

# ANNUAL 20 REPORT 23



Ombudsman  
Toronto



# Contents

Message from the Ombudsman .....	2
How We Help .....	8
What We Do at Ombudsman Toronto .....	10
15 Years of Fairness .....	12
A Look at the Past 15 Years .....	14
Voices Throughout the Years .....	16
A Look at our Numbers in 2023 .....	18
Our Impact .....	22
Case Stories .....	24
Public Reports and Announcements in 2023 .....	36
Update on our Interim Report into the City’s Process for Clearing Encampments ...	45
Improving the Fairness of City Services .....	47
Working Together .....	48
Consulting with City Staff .....	51
Meaningfully Engaging with People Across Toronto .....	53
Our Financials .....	54
Our Team .....	55

Ombudsman Toronto acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and that this land is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. We are here because this land has been colonized, and we recognize the ongoing harm done to Indigenous communities by this colonial system, including the effects of broken treaty covenants.

Ombudsman Toronto is committed to continually acting in support of and in solidarity with Black communities seeking freedom and reparative justice in light of the history and ongoing legacy of slavery that continues to impact Black communities in Canada. As part of this commitment, we would also like to acknowledge that not all people came to these lands as migrants and settlers. Specifically, we wish to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

At Ombudsman Toronto, we know we have a responsibility to uphold and ensure fairness in our local government. We understand that this must be done with a respectful and culturally responsive approach, and we commit to ongoing learning, unlearning, engagement, and relationship-building in order to do so.

# Message from the Ombudsman





## 2024 is a significant year for Ombudsman Toronto. Fifteen years ago, we opened our doors as the first municipal Ombudsman office in the history of Ontario.

Since then, Ombudsman Toronto has worked hard to ensure that people in Toronto have a local government that treats them fairly. Our groundbreaking achievements not only benefit the residents of Toronto but serve as a model for other municipalities and governments alike.

I had the honour of being one of the very first employees of Ombudsman Toronto. During those early days, I worked with a small team led by the first Ombudsman Fiona Crean to build the office from scratch. I am proud to say Ombudsman Toronto has lived up to the promise and potential that many saw in our early beginnings.

Over the ensuing years, I have seen how our investigative work has sparked tremendous change and improvement in the City's policies and programs, made possible thanks to the independent and impartial scrutiny that Ombudsman Toronto provides. And I remain impressed with how the City of Toronto administration has embraced this increased scrutiny, seeing it not as a problem, but as a tool to improve its service to the public.

Since 2009, we have completed nearly 50 systemic investigations and public reports on issues of significant unfairness. These investigations have covered a wide range of issues, from incorrect and confusing public health guidelines to the City's harmful approach to the clearing of encampments, which we detailed in a report last year. (You can read more about our investigation into the encampment clearings later in this report.)

During the course of our 15 years, we have also investigated more than 31,000 individual complaints from the public — 3,512 last year alone. Our work has had a

demonstrated and direct impact on the lives of people in Toronto. For example, we made sure senior residents of City-owned long-term care homes received the Kosher meals they were entitled to and just last year, prevented the imminent and unfair eviction of a father and his family from their apartment in Toronto social housing. (More examples of how we resolved individual complaints are available throughout this report.)

Having been a part of the office since the very beginning, it has been humbling to see firsthand the difference our office can make. For me, the complaints we receive are more than casefiles, examples, or statistics; they are the stories of real people — many of whom I've had the pleasure of meeting myself — whose lives have been forever altered because of the accountability that Ombudsman Toronto provides. They are important reminders of what can go wrong when the public does not have someone in their corner standing up for fairness within local government.

It is no secret that life in Toronto is becoming increasingly more complex — as are the complaints that come to our office and the issues we investigate. The fact that I am able to do my part each day to make life better for people is something I will never take for granted.

Equally as important is the role Ombudsman Toronto now serves at City Hall — we are truly a part of its DNA. A study by Toronto Metropolitan University in 2015 found that City staff felt Ombudsman Toronto had improved how they do their jobs and brought a heightened sense of accountability to the culture of City Hall.

City divisions and their staff across the administration know who we are and see the value in the support we provide. Notably, as you will read later in this report, many City staff members will even request our help when developing a new policy or program to ensure a fairness lens is built in from the start.

The result of this increased focus on accountability has had a positive impact on our investigations as well. Last year for example, the City's social housing provider Toronto Community Housing Corporation began implementing our recommended improvements for handling human rights complaints by tenants even before our investigation was finalized — an important step and commitment to accountability that I commend them for.

This strengthened commitment to accountability was also evident when City Council unanimously voted in 2021 to give new authority to Ombudsman Toronto to investigate the fairness of Toronto Police's policies and procedures. After finalizing the scope of that oversight, we launched our first investigation into the Toronto Police Service's Vulnerable Persons Registry in 2023 and expect to release the findings and any recommendations from that investigation later this year.

As we mark 15 years of Ombudsman Toronto, we know this is not just a time to acknowledge the positive changes — both individual and systemic — that this office has made possible; it also presents us with an opportunity to shine a light on real and persistent concerns that continue to be felt by the public today. While we have seen positive and constructive progress in City services over the years, challenges and frustrations remain.

When Ombudsman Toronto released its first annual report in 2010, we noted that the City's failure to properly communicate with the public was one of the top concerns we heard about. This lack of proper

communication unfortunately continues, resulting in significant consequences for the public.

For instance, earlier this year, my office released the results of an investigation where we found that Toronto Hydro charged a member of the public \$20,000 to repair a hydro vault that he did not even know he owned. This hefty bill, which amounted to half of his annual salary, was a direct result of Toronto Hydro's poor communication and a perfect example of the real and tangible impact this type of unfair service can have. (More information on that investigation can be found on our website.) I urge the City to take a serious look at how it communicates with people in Toronto and to work harder in the future to improve its communication.

As we continue to look ahead, I also urge the City to recommit itself to the ongoing and pervasive housing crisis. The severe lack of affordable housing was one of the most pressing issues facing the City in 2023. This remains true today, with more and more people struggling to live with dignity and security — a third of the complaints we received last year had to do with housing. According to both international and Canadian law, access to adequate housing that is safe, affordable, and secure is a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, however, this is not the lived reality for many people in Toronto.

With the launch of its Housing Charter in 2020, the City promised to work towards ensuring all people living in Toronto have access to this human right to safe, secure, and affordable housing. While we applaud the City for this promise, we also recognize that there is more work to be done and to help achieve that work the City needs someone to hold it accountable.

This need for accountability — and for increased focus on housing in Toronto — is something that City Council understands as well. Last year, Council approved the



creation of a new housing unit within Ombudsman Toronto to hold the City to its stated promise of adequate housing for all and to ensure its housing policies and programs are fair. Led by Toronto's first Deputy Ombudsman (Housing), the unit has already made great strides, including launching its first systemic investigation into the City's decision to deny refugee claimants access to space in its shelter system. That investigation is well underway. We will share our findings and any recommendations for the City in the coming months.

Serving as Toronto's Ombudsman is not a responsibility that I take lightly. It has been an immense privilege to witness firsthand the growth of this office and to play a role in helping countless individuals whose lives have been irrevocably improved as a result.

I owe my predecessors Fiona Crean and Susan Opler a debt of gratitude for the positive, pervasive change their work made possible — the results of which are still helping people today. Similarly, I am deeply grateful to my team at Ombudsman Toronto and those who came before who stand up every day for fairness in City services. I also commend and thank the numerous members of City staff, past and present, who understand the importance of fair service and who collaborate with us to resolve issues quickly.

But most importantly, I extend my sincerest thanks to the many members of the public who have and continue to entrust us with their complaints. It is a true honour to serve you.

Sincerely,



Kwame Addo



# How We Help

“We all want to thank you very much for your help. The only way that we got the City to move ahead and solve the problem was through pressure from you.”

Member of the Public



# What We Do at Ombudsman Toronto

## Our Core Mandate: Making Sure City of Toronto Services are Fair

### What We Do

We investigate complaints and concerns from members of the public who believe they have been treated unfairly by the City of Toronto. We also investigate larger, systemic concerns of serious unfairness carried out by the City and can do so without waiting for a complaint. When we find the City has acted unfairly, we recommend ways it can resolve the immediate issue and improve its services in the future.

### Who We Oversee

**Divisions and Departments** that are a part of the City administration (e.g., Municipal Licensing & Standards, Toronto Water)

**Agencies** that provide City services (e.g., Toronto Zoo, TTC)

**Corporations** that are owned by the City (e.g., Toronto Hydro, Build Toronto)

**Tribunals, Committees, and other bodies** that hold hearings to resolve disputes, regulate activities, and determine legal rights and benefits related to City services (e.g., Administrative Penalty Tribunal, Toronto Local Appeal Body)

### Why It Matters

The City's services and programs affect people's daily lives in countless ways; when there's unfairness in the City's services, it can have a big impact. People have a right to a City government that is transparent, fair, and accountable to them — we make sure that happens.

## Our Housing Unit: Advancing the Goal of Adequate Housing

### What We Do

Using a human rights lens, we investigate and review the City's planning and delivery of its housing services, policies, and programs to make sure they are fair. We also actively engage with the public to better understand the housing-related challenges they face.

### Who We Oversee

**Divisions and Departments** within the City administration that are directly or indirectly related to housing (e.g., City Planning, Toronto Shelter & Support Services)

**Agencies** providing City services that directly or indirectly affect housing (e.g., Toronto Public Health, CreateTO)

**Corporations** that are owned by the City and directly or indirectly play a role in housing (e.g., Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation)

**Tribunals, Committees, and other bodies** which hold hearings to resolve disputes, regulate activities, and determine legal rights and benefits related to City services that directly or indirectly impact housing (e.g., Multi-Tenant House Licensing Tribunal, Committee of Adjustment)

### Why It Matters

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right and includes the key principle that all people have a right to housing that is safe, secure, and affordable, without discrimination. The City has pledged to make this fundamental human right a reality for everyone in Toronto; we hold it accountable for following through on that promise.

## Our Police Oversight: Increasing the Fairness of Policing in Toronto

### What We Do

Through systemic investigations, we examine the fairness and impact of Toronto Police policies and procedures on the lives of people in Toronto. We also recommend practical solutions to improve services provided by the Toronto Police and ensure it is held accountable to the public.

### Who We Oversee

**Toronto Police Service Board** policies

**Toronto Police Service** procedures, services, and administration

*\*Note: We do not oversee individual police officers or their conduct.*

### Why It Matters

The role of policing in Toronto — and around the world — is significant. This work ensures there is an accountability office that is both independent and local overseeing important aspects of policing in Toronto, improving its services for everyone.

# 15 Years of Fairness

“Thank you so very much. Toronto is very fortunate to have you working for them.”

Member of the Public



2024 is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Ombudsman Toronto. This anniversary is more than an important milestone. It also highlights the invaluable role that our office has played in improving local government and the countless individuals whose lives have been positively impacted as a result. Here are some examples of how we have helped over the years.

**2009**

Ombudsman Toronto opened our doors to the public, marking a monumental shift in accountability for the City of Toronto administration and the public.

**2010**

Despite constant communication with the City, Qadira suffered through 17 sewer back-ups over eight years. This resulted in significant mould damage to her home, causing a serious health risk to her and her family. We helped resolve the issue for Qadira and worked with the City to put systems in place, including a process outlining the City's responsibilities in similar situations, so it would not happen again.

**2011**

The City's insurer was routinely denying residents' claims about damage caused from potholes, sewer or water backups, and falling tree limbs without any review. After investigating, we made recommendations to fix this, including that the City adopt a service standard that required a proper review of claims.

**2012**

The City failed to adequately support more than 1,700 residents who were left with nowhere to go after a fire broke out in Canada's largest social housing building. Our recommendations, including developing a protocol for communication between staff responders from different divisions, improved the City's response to major fires and other emergency events so no resident will experience a similar situation again.

**2013**

We fixed a communication breakdown between the City and a mother who was promised a space in Toronto's social housing. Without our intervention, the City's failure to properly communicate would have left the mother and her children without a home.

**2014**

The City unfairly gave Sanjeet's neighbour a permit to cut down part of Sanjeet's tree. Thanks to our intervention, the City apologized to Sanjeet, provided him with deep-root fertilization, and promised to monitor the tree's health.



**2015**

A study conducted by Toronto Metropolitan University found that a majority of senior City staff felt the creation of Ombudsman Toronto improved how they do their jobs and had brought a heightened sense of accountability to the culture of City Hall.

**2016**

Residents at two City long-term care homes were not being provided with Kosher meals. After we met with the City and told officials that this did not comply with provincial law, City long-term care homes began providing Kosher meals to residents at no extra cost.

**2017**

Thanks to Ombudsman Toronto's help, Dante, an elderly resident facing financial challenges, recovered \$462,000 from a tax sale of his home after the City refused to give it to him.

**2018**

We worked with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the City's social housing provider, to establish a Crisis Priority Transfer Protocol, so that the most urgent health and safety cases get the quick attention they require.

**2019**

TTC's Wheel-Trans service dropped off Ashley, a young woman with special needs, at an incorrect location. This understandably caused Ashley and her family considerable stress. We called out this unfairness and made recommendations to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

**2020**

We found that the City was providing incorrect information to the public about COVID-19 rules. We brought this discrepancy to its attention and worked with the City to fix the error.

**2021**

Following City Council's unanimous approval, we began putting our new oversight in place for the fairness of Toronto Police Service and Toronto Police Service Board's policies and procedures.

**2022**

Our recommendations made it easier for anyone leaving an abusive relationship to secure new housing through the City's rent-geared-to-income program.

**2023**

The first-ever Deputy Ombudsman (Housing) was hired to lead a new unit focused on making sure the City's housing policies and programs are fair and that adequate housing is truly a human right for everyone in Toronto.

**2024**

Ombudsman Toronto celebrates 15 years of holding the City of Toronto accountable to the people it serves.

# Voices Throughout

2009

“ Fundamentally, it’s about ensuring the City government is doing its very best in delivering services to residents.”  
– *Fiona Crean, Toronto’s First Ombudsman*

2010

“ Your voice is crucial to the community, helping to bring a voice and balance.”  
– *Member of the Public*

2011

“ Your team has proven to be unrelenting in their commitment to fulfill your mandate to all citizens of this city. Your work advances moral and ethical government. And this is why if we were to ever see the Ombudsman service end or decrease in any way, it would be a disservice not only to those who so desperately deserve respect and support but a disservice to the community at large.” – *Member of the Public*

2012

“ Thank you. Like many other public service employees, I recognize the critical role that you play and that role must continue on in its capacity.”  
– *City Staff Member*

2013

“ You were kind and warm and attentive and made my client feel important. I’ve had so much feedback from so many people on how your words have inspired them to continue.” – *Legal Representative*

2014

“ Ombudsman Toronto is here to help. It’s a huge benefit to have someone look at you critically and where you can improve.” – *City Staff Member*

2015

“ We spent all morning going from one government office to another, four in total, and the only office that treated us as humans was the Ombudsman’s Office.”  
– *Member of the Public*

2016

“ Ombudsman Toronto gave me back faith that someone cares, and something can be done.” – *Member of the Public*

# the Years

2017

“The light that you and your office shine on matters leads to improvements in how we do business and the service we provide.” – *City Staff Member*

2018

“If other offices cared as much as yours does, there would be fewer problems!” – *Member of the Public*

2019

“I want to reiterate how important this office is – it’s sometimes the only way that citizens can get a breakthrough on the ‘stone in their shoe.’” – *City Councillor*

2020

“You make a difference because you allow people an opportunity to be heard. And you remind a big publicly funded institution that policy impacts real people and that they can do better.” – *Member of the Public*

2021

“Thank you for all your hard work. The world needs more people like you to go to bat for them.” – *Member of the Public*

2022

“You are doing great work so that the public’s issues are dealt with appropriately and fairly, and so that the City is held to account, which is critical in a functioning democracy. All the best as you continue making our City better!” – *City Staff Member*

2023

“Thank you for shedding light on this important issue and for exposing the truth.” – *Member of the Public*

2024

“I was one of Ombudsman Toronto’s first employees in 2009. Since then, I have witnessed both the office’s tremendous growth and the positive impact it has on people in Toronto every day. To now serve as the Ombudsman during this important milestone is something I do not take lightly. To the people of Toronto, serving as your champion for fairness at the City of Toronto is a true honour. Thank you.” – *Kwame Addo, Toronto’s Ombudsman*

# A Look at our Numbers in 2023

“The great report from the Ombudsman brought some things to our attention as a city and certainly as a public service.”

City Councillor



**3,512**  
cases handled

**80%** of cases  
closed within 30 days

**37** recommendations  
made public

**24** staff + the  
Ombudsman

**61** public  
recommendations  
monitored

**111**  
engagement  
activities

**20** consultations  
undertaken with  
the City

## What We Heard About Most: Frequent Complaint Topics\*

\*in alphabetical order

### Municipal Licensing & Standards

- Business Licence Applications & Renewals
- Noise
- Property Standards  
(e.g., long weeds and grass, graffiti)

### Revenue Services

- Property Tax
- Utility Billing: Water, Sewage, Solid Waste
- Vacant Home Tax

### Toronto Community Housing Corporation

- Maintenance Issues
- Neighbour Issues
- Transfers

### Toronto Shelter & Support Services

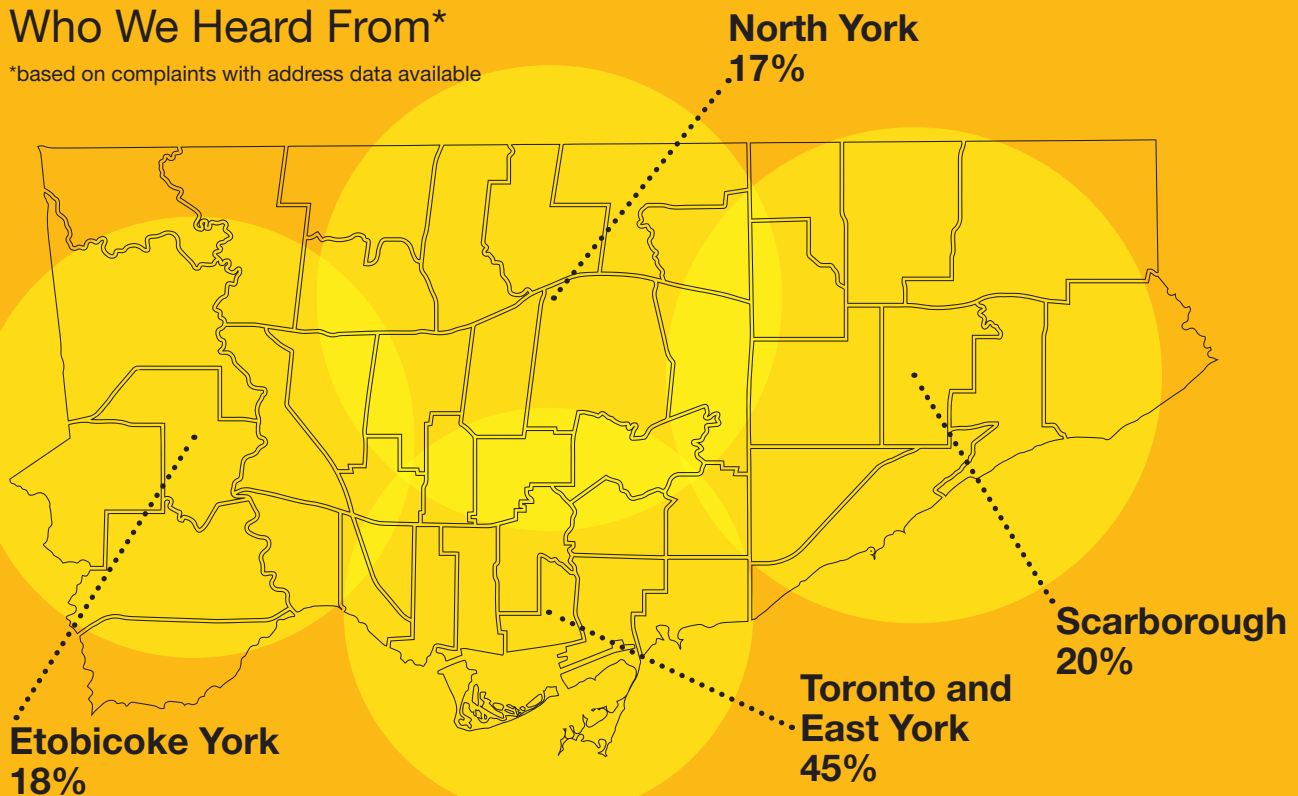
- Encampments
- Shelter/Respite Intake
- Shelter/Respite Maintenance and User Experience

### Transportation Services

- Summer Maintenance (e.g., pothole repairs)
- Traffic Management
- Winter Maintenance (e.g., snow removal)

## Who We Heard From\*

\*based on complaints with address data available



# 15

Years of Results

**31,000+**  
cases handled

**45+**  
investigations completed

**550+**  
recommendations made public

since 2009

## Increase in Complaints Over Time



**58% increase**  
Over the past 5 years  
(2019 to 2023)

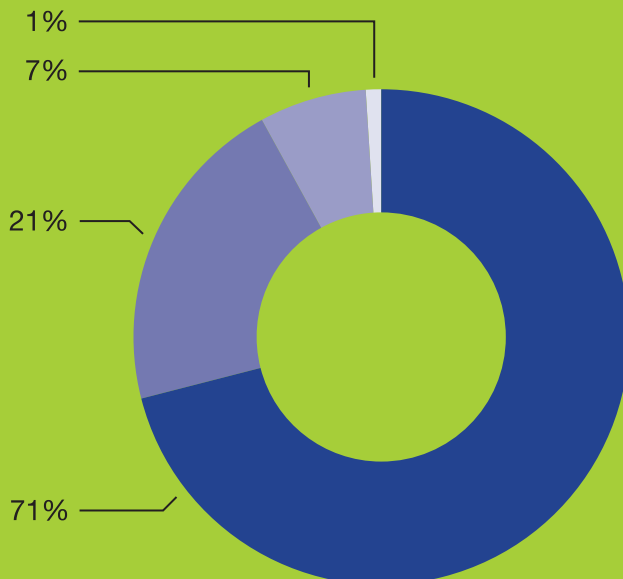


**62% increase**  
Over the past 10 years  
(2014 to 2023)



**239% increase**  
Over the past 15 years  
(2009 to 2023)

## What We Found: Fairness Problems



In 2023, we identified problems of administrative unfairness in close to half of the complaints we looked into, and with case complexity on the rise, some cases involved multiple instances of unfairness. Here is a breakdown of the most frequent types of problems we found.

- Communication**  
(e.g., delays in getting back to people, poor complaint handling): 71%
- Policies and Procedures**  
(e.g., poor written procedures, not making policies publicly accessible): 21%
- Decisions**  
(e.g., failing to provide sufficient reasons for a decision, making an unreasonable or unfair decision): 7%
- Investigations and Enforcement**  
(e.g., failing to give proper notice): 1%

# Our Impact

“An enormous hug and heartfelt thank you comes from my family to you. So grateful, we will not forget the difference you made in our lives.”

Member of the Public





# Case Stories

Every day, we hear from people who believe they have been treated unfairly by the City of Toronto. Case stories provide a window into the kinds of complaints we handle, and how we help improve the City's systems and services for everyone. Here is a small selection of the complaints we handled last year.



*All names have been changed to protect people's privacy. Photos are for illustrative purposes only.*



# Flexible and Fair Treatment: Preventing an Imminent Eviction

## What Happened

A community organization reached out to us on behalf of Nico, a Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) tenant, with a request for urgent support. Nico and his family had been living in the same unit for the past 24 years without any issues paying rent but he had lost his job in the pandemic, and as a result, was now behind in his payments and facing an imminent eviction.

We learned that Toronto Employment & Social Services (TESS), the City division that provides financial benefits and social supports to people living in Toronto, had agreed to cover almost 50% of Nico's outstanding rent. Unfortunately, Nico was unable to cover the remaining amount, and with the eviction only days away, he and his family were now at risk of becoming unhoused.

## What We Did

Understanding the urgency, we immediately got to work. We contacted TCHC to try to work out a plan to avoid the eviction, pointing out that TESS was willing to cover 50% of the overdue rent and escalating our concerns directly to TCHC's Chief Executive Officer.

## The Result

In response to our calls, TCHC confirmed that, thanks to TESS's financial support, a resolution could be worked out. TCHC confirmed with Nico that the imminent eviction would be paused and that it would work with him to arrange a payment agreement.

## Why This Matters

Fair treatment requires that the City consider people's individual needs and circumstances, and explore all possible solutions to an issue. We worked with TCHC — the City's social housing provider — to ensure it did just that for Nico.

# Enhancing Accessibility: Recreational Opportunities for Everyone

## What Happened

Samantha contacted us after she became frustrated with the City’s sign-up process for its community recreation programs. She felt the sign-up process was inaccessible and unfair to those like her who are visually impaired and do not use the internet. According to Samantha, by the time someone tried to register in person or by phone, most spots were already booked. She wondered if the City could start reserving a specific number of spots for in-person and phone sign-ups.

## What We Did

After speaking with Samantha, we learned that she had not yet raised her concerns with the City. Since the City must have the opportunity to address concerns before our office gets involved, we connected Samantha with staff in the Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PF&R) division — the division that oversees the City’s community recreation programs — so they could address the issue.

## The Result

PF&R staff contacted Samantha to discuss her concerns and ways the City can ensure it is delivering services accessibly.

### Why This Matters

All people have a right to accessible services that meet their needs — that includes ensuring those who do not use or have access to the internet are still able to take part in City programs and services. If you are like Samantha and feel the City’s services are not accessible or fair, you can make a complaint.

“My utmost thanks to you. You are quite possibly a lifesaver.”

Member of the Public



# Small Error, Big Consequences: Correcting Essential Shelter Information

## What Happened

When the City mistakenly provided the address of Adina's home in its communications about warming centres, individuals seeking shelter arrived at Adina's house looking for a place to stay. Adina's Toronto address shared the same street name and number as a warming centre in North York, but the City had not specified in its communication that the warming centre was in North York.

Adina contacted 311 and Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) to try and correct the error but did not receive a response. She continued to escalate her concerns and eventually received a response from staff at TSSS, who apologized for the mistake. However, Adina remained dissatisfied with the apology and felt that more needed to be done as individuals were still arriving at her house seeking shelter. Ultimately, Adina asked for our help.

## What We Did

We contacted TSSS to discuss the situation. Although TSSS confirmed it had apologized to Adina and updated its communications to include 'North York' in the address of the warming centre, we stressed that more work was needed.

We facilitated a call between TSSS and Adina, and Adina was provided with a phone number that she could use if people continued to arrive at her house seeking shelter. We also connected her with several TSSS staff to ensure Adina's ongoing concerns were addressed and that Adina received a detailed explanation of the steps TSSS would be taking.

## The Result

After we spoke with TSSS, it posted a sign on Adina's door explaining the situation and distributed flyers with directions and contact information for the warming centre closest to Adina's home. TSSS also contacted emergency services, news outlets, and taxi services to ensure all were aware of the correct warming centre address. This not only helped prevent people from showing up at Adina's home, but also helped ensure those seeking shelter from the cold were better able to secure it.

## Why This Matters

Sometimes little errors can have huge consequences that significantly impact peoples lives. In this case, the City negatively affected the lives of both Adina and her family, as well as everyone who came to her door in need of shelter, by mistakenly sharing Adina's address. When errors of this scale occur, the City must ensure its response adequately measures up. We made sure it made things right.



# Ensuring Timely Service: Securing a Refund After Years of Delay

## What Happened

Dinara reached out to us after waiting nearly two years for a significant refund from Toronto Hydro. Dinara expressed frustration at having to wait so long for money that was rightfully theirs.

## What We Did

Recognizing that Dinara had already waited for a considerable amount of time, we contacted Toronto Hydro right away to find out what had gone wrong and to help facilitate a resolution. We also reminded Toronto Hydro of the importance of timely service.

## The Result

After we spoke with Toronto Hydro, Dinara received a refund cheque — this time, within days of their inquiry to our office.

### Why This Matters

Not only can delays be extremely frustrating, but they are also unfair. We worked with Toronto Hydro to ensure it responded to Dinara and issued the refund in a timely manner.

“Thank you so very much. It has been very difficult to find someone to help with my situation. My deep appreciation to you for your understanding and kind concern.”

Member of the Public



# Sinking Service: Fixing a Damaged Front Lawn



## What Happened

Omar reached out to us with concerns about damage to their lawn after Toronto Water installed a water supply line and shut-off valve months earlier. They told us that Toronto Water had dug a significant hole on their property and that the area began to sink after the work was completed, creating a depression on their lawn where weeds started to grow. Frustrated, they contacted Toronto Water several times, but they were not able to come to a resolution.

## What We Did

We raised Omar's concerns with Toronto Water and worked to facilitate a resolution.

## The Result

Shortly after we spoke with Toronto Water, it sent two contractors to repair the damage to Omar's lawn.

### Why This Matters

We all make mistakes, including City staff. When those mistakes happen, it's important for the City to acknowledge and correct its errors. We worked with Toronto Water to make sure it fixed the damage it made to Omar's lawn.

# Sounding the Alarm: An Ongoing Investigation

## What Happened

Mathéo contacted our office with a complaint about the Toronto Paramedic Services (TPS). He told us that he had called an ambulance for his son, but one never came. After acknowledging the incident, TPS launched an investigation to understand what had gone wrong. Seven months later, Mathéo still had no new information. That is when he reached out to us.

## What We Did

We contacted TPS, who told us the investigation was not complete and therefore the report was not ready for release. We told Mathéo that we would monitor the status of the investigation, keep him informed throughout the process, and ensure he received the report as soon as it was complete.

## The Result

Within weeks of contacting our office, TPS finished its investigation. We made sure TPS shared the final report with Mathéo, who expressed his thanks for our help.

### Why This Matters

Delays in service can add anxiety to already stressful situations. We alleviated some of Mathéo's stress by monitoring the status of the investigation, keeping him updated along the way, and ultimately ensuring he received the final report.

“Thanks so much! I really appreciate the work of the Ombudsman.”

Member of the Public





# Silencing the Noise: Navigating By-laws

## What Happened

Arianna was frustrated with the service she received from Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS) by-law officers. She told us that after making calls to 311 about noise complaints in her condo building, she got in contact with by-law officers. However, Arianna did not feel that the by-law officers took the issue seriously, nor did she feel they had educated themselves about her previous 311 calls. Arianna told us that eventually the by-law officers stopped responding to her calls. Frustrated with the service she received and unsure where to raise her concerns, Arianna contacted us for help.

## What We Did

We provided Arianna with a link to MLS's complaints process to raise her concerns about the service she received from the by-law officers. We also referred her to the City's Manager of Noise Enforcement and the 311 Operations Manager. In addition, we explained how the City handles noise complaints and clarified the respective roles of by-law officers and the police in handling such issues. Specifically, we told Arianna that by-law officers can respond to persistent and reoccurring noise, but do not respond to complaints about isolated events that occur infrequently, such as parties or noise from disorderly conduct. Those complaints fall under the jurisdiction of the police.

## The Result

After speaking with our office, Arianna had the information she needed to escalate her concerns with the City and knew she could come back to our office for help if she was dissatisfied with its response.

## Why This Matters

Sometimes navigating an issue with the City can feel overwhelming. When someone comes to our office and doesn't know where to go to address their problem, we always try to refer them to the right place.



# Connecting Communities: Supporting Seniors through a Referral

## What Happened

Evangeline came to us with questions about City programs for seniors. She told us that she is an advocate for seniors and helps to ensure they have the support they need to stay engaged, informed, and employed. She noted that Durham Region had senior-specific programs but could not find any at the City. Concerned, she contacted us.

## What We Did

We referred Evangeline to the City's Equity Unit for more information on initiatives for seniors and informed her about the Toronto Seniors Strategy, which outlines the City's commitment to improving the well-being of seniors across Toronto.

## The Result

Evangeline appreciated the information we shared and said she was looking forward to learning more.

### Why This Matters

It is important to know about the available resources provided by your local government and that efforts are being made to ensure equitable access to City services. We helped connect Evangeline with the City's initiatives for and commitment to supporting seniors in Toronto.

“Thank you so much for viewing my email and showing concern about my complaint. I understand my concern doesn't fall under your jurisdiction, but at the same time I would like to thank you for the all the support you provided for further assistance.”

Member of the Public



# Communication Clarification: Providing Necessary Updates on Time

## What Happened

We heard from Lan, who had concerns about the status of their application for Rent-Geared-to-Income housing (Rent-Geared-to-Income or RGI is subsidized housing made available by the City to help make rent more affordable). Lan told us they had reached out to TCHC for a status update, but did not receive a response.

## What We Did

With Lan's consent, we contacted TCHC to confirm the status of their application and determine why they had not yet received a response. TCHC told us that Lan's application had been approved, but acknowledged there was a delay in communicating the result. We stressed the importance of timely communication.

## The Result

Shortly after we contacted TCHC, Lan received confirmation that their RGI application had been processed and approved.

## Why This Matters

Timely communication is a key aspect of fair service and delays can have a big impact. This is especially the case when it involves a person's ability to secure safe and affordable housing. We identified the source of the delay in TCHC's communications to Lan and helped ensure they received a quick response from TCHC.

“I have been calling the City for help, but just get the run around. In the end, I wrote to you, the Ombudsman, and was given a swift response. Thank you.”

Member of the Public



# An Opportunity to be Heard: Clarifying a City Decision

## What Happened

Li had done some construction on his house that damaged a tree on his neighbour's property. Staff from the City's Urban Forestry department conducted an inspection and found that the damage occurred within the official 'tree protection zone,' a protected area determined by the diameter of a tree. As a result, the City charged Li a \$790.63 fee. Li disagreed with the City's assessment.

After raising his concerns with the City and being dissatisfied with its response, Li came to our office. He told us that he had obtained his own assessment from an independent arborist who determined the tree was dangerous and needed to be removed. Because of this independent assessment, he did not feel that he should have to pay the fee.

## What We Did

We met with Li to gather more information. We also met with the City and reviewed the documentation it provided about its inspection and the City's response to Li. After reviewing all the information, we found the City's response to Li was satisfactory. This was because the City both provided Li with an opportunity to be heard and clearly explained its final decision, which included that the independent assessment Li obtained did not exclude the tree from protection.

## The Result

We let Li know that after looking into the matter, we did not find any fairness issues with the City's decision to charge him a fee related to the tree's damage.

## Why This Matters

Sometimes after gathering and considering all the available evidence, we find that the City's policies and procedures were, in fact, applied fairly. Regardless of whether we ultimately find unfairness or not, all people deserve to have their issues taken seriously and investigated objectively.



# Navigating Neighbour Concerns: Providing Avenues for Support

## What Happened

Haval contacted us on behalf of their mother, an 80-year-old widow with a heart condition. Haval was concerned about their mother's neighbours who Haval said often displayed aggressive behaviour and actively teased Haval's mother.

## What We Did

We empathized with Haval but confirmed that their concerns fell outside of the scope of the City administration, which meant we would be unable to look into the matter further. Instead, we referred Haval to the Toronto Police Service's non-emergency hotline to report their concerns about neighbour harassment. We also provided them with information about the services provided by 211 Ontario to assist them with their caregiving for seniors' needs.

## The Result

Haval thanked us for our help and for the referrals we provided, confirming they now had the information they needed to address their concerns and request community support.

## Why This Matters

It can be hard to know who the right person is to contact and where you should make your complaint. When we hear from people who contact us about an issue that is outside of our jurisdiction, we do our best to refer them to the right place to raise their concerns. When possible, we will also recommend avenues where you might receive additional support.

“Thank you so much for providing me the contacts to reach out to. That solves half the problem.”

Member of the Public



# Public Reports and Announcements in 2023

We release public reports after completing investigations into issues that are in the public interest. Our public reports — and the findings and recommendations the Ombudsman makes in them — improve City services for everyone and help hold the administration accountable for its actions. Since our office opened in 2009, our recommendations have been responsible for hundreds of lasting improvements to City systems and services.

*All public reports and announcements are available on our website at [ombudsmantoronto.ca](https://ombudsmantoronto.ca)*

# An Investigation into the City’s Clearing of Encampments

## The Issue

Toronto is experiencing a sharp increase in homelessness and housing precarity; more and more people are struggling to live with dignity and security. These issues — which are directly connected to the shortage of affordable housing — were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic and Toronto has seen a significant increase since March 2020 in the number, size, and visibility of encampments.

In the spring and summer of 2021, the City of Toronto cleared people who had been living in encampments in Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra, and Lamport Stadium Parks. This upset many members of the public, community groups, advocates, and outreach organizations who were concerned about the impact the City’s clearings were having on people living in encampments.

The City is responsible for treating its residents fairly and has a particularly high duty of care towards those navigating vulnerable situations, including people experiencing homelessness. It is against this backdrop that Ombudsman Addo began an investigation into the City’s clearing of encampments in Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra, and Lamport Stadium Parks.

## Our Investigation

Our investigation focused on how the City planned the encampment clearings, communicated and engaged with community members and the public, as well as the policies and procedures that guided its actions.

On July 14, 2022, we released an interim report in which we found issues with key City policies and processes that

are fundamental to the City’s work in encampments (see page 45 for more on our interim report). Our 2023 report, which builds on those findings and recommendations, completed our investigation.

## What We Did

Through interviews and document analysis, we conducted an extensive review of evidence gathered from the City and the public. We:

- Conducted 50 interviews, including 37 interviews with City staff from 10 divisions and 13 interviews with community workers who assist individuals experiencing housing precarity and homelessness.
- Spoke to 43 people with lived experience of encampments and homelessness.
- Received 54 complaints and submissions from members of the public.
- Reviewed over 11,000 documents from the City, including more than 4,600 staff emails.

## What We Found

Our investigation found that the City chose expediency over the needs of the individual: its focus on enforcement meant that it discounted the experiences of and impact on individuals in encampments. The overall result was significant unfairness in how the City planned, engaged, and communicated about the encampment clearings.

### Speed Over People

- The City treated its encampment clearing response as a top priority, but there was no evidence suggesting that encampments required that level of urgency.
- The team coordinating the City’s response prioritized speed. It had no previous involvement with encampments or delivering social supports, and City staff with that experience felt their advice was ignored.
- The City did not provide vital social services supports to help people transition out of the encampments. Mental health supports were not available, despite advice that they needed to be provided.

### Insufficient Engagement

- Despite the importance of hearing from people in encampments, the City’s engagement with them was inconsistent and often insufficient, sometimes viewing simply greeting someone as meaningful engagement.
- The City did not consider the unique needs and circumstances of the specific people living in encampments, including Indigenous peoples.
- There was mistrust between the City and people living in encampments, and a breakdown in the relationship between the City and community groups.

### Unclear Communication

- The City provided little information to the public about its process for clearing encampments, no information about how to make a complaint, and often repeated its key messages, which raised concerns about transparency.
- The City’s communication with people living in encampments was confusing, lacked transparency, and showed a lack of understanding about their reality.
- The City provided no dedicated onsite staff for people in encampments to speak with, even though it knew they had questions. These questions went unanswered.

## Our Recommendations

In addition to the 8 recommendations in our interim report, we made 23 in our final report — for a total of 31 recommendations — to ensure the City’s future actions are fair, transparent, and prioritize the wellbeing of those living in encampments.

Since the release of our final report, we have met quarterly with the City to receive updates on its implementation of our recommendations and to provide our feedback. We will continue to monitor the City’s implementation of these recommendations until we are satisfied that they are being successfully carried out.

“What the Ombudsman’s report has shown us is the way things were done was not right and that we must ensure that we’ve learned and that we do better. We must treat all Torontonians with respect and build a better path forward.”

City Councillor







# An Investigation into Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Tenant Human Rights Complaints Process

## The Issue

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is Toronto's publicly owned social housing provider and the largest social housing provider in Canada. The City of Toronto is its sole shareholder.

Over the last two years, we heard from several TCHC tenants about complaints involving their human rights. Based on these complaints, we were concerned that TCHC did not have a system in place to carefully assess and respond to the human rights needs of its tenants and that TCHC staff were potentially overlooking issues that involved the legal rights of tenants. Human rights are fundamental rights and TCHC has legal obligations under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* to respect them.

## Our Investigation

Our investigation looked at TCHC's process for handling tenants' human rights complaints. We assessed whether its human rights policies and procedures were clear, current, accessible, fair, and applied consistently. We also considered whether TCHC staff have the proper expertise to address human rights complaints.

## What We Did

As part of this investigation, we conducted 20 interviews with TCHC staff, external experts in human rights complaint handling, and other social housing providers. We also reviewed documents provided by TCHC or available on its website.

## What We Found

Our investigation found a number of fairness concerns with TCHC's process for addressing human rights complaints from its tenants, including that:

- TCHC shared incorrect and misleading information with its tenants about its human rights complaints process, including referring them to a human rights office that had not been active for several years.
- It had wildly out of date policies and procedures that disregarded major changes to Ontario's human rights system made in 2008.
- It did not provide proper training or the necessary resources to staff responsible for dealing with tenants' human rights.

As a result, TCHC tenants did not know where they should take their concerns about human rights and staff were unequipped to address them once they were identified.

## Our Recommendations

In response to our findings, we made 14 recommendations to ensure that TCHC maintains a housing environment where tenants' human rights are respected and protected. Before the report was released, we were pleased to see that TCHC had already made progress on the implementation of our recommendations. We will continue to monitor its actions until we are satisfied that our recommendations are being successfully carried out.

“Thank you so much for your dedication, passion, and hard work on this report. As a TCHC tenant myself, I couldn't be more grateful. TCHC tenants and vulnerable tenants have high hopes your detailed report will lead to changes that so many tenants will benefit from.”

Member of the Public

# Helping to Address the Housing Crisis through a New Housing Unit

## What Happened

As a part of the creation of its housing strategy in 2020, the City acknowledged that adequate housing is a human right and pledged to make Toronto a place where all people have access to housing that is safe, secure, and affordable.

In 2023, City Council approved the creation of a dedicated unit within our office to hold the City accountable to that commitment.

## Why It Matters

The housing crisis has reached dizzying heights in Toronto and across the world, with no signs of slowing down — leaving more and more people struggling to live with dignity and security.

Fixing it will take collaboration from all levels of government, innovative solutions, a commitment to meeting the needs of those most vulnerable to housing precarity, and importantly, real accountability.

## What the Unit Does

Led by a Deputy Ombudsman (Housing), the new unit oversees the City’s housing policies and programs to make sure they are fair. As a part of this work, the unit uses a human rights lens to investigate systemic discrimination and hurdles in the City’s planning and the delivery of its housing services. It also proactively engages with the public to best understand the housing-related challenges they are facing.

## The Impact

In the five months that the housing unit was active in 2023, we:

- Hired the full unit’s team — a group of seasoned investigators, public policy professionals, and administrative support.
- Launched the unit’s first investigation, a review of the City’s response to refugee claimants looking to access space in the City’s shelter system in the spring and summer of 2023.
- Connected with over 30 key external contacts, from members of Council to senior City leadership to advocates and service providers in the community.

## What’s Next

The momentum of these first five months was only the beginning and has continued into 2024. If you’d like to meet with the housing unit to learn more or to let us know about an issue you think we should be aware of, we encourage you to reach out at [ombudsman@toronto.ca](mailto:ombudsman@toronto.ca).

*See page 11 for more information on the housing unit.*

“The Ombudsman has given us some clear ideas about how we fix this urgent issue.”

City Councillor



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# Update on our Interim Report into the City’s Process for Clearing Encampments (2022 Report)

## What We Recommended

The City’s response to encampments, including its enforcement action, must be consistent and coordinated, following a well-established process that is transparent, and understood by all — City staff, the public, and encampment residents alike — and this work must be carried out by a team with a clear mandate.

With this in mind, we made eight recommendations in our interim report — which focused on how the City coordinates its response to encampments and encampment clearings — to increase the fairness, transparency, and accountability of the City’s response to encampments in parks.

- To ensure transparency, the City made detailed summaries of this feedback public in its report to the Economic Community Development Committee on May 29, 2024.
- The City created a new and detailed IDP, which incorporates the public’s feedback. This updated IDP will help guide its future response to encampments in Toronto.
- The City has assessed the resource and expertise needs of its Encampment Office and has clearly defined its mandate, role, and responsibilities.

## What Has Been Implemented

The City has completed all recommendations in our interim report. As a result:

- Members of the public had an opportunity to share their feedback on the City’s Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments (IDP) — formerly called the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces — which guides the City’s response to encampments.

“I’m so grateful, as so many people are, to the Ombudsman and his office for the extraordinary work that they did. For so many people, both the unhoused and their advocates, this is the first time that they’ve been heard by anybody in a position of authority to make any substantive change.”

City Councillor





# Improving the Fairness of City Services

Our work ranges from finding quick and practical solutions for individual problems to doing comprehensive deep dives into issues of public concern. On issues big and small, our work impacts the daily lives of people in Toronto and improves City services for us all.

## Here is a glimpse at some of the ways we helped make Toronto more fair in 2023:

- Janine was having trouble getting a refund from the City's Committee of Adjustment (COA). We helped her receive her rightful refund and recommended larger system changes within the COA, ensuring better service for the public in the future.
- Hader received a parking ticket that he didn't think was fair. He wanted to dispute it with the City but couldn't figure out how to do that. We gave Hader contact information for someone at the City who he could speak to about his concerns.
- Despite contacting Revenue Services several times, Cheyenne was unable to get someone to call her back. We repaired the communication breakdown by ensuring Revenue Services contacted Cheyenne to answer her property tax questions.
- Chen's basement was flooding, and he needed help getting the City to repair the leak. We worked with Toronto Water to pin down the problem and have it repaired.
- Yeva contacted our office after receiving countless incorrect referrals to different City divisions — they were tired of feeling like the City was giving them the runaround. We listened to Yeva, identified that their issue had to do with Transportation Services, and provided the correct referral.
- Amayra had concerns about the conditions at the City-run shelter where she and her four children were staying. We helped get Amayra and her family transferred to a different shelter that better fit her family's needs.
- All people, even City staff, deserve to be treated fairly. We worked with several City Divisions to ensure their staff have the knowledge, tools, and guidance required to continue delivering fair service, despite dealing with challenging or difficult behaviour.

*\*All names have been changed to protect people's privacy.*

# Working Together

“I am extremely grateful for your work on this file and for your integrity throughout the process. I’m looking forward to continuing to advance this work with the guidance of your office. Thank you again for all of your hard work.”

City Staff Member





# Consulting with City Staff

Our team proactively consults with the City of Toronto on a range of topics to improve its policies, programs, and services. In 2023, we conducted 20 consultations with City leaders and divisions.

## Here is a small sample of how we helped:

- We provided 311 Toronto with feedback on its new complaints process, which aims to streamline complaints to the City for various divisions, including Toronto Water, Transportation Services, Municipal Licensing & Standards, Animal Services, and 311.
- We worked with the City Manager's Office to create one centralized tool to help the public navigate the different City tribunal complaints processes, making it easier for members of the public to make a complaint.
- We helped the City's Newcomer Office enhance the fairness of its complaints processes for AccessTO and undocumented Torontonians.

We always welcome requests for consultations from City staff and will continue to work constructively with the City to promote fairness in the delivery of its services.

“I would like to sincerely thank you for the time you and your staff have taken in reviewing this matter. It has triggered very important discussions within our team to ensure our processes are clear, transparent and understandable.”

City Staff Member



# Meaningfully Engaging with People Across Toronto

One of our key priorities at Ombudsman Toronto is to make sure that anyone who needs our services knows how to access them — connecting with and hearing from the public is fundamental to that work.

Throughout 2023, we met with many individuals and organizations who are creating positive change in their communities. This work included 111 engagement sessions, an increase of 35% from last year and 48% over our yearly target. To all those who took the time to meet with us, thank you. We extend our sincerest gratitude for the time and knowledge you shared with us.

As we continue this work, we understand that true engagement involves ongoing conversations, listening, and (un)learning. We remain committed to proactively building trust with people and their communities through consistent and intentional work. This work includes,

but is not limited to, unlearning harmful policies and beliefs that have become normalized, listening to the experiences of people in Toronto and applying what we've been told to our work, and making our services as accessible as possible.

By prioritizing relationship-building and proactively engaging with people throughout the city — with a particular focus on reaching people from equity-deserving groups and people who may experience higher barriers to accessing City services — we are actively choosing not to wait for problems to come to us.

*If you wish to meet with our office or learn more, we encourage you to contact us at [ombudsmancomms@toronto.ca](mailto:ombudsmancomms@toronto.ca)*

“Thank you for speaking with us today. It was an informative, engaging, and very beneficial session!”

Member of the Public

# Our Financials

Ombudsman Toronto's operating budget allocation approved by City Council was \$3.6 million for the year ending December 31, 2023.

An external audit firm conducts a compliance audit of Ombudsman Toronto annually.

All unused funds are returned to the City Treasury.







# Our Team

At Ombudsman Toronto, we are proud to dedicate each day to improving City of Toronto services for everyone. From our complaints and investigation staff to our research, administrative, and communications team members, we all believe in the importance of a fair, equitable, and accountable municipal government and are grateful to the members of the public who entrust us with this vital work.

“It is both an honour and a privilege to do the work we do at Ombudsman Toronto, and it’s a responsibility that my team and I do not take lightly. As we look ahead, our commitment to a fair City government is stronger than ever before.”

Ombudsman Kwame Addo








Ombudsman  
Toronto

Making sure  
the City of Toronto  
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