

# **Toronto Shelter Standards**

## **Guiding Principles**

The Shelter Standards are grounded in the following principles and values that promote a philosophy for service provision. These principles and values are not shelter standards, but rather help guide the delivery of shelter services.

1. All homeless persons have the right to shelter service regardless of political or religious beliefs, ethno-cultural background, (dis)ability, gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Staff must respect and be sensitive to the diversity of residents. Discriminatory and racist incidents or behaviors are not tolerated.
2. The shelter will provide an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all shelter residents, and provide services in a non-judgmental manner.
3. Residents are capable of moving toward increasing levels of self-reliance and self-determination. Shelter staff will work with residents to assist them in achieving their goals.
4. Shelters will be sensitive to the ethno-specific and linguistic needs of residents. Staff will work to ensure residents have access to culturally appropriate interpreter services and that written materials are available in other languages.
5. Gender identity is self-defined. Sometimes this may not correspond with a person's physical appearance. Service providers need to accept gender identity as defined by the individual rather than by the perception of staff and/or other residents.
6. Shelter staff often have access to detailed and highly sensitive personal information about residents. Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of shelter residents and their personal information is of the utmost importance.
7. All people staying in shelters will have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.
8. The health and safety of residents, volunteers and staff is of the highest importance in each shelter. Training, policies, procedures and regular maintenance are intended to encourage, improve and maintain the health and safety of all people residing, volunteering and working in the shelter.
9. People who are homeless have few resources and the shelter system is often their final option to receive the basic necessities of life: food and shelter. Issuing service restrictions in the shelter system must be done only as a last resort and in the most serious cases.
10. People who are homeless, like other members of our community, may use substances to varying degrees. Everyone is entitled to shelter service whether or not they use substances. As a result, admission, discharge and service restriction policies must not be based on substance use alone, except for those shelters operating on an abstinence basis. To increase the accessibility of the shelter system and to respond to diverse resident needs, a range of

service approaches from abstinence to harm reduction must be available within the shelter system.

11. In order to provide effective shelter programs and services, shelter residents must be involved in service provision, program planning, development and evaluation, and policy development.

12. Shelters that include children and youth must provide supports and activities and ensure that the school-related, recreation and treatment needs of resident children are met on-site or through referral to community-based services.

13. The shelter should offer an opportunity for children and youth with developmental and/or physical disabilities to develop their full potential within an environment where they can interact and socialize with other children.

14. Shelters are part of a larger network of homeless services and agencies. Collaboration within this network is important to ensure effective and co-ordinated services.

Excerpted from *Toronto Shelter Standards* [www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/shelter\\_standards.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/shelter_standards.pdf)