed knowledge of the reality of the boroughs and their respective issues, this pooling of resources will facilitate the planning of municipal activities and the coordination of partner actions.

Appendix 1 –Montréal’s commitment to homelessness

For many years, the city has been committed to fighting homelessness and supporting the most vulnerable, namely through position statements, key documents and action plans, and through various initiatives carried out jointly with several of its partners. The table below provides a brief overview.

- 2005** Adoption of the Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.
- The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (human and youth rights commission) established a committee on homelessness that included representatives from the city of Montréal and community organizations. This work led to the implementation of a number of initiatives designed to help the homeless, including the creation of the specialized legal aid clinic [Droits Devant](#) and l'Équipe de médiation urbaine.
- 2008** Commission sur le développement culturel et la qualité du milieu de vie [commission on cultural development and the quality of living environments].
- 2009** Participation in public hearings as part of the initiative on homelessness in Québec.
- The SPVM creates the Équipe mobile de référence et d'intervention en itinérance (ÉMRII), in partnership with the CCSMTL.
- 2014** Launch of the 2014–2017 Montréal Homelessness Action Plan *Parce que la rue est une impasse* [Because the street is a dead end].
- 2015** First census of people experiencing visible homelessness, with city’s support.
- Creation of Montréal’s first warming station.
- 2016** Conseil des Montréalaises – opinion paper on women’s homelessness in

Montréal entitled *Voir l'invisible* [Seeing what's invisible].

Introduction of a protector of people experiencing homelessness role at city hall.

- 2017** Conseil jeunesse de Montréal – opinion on the reality of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, entitled *Jeunes et itinérance : dévoiler une réalité peu visible*.
- Portrait of day centres for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Montreal – research.
- 2018** The position of protector of homeless persons in the City of Montréal becomes that of commissioner of people experiencing homelessness.
- Launch of the 2018–2020 homelessness action plan, *Parce que la rue a différents visages*.
- Launch of the *Strategy for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*.
- 2019** Forum on social cohabitation entitled *Montréal, solidaire et inclusive : comment favoriser la cohabitation sociale dans le partage de l'espace public?*
- Research paper providing an overview of the emergency housing resources for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- 2020** Deployment of emergency homelessness measures as part of the state of emergency declared in Montréal under the CPA.
- 2021** Creation of the Mobile mediation and social intervention team (ÉMMIS).
- Integration of municipal homelessness commitments into the *Plan concerté montréalais en itinérance 2021-2026*.
- Deployment of the *Plan solidarité, équité et inclusion 2021-2025*.
- 2023** Creation of a multi-party crisis unit, jointly managed by the city and the health and social services network, to respond to problems in the Village and Place Émilie-Gamelin areas.

2024 Expansion of the scope of the multi-party crisis cell, which becomes a tactical committee on vulnerable people in public spaces and whose mandate is extended to the boroughs of Ville-Marie, Sud-Ouest, Plateau-Mont-Royal and Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve.

Creation of an ad hoc committee on the issues and needs of people who can't access shelters/housing.

Plan concerté montréalais en itinérance (PCMI) 2021-2026

In this intersectoral action plan, Montréal has committed to two main areas: housing and shelters, and social cohabitation and criminalization issues. The city's objectives are as follows:

- Expand and improve transitional and permanent housing services.
- Improve cooperation between partners in emergency shelters and housing projects.
- Take an inclusive approach to the sharing of public space.
- Promote dialogue, communication and awareness in relation to social cohabitation and the realities of homelessness.
- Harmonize social cohabitation practices throughout Montréal.
- Prevent criminalization and promote access to diversion programs.

Itinérance et milieux inclusifs program

The City of Montréal has an annual budget of around \$6 million to support community projects aimed at contributing to more inclusive, harmonious and safe neighbourhoods for all. In a multi-year perspective, the projects supported include actions to raise awareness of homelessness, social cohabitation and the social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. This [program](#) (in French only) supports some 40 community projects until the end of 2025, including projects specific to women and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

Prévention Montréal program

With a budget of \$42.5 million from 2023 to 2025, Prévention Montréal is a program designed to create safe and inclusive living environments. Measures include community empowerment, awareness-raising, positive reappropriation of public spaces, interventions tailored to experiences of violence, and support for the communities most

affected by violence. Prévention Montréal recognizes that the different aspects of identity can combine to create complex forms of discrimination and oppression, making marginalized groups more vulnerable to insecurity and violence. As part of this program, the city funds various projects relating to the sharing of public space, street harassment, cohabitation, and violence prevention. The program also focuses on skills development, training and evaluation measures.

Entente de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale

Within the framework of the Entente de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (Alliance pour la solidarité) established with the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale [ministry of employment and social solidarity], the city financially supports local and regional projects promoting the social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness and social cohabitation in public spaces.

Social programs at the municipal court

The Municipal Court provides judicial services in civil, criminal and penal matters in all Montréal boroughs. The traditional judicial approach (accusation–trial–conviction) does not always resolve the issues that led to the crime being committed. Special programs have been set up to provide alternatives to incarceration or financial penalties, avoid harming the future of those accused, while holding individuals accountable and reducing recidivism. A total of eight programs exist for people with mental health issues, substance abuse problems or homelessness, or who identify as Indigenous. For a long time, this approach was unique in Québec and remains a source of inspiration for provincial and foreign courts alike.

List of acronyms

GBA+: Intersectional Gender-based Analysis

CCSMTL: Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal [Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal integrated health and social services centre]

ÉMMIS: Mobile mediation and social intervention team

ÉMRII: Mobile reference and homelessness intervention team

ISQ: Institut de la statistique du Québec

CPA: Civil Protection Act

MSSS: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux [Health and Social services Ministry]

OCPM: Office de consultation publique de Montréal [Montréal Public Consultation Office]

NPO: Non-profit organization

PCMI: Plan concerté montréalais en itinérance 2021-2026 [Montréal Concerted Plan on Homelessness 2021-2026]

PSOC: Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires [Support program for community organizations]

PUM: Plan d'urbanisme et de mobilité [Land Use and Mobility Plan]

RSSS: Réseau de la santé et des services sociaux [health and social services network]

SHUT: Service d'hébergement d'urgence et de transition [emergency and transitional housing service]

SPVM: Service de police de la Ville de Montréal [Montréal police service]

TAPAJ: Alternative work paid by the day

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