



November 25, 2022

Currie Dixon, Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Yukon Legislative Assembly

Dear Currie Dixon:

On behalf of the Board and Staff at the Safe at Home Society (SAHS), I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Public Accounts Committee on the Auditor General's report regarding *Yukon Housing – Yukon Housing Corporation & Department of Health and Social Services*.

First and foremost, I would like to recognize that the Government of Yukon has been a longstanding partner of the *Safe at Home Community-Based Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness*, adopted in 2017. Since this time, the Safe at Home Plan has evolved into an organization – the [Safe at Home Society](#) - and works to end and prevent homelessness in the Yukon, bringing together service agencies, government partners, landlords, the private sector, community members and people with lived experience of homelessness.

With regards to planning and policy work, SAHS works closely with the Yukon Housing Corporation (YHC) and Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) to support alignment between what we see happening on the frontline with work being done to resource and streamline services for marginalized individuals and families experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness.

The results of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) report regarding the state of *Yukon Housing* was a long overdue validation of what many non-profit organizations and community partners have known for years. The needs of marginalized Yukoners continue to be overlooked across the continuum, especially for individuals and families who need access to deeply affordable, subsidized, and permanent supportive housing. This gap is evidenced by a well-documented and steady increase in chronic homelessness over time according to Whitehorse's By-Name List. *See Appendix A for data overview and explanation of the By-Name List.*

SAHS would be remiss if we didn't remind the Public Accounts Committee of the Government of Yukon's commitment in the *Putting People First Report* whereby recommendation 5.15 and 5.16 highlight the necessity of coordination of housing stock and housing-related services. Since 2020, SAHS has been diligently working towards the implementation of a Coordinated Access system with the fiscal and frontline support of both YHC and HSS.

A Coordinated Access system is a way for communities to bring a consistent, person-centred approach to how service providers help people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The community of Whitehorse, under the direction of [Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#), have been working on implementing a Coordinated Access system since 2017. There are currently 18 organizations, First Nations governments and territorial government programs participating in the Coordinated Housing Access Team (CHAT). See *attached Yukon Coordinated Access Guide for more information about Coordinated Access*.

The above work underway is important for the Public Accounts Committee to consider. **Both the OAG report and YHC/HSS draft action plan presented are at odds with work that is ongoing and has actively been invested in by the territorial and federal governments.** SAHS cannot understate enough that there is inherent risk to centralizing YHC and HSS as the sole entities responsible for planning, data collection, implementation of programs, or housing provision. This directly contradicts the spirit of the *Putting People First Report* and of Government of Yukon's partnership in the Safe at Home Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness.

At the outset, many of the recommendations suggested in the draft action plan, while meant to be specific to work internal to YHC and HSS, are a duplication of work underway at the community level. This leaves non-profit organizations feeling undervalued, unheard, and as 'partners' brought to the table when convenient or for consultation.

Further, SAHS has been working closely and collaboratively to help inform YHC's forthcoming Community Housing Transformation. There is overlap in this planning and the arrival of the OAG report, which is why the Transformation work underway is contextually important. In 2019, SAHS heard that this Transformation will improve housing outcomes for vulnerable Yukoners by moving towards a mixed-income, mixed-used model of Rent Geared to Income housing owned by YHC. This approach was something our organization could support at the time by virtue of it being lauded as person-centered.

Since 2019 the framework, scope, and related policies are coming to fruition and SAHS is adamantly opposed to YHC's tenant allocation policy in particular. We have come to understand that through YHC's new approach, **the most vulnerable Yukoners (i.e. survivors of violence and individuals who are currently homelessness) will receive less access to Yukon Housing units than in the previous model.** Similarly, the Household Income Limit, or HILs, threshold has been increased which means that those with low and no income will also have decreased access to subsidized housing.

We have actively worked with YHC to support a pivot away from this approach, suggesting that layering in a more assertive approach to support provision for Yukon Housing tenants could offset the concerns around housing retention and asset damages. Our understanding is that the new 47-unit YHC building at 4th and Jeckell will be the flagship building for this Community Housing Transformation. **9 of the 47 units will be home to those who are actively homeless, tenanted off the By-Name List.** Moving forward, 20% of all YHC units will be tenanted through the By-Name List IF the person being offered the unit fits within the required income band.

The OAG's recommendations are premised on the fact that vulnerable Yukoners have been under-supported and further marginalized due lack of coordination, planning with urgency, and making decisions based on evidence. Likewise, at a time when we have **211** actively homeless individuals and families, **79%** of whom are survivors of violence and who are parents or guardians to 64 children, the tenant allocation policy is a move in the opposite direction of the OAG's recommendation to prioritize vulnerable Yukoners.

Overall recommendations - some of which are mentioned above

1. **No explicit mention of working with people with lived/living experience (PWLE) outside of being research subjects, for development of action plans, assessments, or programs.**
 - *Issue:* A common theme that surfaces in this report is that past initiatives and even action plans following previous OAG reports have failed to provide for vulnerable people in the territory. A key component of effective and sustainable policies is to engage with the people that are directly impacted by the policies, the true experts.
 - *Potential solution:* Government of Yukon (YG) cannot simply check a box that they are consulting with PWLE by working with third parties in the community (such as NGOs). YG must recognise PWLE as experts and as an equal stakeholder in the housing continuum. YG must respond to this with the development of PWLE-specific advisory groups, committees, and positions within all actionable items that pertain to social and supportive housing. This must be matched with a robust compensation strategy to recognize time and expertise brought by PWLE.
2. **Government of Yukon doesn't have to reinvent the wheel: many of the actionable items overlap, if not are entirely redundant, to information that already exists or is already being collected within the community.**
 - *Issue:* The SAHS, who partners with approximately 18 other government and non-government homelessness service organisations in the community, has maintained a By-Name List (BNL) that tracks the inflows and outflows into homelessness and housing precarity effectively since 2020. This list was created and is monitored by Built for Zero Canada (BFZ), which is a national network that works in partnership with the federal

government to address homelessness and housing instability in the country. In January 2022, the SAHS's BNL was given "Quality BNL" status from BFZ, which affirms the following about the data:

- a) touches everyone who is experiencing homelessness in the community
 - b) can be used to accurately assess who is entering homelessness system on an ongoing basis
 - c) can be used to track a person's progress through the system
 - d) can be used to measure how successful the organisation/community is at implementing prioritisation and providing permanent housing to those who need it
- *Potential solution:* If YG is actively investing time and funding into Whitehorse's Coordinated Access system, all resources, policies, and action plans should make clear linkages to the work at the community-level. The role of HSS and YHC as funder and in some cases, service provider, needs to be made clear and there needs to be mechanisms for transparency and accountability. Prior to determining whether new research around data/systems is warranted, a community-wide audit of data collection efforts and programs should be prioritized.

3. **Action Plan does not provide list of "community partners" and nor does it identify *who* and *how* relationships will be different this time around.**

- *Issue:* The Draft Action Plan mentions that HSS and YHC will "continue" to work with community partners but does not identify which partners, nor how the relationships will be different moving forward. Lack of meaningful and sustainable collaboration has been identified, in the current and previous reports, as a barrier to service provision. The Draft Action Plan fails to identify why it is different this time around.
- *Potential solution:* Publish a list of community partners and identify who and how the relationships will be different moving forward (per actionable item).

4. **Contradictions in investments.**

- *Issue:* YG indicates the intention to research and implement a prioritisation system by 2024, while also planning to participate in Coordinated Access, which has its own assessment and prioritisation system.
- *Potential Solution:* YG should commit to either completely redesigning a prioritisation system for the entire community or improving the system in place for Coordinated Access. This decision must not be made in isolation of the mandates and funding

directives provided by Infrastructure Canada. Since the onset of Reaching Home, these investments have brought millions of homelessness-specific dollars to the territory all of which are premised on the implementation of a coordinated access system and a Homelessness Management Information System, like HIFIS (Homelessness Individuals Family Information System).

5. Yukon’s Housing Action Plan (HAP 2015 – 2025) is outdated and should be updated to reflect the changes that have occurred in the territory’s housing continuum since the 2015 (i.e. Global pandemic, the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, the housing affordability crisis, and a rapid increase in homelessness).

- *Issue:* Draft Action 87.5 speaks to the HAP three-year action plan report. It is noteworthy that a key ‘pillar’ of HAP is to facilitate “increased access to adequate and affordable market and non-market rental housing and support for tenants and landlords”. While there has been some momentum in building out housing options as evidenced by various announcements and re-announcements of initiatives underway, few options are deeply affordable or provide the supports necessary for the most vulnerable to thrive and maintain their housing.
- *Potential Solution:* An urgent and evidenced-based action plan to build, operationalize and maintain more permanent supportive housing options for vulnerable Yukoners is essential. Current modelling suggests that Whitehorse’s chronically homeless numbers will grow exponentially if we don’t collectively address the shortfalls in how affordability is understood, in how rent supplement programs are used, and if we don’t put more energy into eviction prevention initiatives.

6. Overall lack of transparency with the public and other providers impacted by constraints across the housing continuum.

- *Issue:* Members of the public and community-level organizations do not have open access to information that is used to inform public housing policy and programs. Inter-governmental conversations occur frequently and are often at odds with community-level conversation leaving funding organizations in the dark about upcoming shifts or developments in housing policy and program development.
- *Potential solution:* Develop quarterly status update reports for the public, as well as a report for partners that includes data, upcoming meetings, community consultations, events, etcetera. This should be readily available online.

Moving forward, SAHS remains open and committed to working with both Yukon Housing Corporation and Health and Social Services. We actively sit together at the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board, on the Housing Action Plan Implementation Committee, and on the Housing and Homelessness Task Force. These are intentional and ongoing forums to collaborate and reach alignment on planning, programming, funding, research, data collection and related policies. A balanced approach to responding to the Office of the Auditor General Report while simultaneously working with organizations like SAHS to effectively address the current homelessness crisis is paramount.

As a key housing stakeholder impacted directly by the shortfalls addressed in the OAG's recommendations, SAHS looks forward to the Finalized Action Plan when presented by HSS and YHC. These YG Departments have a unique opportunity to lead by example - writing a plan that includes mechanisms for accountability and clear linkages to building on strengths and successes underway both internal and external to the territorial government. The Action Plan also presents an opportunity to have transformational conversations about what hasn't been working with an eye for rebuilding trust and momentum that will result in meaningful changes for marginalized Yukoners.

If you have questions, require further evidence or information regarding SAHS comments or initiatives more generally, don't hesitate to contact Kate Mechan, Executive Director at ed@safeyukon.ca or at 867-334-9310. Once again, thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KM', with a stylized flourish.

Kate Mechan
Executive Director