

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Ombudsman
Toronto

ombudsmantoronto.ca

Land Acknowledgement

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.

African Ancestral Acknowledgement

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.



Table of Contents

- From Toronto’s Ombudsman 1
- Our Work 5
- Case Stories.....11
- Creating Systemic Change 29
 - Investigation Reports 31
- Our Impact 39
- Our Numbers 41
- Working Together 47
 - Engaging with Community 49
 - Consulting with the City 51
- Our Team 53
- Our Financials 54

From Toronto's Ombudsman



“Thank you for taking the time to chat.... Your insight and considerations are tremendously valuable as we determine our next steps in supporting the client”

— SENIOR CITY STAFF MEMBER

Change pushes us beyond our comfort zones, but it's how real progress happens. The City of Toronto must keep evolving, with fairness, integrity, and purpose, so that Toronto is a place where everyone can thrive.

In 2024, the call for change grew more urgent and visible. Ombudsman Toronto received more complaints than ever before, a reflection of the increasing complexity of city life and the ongoing demand for accountability in local government. We heard from people across Toronto — each story a reminder of the human impact of municipal decisions.

We delivered on the two new areas of responsibility that Toronto City Council added to our mandate — the most significant additions since we opened our doors more than 15 years ago. Ombudsman Toronto's Housing Unit released its first investigation, which examined the City's refusal to allow refugee claimants access to its base shelter system. We also completed our first investigation of the Toronto Police Service, focusing on its Vulnerable Persons Registry.

STANDING UP FOR FAIRNESS IN HOUSING

Our housing investigation found that referring refugee claimants to federal services — services that did not provide temporary shelter — was ineffective and harmful. City staff could not clearly identify who made the decision to prevent refugees from accessing the base shelter system. The decision was also inconsistent with City policies, including the Housing Charter and the Toronto Shelter Standards, and a clear instance of systemic discrimination on the basis of citizenship and race, specifically, anti-Black racism.

Our report on the shelter system faced opposition from the public service. At its December 2024 meeting, Council simply received the report for information without debate and did not direct City staff to implement its recommendations. Despite the City's response, we stand by our findings because they are rooted in fact.

After months of continued calls from community members and stakeholders who supported our report, City Council then held a public debate and unanimously adopted a motion incorporating essentially all our recommendations. This outcome demonstrates the power of collective effort and underscores the critical role Ombudsman Toronto plays in promoting fairness.

BUILDING TRUST IN PUBLIC SAFETY

We released our investigation report into how the Toronto Police Service manages its Vulnerable Persons Registry. This vital program is designed to protect and support some of the city's most vulnerable residents by helping police respond appropriately in crises. We found a lack of transparency and consistency in how police communicated about the Registry — both to the public and internally — which risked undermining the program's effectiveness.

Why does this matter? Because trust plays a key role in whether people feel comfortable participating in programs like these. If people are unsure how their personal information is used or whether officers understand a resource like this, they may hesitate to participate. That hesitation can leave vulnerable individuals without support in times of crisis.

Our recommendations aim to improve communication and accountability, so people can make informed decisions about using the Registry, and officers receive proper training to ensure the program works as intended. The Toronto Police Service accepted all our recommendations — a positive step towards improving the program that addresses a clear need in our city.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

This annual report is more than a summary of complaints and investigations. It is how we hold ourselves accountable to both City Council and to the people of Toronto. Behind every statistic is a person — a neighbour, a family, a community — whose life has been touched by our work. These are the stories that drive us forward.

We encourage you to read them. See the people behind the numbers. Understand why fairness in local government matters — not just in principle, but in practice.

LOOKING AHEAD WITH PURPOSE

I extend my sincere thanks to the residents of Toronto who trusted us, to the community organizations that welcomed our presence, and to the public servants who share our vision of an equitable Toronto and work daily to uphold it.

And finally, I commend the dedicated staff of Ombudsman Toronto, who strive every day to make sure the City of Toronto treats people fairly.

It is a privilege to serve as Toronto's Ombudsman. I look ahead with purpose and hope, knowing that progress is possible — and that fairness must always be at the heart of it.



Kwame Addo

What is an Ombudsman?

Om • buds • man

An Ombudsman helps ensure fairness between people and a government. An Ombudsman handles complaints in an impartial, confidential, and independent manner. An Ombudsman is neutral – they aren't an advocate for the person making the complaint, or for the government being complained about.

Ombudsman Toronto continually asks the question:
What does fairness at the City of Toronto look like?

This questioning helps the City of Toronto move forward to ensure all Torontonians are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Our Work



“We want to thank you too for taking your time chatting with us and most importantly the work you are doing, holding the City of Toronto accountable to the people you serve.”

— COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

WHO WE ARE

At Ombudsman Toronto, we are dedicated to ensuring fairness and accountability by the City of Toronto. Local government decisions impact many parts of our daily lives, from housing and transit, to public health and recreation.

When fairness falls short, the consequences can be significant. Our role is to investigate complaints from individuals who feel that they have been treated unfairly when they tried to resolve their issue with the City. We strive to move the City forward on issues of fairness, accountability, and equity. We are an independent, impartial office offering confidential and free services to anyone needing assistance.

HOW WE HELP

We hold the City to account by:

- **Listening to residents** and investigating their complaints about the City of Toronto
- **Providing advice** to residents and helping to resolve their disputes with the City
- **Shining a light on** systemic barriers Torontonians are facing
- **Making recommendations** to ensure concrete, significant improvements in City governance

If we find the City has acted unfairly, we provide clear and practical recommendations to resolve the issue and improve services. Our work — whether addressing individual complaints or larger systemic problems — creates meaningful change for the people of Toronto.

WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT

Anyone who has come into contact with City services can ask us for help – you do not need to be a resident of Toronto. We also accept complaints made on behalf of someone else with their permission, and we have access to translation services to serve you better.

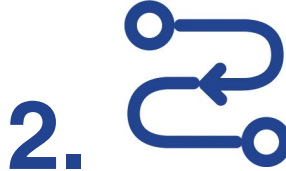
Our Complaints Process



1.

Contact the City

First, raise your concern with the relevant City division, agency, board, or corporation. Contact 311 Toronto if you are unsure where to begin.



2.

Review the City's Response

Follow the City's complaints process and await a final response. If issues arise, you may contact us for guidance.



3.

Make Your Complaint

If you are unsatisfied with the final response, reach out to us by phone, email, in person, or via our online form. Your complaint will remain confidential – we will not contact the City without your express consent.



4.

Understanding Your Complaint

We'll contact you to discuss your concern. If we cannot help you because you have not received a final decision from the City about your complaint, or if it falls outside of our jurisdiction, we will provide a referral where possible.



5.

Gathering Information

We will seek your consent to speak with the City and keep you informed throughout the process.



6.

Our Findings

Once we finish our review, we will explain our findings, actions, and recommendations to you.

OUR SCOPE

We oversee all City divisions and most City agencies, boards, and corporations. City services within our scope include:

- animal services
- building permits
- bylaw enforcement
- City-run childcare centres
- distribution of electricity
- fire safety
- garbage and recycling
- City-run long-term care homes
- parking disputes
- parks and recreation
- Toronto Police policies, procedures, and practices
- property standards
- property tax
- roads, sidewalks, and bike lanes
- shelters
- City-run social housing and housing waitlists
- administration of some social services
- transit
- water service and bills
- winter road and sidewalk maintenance

A full list of who we oversee is available at ombudsmantoronto.ca/who-we-oversee/.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT FROM YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

You deserve to be treated fairly when engaging with the City. You should expect:

- **Clarity:** Easy-to-understand information about the rules and how they apply to your situation
- **Responsiveness:** The chance to be heard when decisions or services affect you
- **Timeliness:** Services delivered within a reasonable timeframe
- **Respect:** To be treated with dignity and care in every interaction
- **Accessibility:** Services that consider and meet your needs
- **Transparency:** Clear explanations of decisions that affect you

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM OMBUDSMAN TORONTO

We hold the City of Toronto accountable to make sure it treats you fairly. When you reach out to us, you can expect:

- **Impartiality:** We do not take sides
- **Guidance:** We offer referrals to other resources when helpful
- **Accessibility:** We provide translation services in more than 120 languages
- **Transparency:** We explain our process and how we reach our decisions, including our findings and recommendations
- **Accountability:** We identify unfairness and develop practical solutions to resolve it

Our Housing Unit

Since its opening in 2009, Ombudsman Toronto has worked to ensure transparency and fairness in housing matters. Now that the Housing Unit is firmly established, we have a focused mandate to assess how the City uses a human rights-based approach to implement its housing plans.

Beyond fairness, we also hold the City accountable to honouring its commitment to advancing the right to adequate housing. While the City can't solve the housing crisis overnight or on its own, it must use every available resource to do what it can. Through the Housing Unit's work, we will help ensure accountability every step of the way.

To fulfil our Housing Unit's mandate, we:

- **Investigate:** Carry out systemic investigations and systems reviews, and make recommendations to help the City fulfil its housing rights obligations
- **Advocate:** Aim for change at a systems level for the right to adequate housing
- **Collaborate:** Develop and sustain relationships with the broader housing rights community through meaningful and ongoing discussions, learning, and information-sharing
- **Engage:** Connect with people with lived experience of housing instability and homelessness; community leaders, advocates and organizations; and all orders of government to listen and learn, identify systemic issues, and share information and best practices
- **Consult:** Offer advice and act as a sounding board for City staff on policy and program development and implementation

“Once again, thank you for your thoughtful feedback. It has really helped strengthen our work.”

— CITY STAFF

“More than my thanks, the Ombudsman’s office undoubtedly prevented some very serious illnesses among shelter residents and staff and possibly some deaths. The highest achievement that any government office can do.”

— MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

OUR PROGRESS

Since the Housing Unit’s inception in July 2023, we have:

- **Hired Leadership and Team:** Appointed Toronto's first Deputy Ombudsman (Housing) and built a dedicated and specialized team
- **Operationalized:** Established the necessary framework and processes for effective operation
- **Launched Investigations:** Initiated two major systemic investigations into critical housing issues
- **Provided Consultations:** Offered advice to City staff on nine different files, enhancing the delivery of housing services
- **Engaged with Community and Others:** Learned from more than 215 individuals, including members of community organizations, people with lived experience of housing precarity and homelessness, advocates, provincial and federal housing organizations, members of City Council, and City staff
- **Developed New Tools:** Using the Toronto Housing Charter, created a Housing Rights Framework to guide our investigations into the City’s commitment to realizing the right to adequate housing

WHAT WE’VE HEARD

We continue to engage in conversations with the public to learn about matters affecting people most impacted by housing instability and homelessness. Identifying these issues helps us decide what to investigate. Some of the concerns we heard about in 2024 include:

- Shelter conditions
- Difficulties with using the City's online portal called MyAccessToHousingTO to get access to rent-geared-to-income housing
- Landlords’ responsibilities for repairing and maintaining buildings
- The process for the demolition and replacement of rental units

Case Stories



“Thank you for your prompt response to my inquiry. I really appreciate provided information that hopefully will help me navigate the next steps.”

— MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Every day, people turn to us when they believe they have been treated unfairly by the City of Toronto. While much of our work happens behind the scenes — confidentially and impartially — these case stories offer insight into the types of complaints we look into and how we help improve fairness in the City’s systems and services.

Here is a selection of the complaints we handled last year.

All names have been changed to protect privacy. Photos are for illustrative purposes only.

“Thanks to your recommendations things started moving. I escalated and this resulted in my listing being reactivated. Thanks for your help and for explaining the process to me.”

— MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

PREVENTED TENANT'S EVICTION BY IDENTIFYING ERRORS IN CITY'S DENIAL OF EVICTION PREVENTION PROGRAM FUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

We heard from Amelia, a senior trans woman with a disability facing eviction due to rental arrears that built up during an unexpected disruption in her income. Amelia rents a condo conveniently located close to her health care providers and a food bank that she uses daily. Amelia applied for a one-time grant from the City's Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) Program to pay off the arrears but was denied. Dissatisfied with the handling of her funding request, Amelia contacted us.

WHAT WE DID

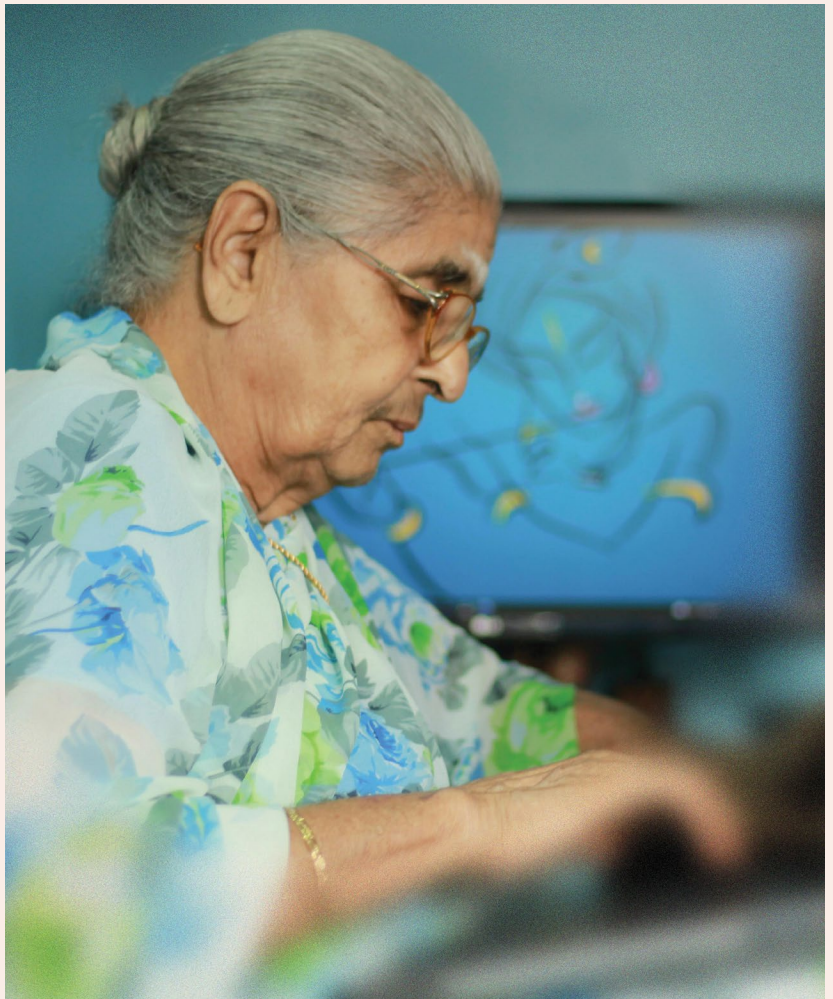
We identified several fairness and right-to-housing concerns with how the EPIC Program handled Amelia's funding request. For example, decisions were not well-reasoned or sufficiently explained. After we brought these concerns to the City, EPIC agreed to reassess her request for financial support.

THE RESULT

EPIC approved Amelia's funding request, agreeing to pay off the full amount of her arrears so that she will no longer be at risk for eviction.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Stable and secure housing is essential for vulnerable tenants. By ensuring a fair review of Amelia's funding request, we helped her access the financial support she needed to preserve her housing and all the benefits that come with it: affordability, accessibility, and proximity to essential services that meet her daily needs.



ENSURED TIMELY COMMUNICATION OF PROPERTY TAX BILLS TO HOMEOWNER

WHAT HAPPENED

When Imani bought a new condo, they expected to receive their property tax bills from the City's Revenue Services division in the mail. However, for all of 2022, no bills arrived. Despite escalating the issue with Revenue Services, Imani didn't receive a response for over a month, leaving them frustrated and unsure of the next steps. Imani reached out to us for help.

WHAT WE DID

We contacted Revenue Services, bringing their lack of response to light. The Customer Service Manager assured us she would reach out to Imani directly to address and resolve the issue.

THE RESULT

Shortly after our intervention, the Customer Service Manager contacted Imani to discuss and work towards resolving the billing issue. We also let Imani know they could return to our office if they didn't receive a satisfactory resolution.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Fairness requires timely communication. When delays happen, we step in to ensure residents aren't left waiting indefinitely for essential services. We help bridge communication gaps in order to ensure the City addresses residents' concerns promptly and thoroughly.



PROVIDED ELDERLY SIBLINGS WITH CLARITY ON A CITY DECISION

WHAT HAPPENED

Two elderly siblings became unhoused after being evicted from a private rental apartment. While living in a City-run hotel shelter and searching for a permanent home, they became dissatisfied with the options offered by the Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) division, and reached out to us for support.

WHAT WE DID

We reviewed TSSS' communication with the siblings, which listed the various shelter and housing offers it made to them. The siblings had declined all the City's offers. We also consulted with the Housing Secretariat to see if additional supports were available to the siblings.

THE RESULT

We found that the City's response to the siblings was appropriate, and we encouraged the siblings to accept the available temporary housing TSSS offered.

WHY THIS MATTERS

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



IMPROVED TRANSPARENCY IN TSHC'S COMMUNICATION TO SENIOR TENANT

WHAT HAPPENED

Frank lives in a Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation (TSHC) building. He complained that a TSHC employee had harassed him, and believed TSHC had not taken action in response to his complaint. He expressed frustration about being restricted from accessing areas of his building.



WHAT WE DID

Our office reviewed TSHC's handling of the complaint and found that while TSHC had investigated Frank's complaint, their communication with him lacked sufficient detail. TSHC did not provide Frank with enough information to understand the process TSHC followed, the outcome of his complaint, or the reasons for that result. We acknowledge some human resources matters must stay private; while TSHC must comply with legal and privacy requirements, residents should receive clear explanations of what was done and why.

We suggested that TSHC improve their outcome letters by including:

- A brief summary of the complaint
- The process and steps taken by TSHC
- A clearly communicated decision or outcome, including any findings made, subject to legal/privacy requirements
- The reasons for the decision or outcome

- Options for the complainant if they wish to dispute the decision
- Any appropriate resources or supports available to the complainant, including relevant referrals

THE RESULT

TSHC accepted our suggestions. A manager informed us that TSHC will determine how they can support staff with standardized letters and templates to guide responses to tenant complaints.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Transparency means clearly communicating how a complaint is handled and explaining the reasons for the outcome as fully as possible, even when some details must be withheld due to privacy concerns. Our work made systemic improvements that will benefit other TSHC tenants in the future.



HELPED CITY USE PLAIN LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATION ABOUT SHORT-TERM RENTAL REGISTRATION

WHAT HAPPENED

Wanting to rent out his home on a temporary basis, Tenzin applied for a short-term rental (STR) registration after having his previous registration revoked the year before. When his application was denied, he struggled to understand the reasons behind the decision.

WHAT WE DID

We contacted Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS), the division responsible for STR registrations, requesting that they provide plain-language, clear reasons for denying his application.

THE RESULT

A staff member from MLS called Tenzin to explain the reasons for the denial, clarified the registration process, and addressed his questions. They also provided him with the 'Good Operator Guide,' which details the latest

updates to the STR bylaw. Tenzin told the staff member he appreciated the clarity that was provided.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Clear communication is essential to fairness. By encouraging MLS to provide transparent explanations, we helped reduce confusion and frustration for Tenzin, fostering a better understanding of the STR registration process.

ENSURED PROPER HANDLING OF TCHC TENANT'S ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

WHAT HAPPENED

Leo filed an internal human rights complaint regarding the accommodation of his disabilities and the storage of his electric bicycle at his Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) building.

WHAT WE DID

We facilitated a meeting between Leo and TCHC management, leading to a resolution regarding vehicle storage. We also assisted Leo with his request that TCHC reconsider the outcome of his internal human rights complaint. TCHC's initial decision letter on the complaint found it to be unsubstantiated, but after Leo requested reconsideration, TCHC acknowledged an error in its initial decision letter.

THE RESULT

TCHC found the internal human rights complaint to be, in part, valid, since it had failed to accommodate Leo's disability in one specific instance.

WHY THIS MATTERS

We help tenants navigate the complex processes required to uphold their accessibility rights. Our work helped ensure that TCHC corrected its handling of Leo's accommodation needs.

WORKED WITH TESS TO MEET CLIENT'S COMMUNICATION NEEDS

WHAT HAPPENED

Xiu, who receives Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits, contacted us for help coordinating her benefits. She reported that her caseworker refused to assist her and ignored her request for accessibility accommodations.

WHAT WE DID

We provided Xiu with the appropriate escalation contact at Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS). She requested an accommodation that TESS communicate with her by email. However, the division does not communicate via email due to privacy concerns. With Xiu's consent, we contacted TESS management on her behalf. TESS reviewed her file and confirmed she was eligible to coordinate her benefits but had not completed her OW application. We then worked with TESS to figure out the best way to meet her needs while protecting the privacy of her information.

THE RESULT

A caseworker reached out to Xiu the next day by email, in line with Xiu's accommodation request. Not only were Xiu's issues resolved, but our office is also actively working with TESS and the City's Corporate Information Management Services office to improve communication policies and processes at TESS.

WHY THIS MATTERS

We work with City divisions to identify and address barriers that make services less accessible. Our ongoing discussions with TESS aim to improve communication policies, ensuring residents can access the support they need in ways that work for them. By collaborating with City staff and using real cases to highlight systemic issues, we help drive meaningful changes that benefit the broader community.





IMPROVED TRANSPARENCY IN CITY'S COMMUNICATIONS

WHAT HAPPENED

A housing support worker contacted us on behalf of their client, Bellamy, who was applying for the Special Priority Program for rent-geared-to-income housing through Access to Housing, a unit within the Housing Secretariat. Special Priority status is given to individuals who live with their abuser and experience intimate partner violence. If granted Special Priority, individuals are placed ahead of non-priority applicants on Toronto's Centralized Waiting List for subsidized housing, expediting their ability to leave the abusive situation permanently. The internal review body denied Bellamy's application. However, the denial letter did not explain the reasons behind the final decision.

WHAT WE DID

We raised concerns with the City's Access to Housing unit about the lack of clarity and transparency in the letter communicating the final decision. We emphasized the importance of clear communication, especially in sensitive cases like this one.

THE RESULT

The Access to Housing unit agreed to revise the outcome letter to provide clearer and more transparent reasons for the denial. They also offered Bellamy another opportunity to expand on their initial application and reapply and supported them in strengthening their application. Additionally, the Access to Housing unit indicated they would consider making their internal review processes more transparent.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Clear and transparent communication is critical to fair decision-making and helping vulnerable residents navigate complex systems. By ensuring the Access to Housing unit provided accurate information about how the application did not meet the criteria, and an opportunity for Bellamy to expand on their case, we helped promote fairness in the City's processes.



IMPROVED ACCESS TO CRITICAL EVICTION PREVENTION INFORMATION

WHAT HAPPENED

In an inquiry initiated by Ombudsman Toronto's Housing Unit, we identified the need for 311 to provide callers who have eviction-related questions accurate information about the City's handbook on preventing evictions.

WHAT WE DID

We are working with 311 to update their Knowledge Base, which contains information about City divisions and services. Additionally, we are addressing broader challenges related to ensuring 311 staff are familiar with the new information and collaborating with the team to find solutions.

THE RESULT

We continue to work with 311 to ensure that the City's handbook on preventing evictions reaches as many callers as possible.

WHY THIS MATTERS

For many tenants, 311 is a key point of contact when facing housing challenges, including eviction. Ensuring that 311 staff provide clear, accurate, and accessible information helps callers connect with the City's eviction prevention resources at a critical time. By proactively identifying and addressing this gap, we support efforts to improve access to information that may help tenants understand their rights and options.

PROVIDED GUIDANCE ON NAVIGATING A CONCERN OUTSIDE OUR JURISDICTION

WHAT HAPPENED

Luca contacted our office with concerns about the judging procedures at a Toronto festival run by an independent non-profit organization. His granddaughter was initially announced as the winner but was later tied for first place. He claimed this caused her emotional and financial stress.

WHAT WE DID

We contacted the Economic Development & Culture (EDC) division for more information about the City's role in the festival. The EDC Cultural Events Manager explained that the City only plays a role if the complaint relates to funding; otherwise, the City does not get involved in the festival's operations. We gathered information about the festival's complaints process and obtained the organizer's contact information.

We contacted Luca to explain the steps we had taken and clarified the City's limited role in this matter. During our conversation, Luca expressed additional concerns about the festival's use of City funds. We explained our process for handling such concerns and informed him that he would need to bring the complaint to EDC and get a final response before bringing his complaint to our office. At his request, we followed up with an email providing the relevant contact information and outlined the next steps for submitting a funding-related complaint to EDC.

THE RESULT

We informed Luca of the City's role and our jurisdiction regarding the festival's judging

procedures. While his funding-related concerns were premature to our office, we provided him with the necessary information to pursue this route if he chose to.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Even when a complaint falls outside our jurisdiction, we take steps to help residents navigate the appropriate processes. We help to clarify the City's role and connect people with the right resources.





HELPED CITY DEVELOP EQUITABLE APPROACH TO TAX ARREARS PAYMENT PLANS

WHAT HAPPENED

We can examine issues even without receiving a formal complaint. In this case, we identified shortcomings in the Revenue Services division's process for collecting tax arrears.

WHAT WE DID

We encouraged Revenue Services to adopt a human rights-based approach in their collections process. This included considering each person's unique needs when offering repayment plans.

THE RESULT

Revenue Services agreed to address this issue in their new collections policy.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Incorporating a human rights and equity-based lens into program design is essential to ensuring that all individuals receive fair, supportive service, particularly those facing financial barriers that can impact their ability to stay housed.

ENSURED ADEQUATE INVESTIGATION OF EXCESSIVE NOISE FROM ELEVATORS IN TENANT'S BUILDING

WHAT HAPPENED

Susan is a senior living with disabilities who has lived in a high-rise rental apartment since 2011. She reported that the elevators in her building make excessive noise, which worsens her health conditions and disrupts her sleep. In 2021, she reported the issue to RentSafeTO, a bylaw enforcement program in the City's Municipal Licensing & Standards division (MLS) that ensures apartment building owners and operators comply with building maintenance standards. Susan felt their response was inadequate. She later came to our office alleging that RentSafeTO inspectors had been negligent and improperly closed her complaint.

WHAT WE DID

We reviewed Susan's case and found that RentSafeTO had not adequately investigated her complaint and that its reason for closing her complaint was unclear. We provided feedback and recommendations to MLS on how to address the issue fairly and appropriately.

THE RESULT

We worked with MLS to develop a fair and reasonable plan to respond to Susan's concerns. While Susan reports that the noise continues, we are satisfied that RentSafeTO has now taken the necessary steps to address her complaint.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Everyone deserves to feel safe and comfortable in their home. By reviewing Susan's complaint and working with RentSafeTO to take appropriate action, we helped ensure that concerns about building conditions are handled fairly and in line with City rules.



HELPED TORONTO HYDRO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION IN ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

WHAT HAPPENED

Adya disagreed with the proposed placement of Toronto Hydro equipment near her home, citing a medical condition that makes her extremely sensitive to noise. Adya submitted a medical accommodation request to Toronto Hydro, but after several months without a response, she became concerned. Adya frequently observed Toronto Hydro contractors working near her home and worried her accommodation request was being ignored.

WHAT WE DID

We confirmed with Toronto Hydro that they were still considering her accommodation request. We requested that they contact Adya directly to confirm to her that they were continuing to review her request and would contact her again when they made a final decision. We followed up with Toronto Hydro about the results of their review. We also advised Adya to discuss potential next steps with her lawyer, considering her complaint involved a request for accommodation under the Human Rights Code. Adya indicated she would follow up with her lawyer and she was encouraged to contact our office again if she experienced further delays.

THE RESULT

After our prompting, Toronto Hydro communicated to Adya that they decided to move the location of the equipment further away from her home. Adya expressed gratitude for our intervention.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Fair treatment requires that the City consider peoples' individual needs and circumstances and explore all possible solutions to an issue. We worked with Toronto Hydro to ensure it did just that for Adya.



PROVIDED GUIDANCE TO HOMEOWNER IN NAVIGATING TREE PLANTING CONCERN

WHAT HAPPENED

Shabina contacted us on behalf of her father who owns a rental property in Etobicoke. Shabina explained that the City planted a tree on the property without her father's knowledge. When she called 311, they told her that the City's Urban Forestry office would follow up. The next day, Urban Forestry contacted her and explained that a notice was sent in March advising that the tree would be planted. Shabina said her family never received the notice, and when she escalated her concerns, a Tree Planting Supervisor told her they would have to pay for a permit to remove the tree if it was healthy. Shabina thought it was unfair to pay for removing a tree they had not consented to.

WHAT WE DID

We explained our role and process — that we are an office of last resort and would only step in after the City's complaints process was fully engaged. We recommended that Shabina escalate her complaint with the City and provided her with contact information for the appropriate staff.

THE RESULT

Shabina thanked us for being patient and listening to her concerns. She said she would wait for the Tree Planting Supervisor's inspection and escalate if needed. She knew we were available to assist if she encountered any communication issues.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Sometimes people contact our office while the City's complaints process is still underway because they are anxious about not being heard. We listen to their concerns, offer guidance, and provide information to help them navigate the process.



FACILITATED BETTER COMMUNICATION TO MEET NEEDS OF TCHC TENANT

WHAT HAPPENED

Dolores, who is disabled and completely housebound, contacted our office after struggling for more than two months to get a response from Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to her requests for a re-inspection of her unit to show that she had taken corrective action by clearing out clutter. Her requests for re-inspection went unscheduled.

WHAT WE DID

We reached out to TCHC, and they contacted Dolores immediately. We ensured that TCHC updated Dolores about the re-inspection of her unit.

THE RESULT

Thanks to our involvement, Dolores finally received the responses and support she had been seeking.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Timely communication is a key aspect of fair service and delays can have a big impact. We helped ensure Dolores received the attention and care she needed, reinforcing the importance of responsiveness and fair treatment.



HELPED EXPEDITE CASE FOR SHELTER CLIENT WITH MOBILITY ACCOMMODATION NEEDS

WHAT HAPPENED

Noah and their partner were denied access to a shelter because Noah's partner required a walker for mobility support. This was surprising to them, as they had previously stayed at the same shelter without any issues. Toronto Shelter & Support Services' (TSSS) Central Intake was aware of their accommodation needs, and the couple was waiting for a new placement. Frustrated with how long the process was taking, they contacted us.

WHAT WE DID

Our office confirmed that Noah and their partner were staying in a safe place while waiting for a shelter placement. We then facilitated an escalation by making a direct referral to a senior TSSS staff member to review their shelter placement and ensure TSSS considered the couple's accommodation needs.

THE RESULT

Noah expressed gratitude for our support and later called back to confirm that their case was being expedited. They appreciated the information and intervention.



WHY THIS MATTERS

It is critical for the City to properly consider accommodations. We helped ensure that the City addressed their accommodation needs appropriately.

Creating Systemic Change

INVESTIGATION REPORTS IN 2024

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.

“We are immensely grateful for your leadership, integrity, and the dedication demonstrated by you and your team. Your presence and advocacy at City Council yesterday underscored the critical importance of upholding human rights in Toronto”

— COMMUNITY LEADER

All public reports and announcements are available on our website at ombudsmantoronto.ca.



An Investigation Into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants Into Base Shelter System Beds

THE ISSUE

In November 2022, the City of Toronto decided to stop allowing refugee claimants access to its base shelter system beds. The City made this decision public in May 2023 and said it would redirect refugee claimants to federal services.

OUR INVESTIGATION

We looked at the specific decision to stop allowing refugee claimants access to base shelter beds. We investigated to determine:

- How, when, and why this decision was made
- Whether the shelter eligibility change was fair, transparent, and demonstrated accountability
- Whether the shelter eligibility change was consistent with relevant City policies
- Whether the change was in line with the City's commitments to realize the right to adequate housing
- The impact the change had on refugee claimants

We:

- Reviewed the actions and decisions of several City divisions, including Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS), Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA), the Office of the Deputy City Manager to whom TSSS reports, and the City Manager's Office
- Reviewed thousands of emails and documents

- Interviewed more than 70 people including: two members of City Council, 19 refugee claimants, 28 members of City staff, and many members of the public who were providing services, facilities, and shelter to refugee claimants
- Visited three churches providing makeshift shelter to refugee claimants, and one program that specializes in providing shelter to refugee claimants
- Examined and analyzed relevant laws and policies

OUR FINDINGS

Our investigation uncovered several critical issues with the City's shelter eligibility change, including:

- **Inconsistency with City policies:** The eligibility change went against key City policies meant to ensure universal access to services. Refugee claimants were not told why they were being asked about their immigration status.
- **Unhelpful referrals and harmful impacts:** The City referred refugee claimants to federal services that City staff knew did not provide temporary shelter. Some were turned away from City shelters even when a bed was available.
- **A lack of accountability:** The decision lacked proper documentation, leaving no clear record of who approved it or why.
- **Systemic discrimination:** The decision amounted to systemic discrimination based on citizenship and race — specifically, anti-Black racism. Most of the refugee claimants affected were of African descent and Black, information about which the City was aware.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We made 14 recommendations to:

- Improve and clarify City processes for shelter eligibility decisions affecting refugee claimants
- Train staff on anti-Black racism and the human right to adequate housing
- Meaningfully consult with experts and affected communities
- Strengthen accountability

These recommendations were developed to strengthen fairness and transparency, and to further the right to adequate housing in the City's shelter system, ensuring all residents are treated with dignity and respect.

REPORT UPDATE

On November 26, 2024, the City Manager wrote to Ombudsman Toronto saying he did not agree with the findings in our report, and, subject to City Council's decision, would not take any further action in response to our recommendations.

On December 10, 2024, we submitted our report for action to City Council, asking that it direct the City Manager to implement our recommendations. On December 18, 2024, without debate or discussion, Council decided to receive our report for information. This meant that Council would not take any further action.

After the December Council meeting, and in response to calls for action from the refugee-serving community and others, Council unanimously passed a motion on March 27, 2025, that adopted the recommendations from our report with some minor revisions. This decision will help ensure more transparent and equitable shelter services for refugee claimants and help advance the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for everyone seeking emergency shelter.

Council's directions go a long way towards implementing our recommendations. Council did not direct staff to follow our normal monitoring process, which means there is no formal mechanism for us to monitor the implementation of the recommendations. However, many of these steps include deadlines as well as our participation. We will continue to work with City staff on these issues.

“This first report stemming from an investigation by the Deputy Ombudsman (Housing) marks an important milestone in the City’s journey to advance the right to adequate housing and make the Toronto Housing Charter a reality for all residents of the City. The Toronto Housing Charter and the National Housing Strategy Act recognize housing as a fundamental human right.”

— LEADER IN HOUSING ADVOCACY



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRIS CHEUNG

An Investigation into the Toronto Police Service's Communications About its Vulnerable Persons Registry

THE ISSUE

In December 2019 the Toronto Police Service (TPS) launched a Vulnerable Persons Registry (the Registry) to create personalized de-escalation strategies to improve police officers' interactions with vulnerable persons in crisis. However, by December 2023 (four years after the launch), registration numbers were still low, and our office had concerns with TPS's communication about the Registry.

This was Ombudsman Toronto's first investigation into the TPS after City Council expanded our mandate to oversee the fairness of TPS and TPS Board policies.

OUR INVESTIGATION

We investigated the transparency, adequacy, and meaningfulness of TPS's communications about the Registry, including:

- How the TPS communicated to the public about the Registry's purpose and processes, as well as how it uses the personal information people enter into the Registry
- How the TPS communicates internally with its staff about the Registry and if there are potential gaps in staff's knowledge

We:

- Conducted 28 interviews with the TPS, the TPS Board, and members of the public
- Reviewed documents provided by the TPS, as well as Registry information available on the TPS's website and social media accounts

OUR FINDINGS

Our investigation found that no one within the TPS was specifically tasked with the responsibility of managing the Registry. This lack of accountability created gaps in the TPS's communication about the Registry, ultimately affecting the Registry's success and the public's ability to make informed choices about using it. Specifically, we found that:

- The public announcement of the Registry was low-key and approached as a “one and done” effort, despite TPS staff noting it should have been long-term and ongoing
- Planned targeted promotion and a community awareness event never happened
- Key details about the Registry's goal were taken down from the TPS's website
- TPS staff no longer received training on how to use the Registry, hurting their ability to promote it
- The TPS never completed its review of the Registry's impact on registrants' privacy and personal information

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We made 13 recommendations to the TPS to improve their communication about the Registry. Once implemented, these recommendations will help ensure the public knows relevant details about the Registry and can make informed decisions about whether to use it.

“We’ve been watching the coverage of the announcement, and I have read the Report. Glad we were able to provide information that was valuable to your team and Ombudsman Addo. We were pleased to have been invited to participate, and fully support the recommendations made.”

— COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

An Investigation into Toronto Hydro's Process for Customer-Owned Infrastructure

THE ISSUE

35 years after purchasing a property, Mr. A. received a notice from Toronto Hydro telling him he was responsible for approximately \$20,000 of repairs to an underground hydro vault he did not know about and was never told he owned.

OUR INVESTIGATION

After receiving a complaint from Mr. A., we launched an investigation into Toronto Hydro's process for managing customer-owned infrastructure, such as hydro vaults, and how it was applied in Mr. A.'s case.

We:

- Conducted 16 interviews with Toronto Hydro staff familiar with Toronto Hydro's practice concerning customer-owned infrastructure and Mr. A.'s circumstances
- Reviewed documents provided by Toronto Hydro as well as those available on its website

OUR FINDINGS

Our investigation found that Mr. A. fell through the cracks because of Toronto Hydro's poor communication and lack of clear and consistent internal processes for the establishment, inspection, maintenance, and enforcement of customer-owned infrastructure such as hydro vaults. This was unfair. Specifically:

- Toronto Hydro did not tell Mr. A. about his obligations concerning the vault, resulting in the accumulation of decades of repair costs totalling half his annual salary.
- Toronto Hydro did not notify Mr. A. before going onto his property to inspect the vault, which it is legally required to do.



- Inspectors did not refer to the results of previous inspections and provided conflicting information about what needed to be repaired.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We made 13 recommendations to improve Toronto Hydro's treatment of Mr. A., including that Toronto Hydro cover the \$20,000 cost for repairs, and take steps to ensure others do not end up in the same situation.

Our Impact Over the Years



“It is good to have an
effective Ombudsman in
our city.”

— COMMUNITY LEADER

Since we opened in 2009, we have made more than **550 formal recommendations** in our reports to improve City services. We monitor their implementation to ensure the City is continually enhancing fairness and accountability.

We have also received more than **35,000 individual complaints** from the public since we opened. Every day, we make smaller, but no less impactful, recommendations to the City to improve how it does its work.

Here are some of the direct impacts of our work over the years:

- Ensured Toronto Water and Revenue Services provided timely, detailed explanations of sudden changes in people's water bills
- Recommended enhanced consultations on Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) construction
- Improved oversight of TTC's Transit Enforcement Unit officers
- Helped ensure there were online options for disputing parking tickets
- Strengthened the Human Rights complaints process for Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) tenants
- Improved psychological support for paramedics
- Recommended training for TCHC staff who work with vulnerable seniors
- Ensured a fairer application of Wheel-Trans eligibility rules
- Clarified the process to appeal the denial of a childcare subsidy
- Recommended that Kosher meal options be provided at City-run long-term care homes
- Helped the City improve information about its insurance claims related to potholes, floods, and falling tree limbs
- Ensured residents received the correct refund for their use of smaller garbage bins
- Recommended that the Municipal Licensing & Standards division implement a policy to better serve people with diminished capacity
- Helped TCHC improve hiring and conflict of interest policies
- Made recommendations to City Council that ultimately became the Toronto Public Service Bylaw, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the City's public servants
- Ensured consistent and transparent processes for banning someone from a City building or park

Our Numbers

The data in this report represents more than just numbers — it reflects the concerns, needs, and lived experiences of the people from across Toronto who reach out to us. Each data point tells a story, offering insight into the evolving landscape of issues we see, the people we serve, and the ways we respond through recommendations, collaboration with the City, and the informal resolution of complaints.

In 2024, we saw a significant increase in email campaigns, where groups of people send many emails with the same concerns at the same time. Email campaigns have led to an unprecedented surge in our casework, with the number of complaints handled increasing by 40% over the past year to a record high of 4,929. Additionally, we have found that our cases are growing in complexity, highlighting broader challenges Torontonians are facing, such as a lack of mental health supports, growing housing precarity, and a high cost of living.

The following is a snapshot of key statistics and trends from 2024.

“Thank you so much for your empathy
and professionalism in helping me today.”

— MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC



4,929

cases handled

89%

cases closed within 30 days

40

recommendations made public

58

formal recommendations monitored

121

engagement and outreach activities

24

staff including the Ombudsman

26

consultations with the City

INCREASE IN COMPLAINTS OVER TIME

103%

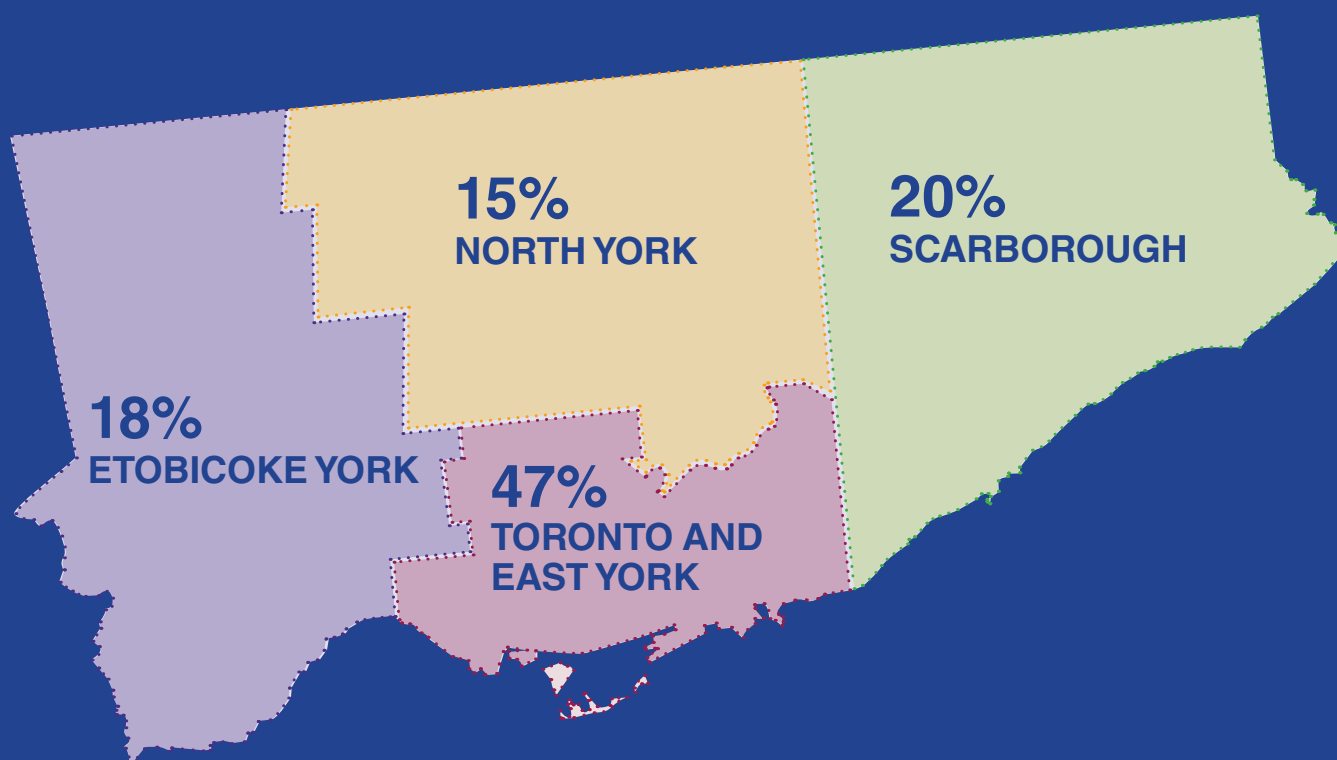
increase over the past 5 years
(2020 to 2024)

173%

increase over the past 10 years
(2015 to 2024)

WHO WE HEARD FROM*

*Based on complaints with address data available.



WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT MOST: FREQUENT COMPLAINT TOPICS BY DIVISION*

*Divisions in alphabetical order

Municipal Licensing & Standards

- Property Standards
- Short-Term Rentals
- Noise

Revenue Services

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

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

- Unit Maintenance Issues
- Neighbour Issues
- Transfers

Toronto Shelter & Support Services

- Shelter Maintenance & User Experience
- Community Outreach & Engagement
- Shelter Intake

Transportation Services

- Traffic Management
- Parking & Parking Permit Applications
- Summer Road & Sidewalk Maintenance

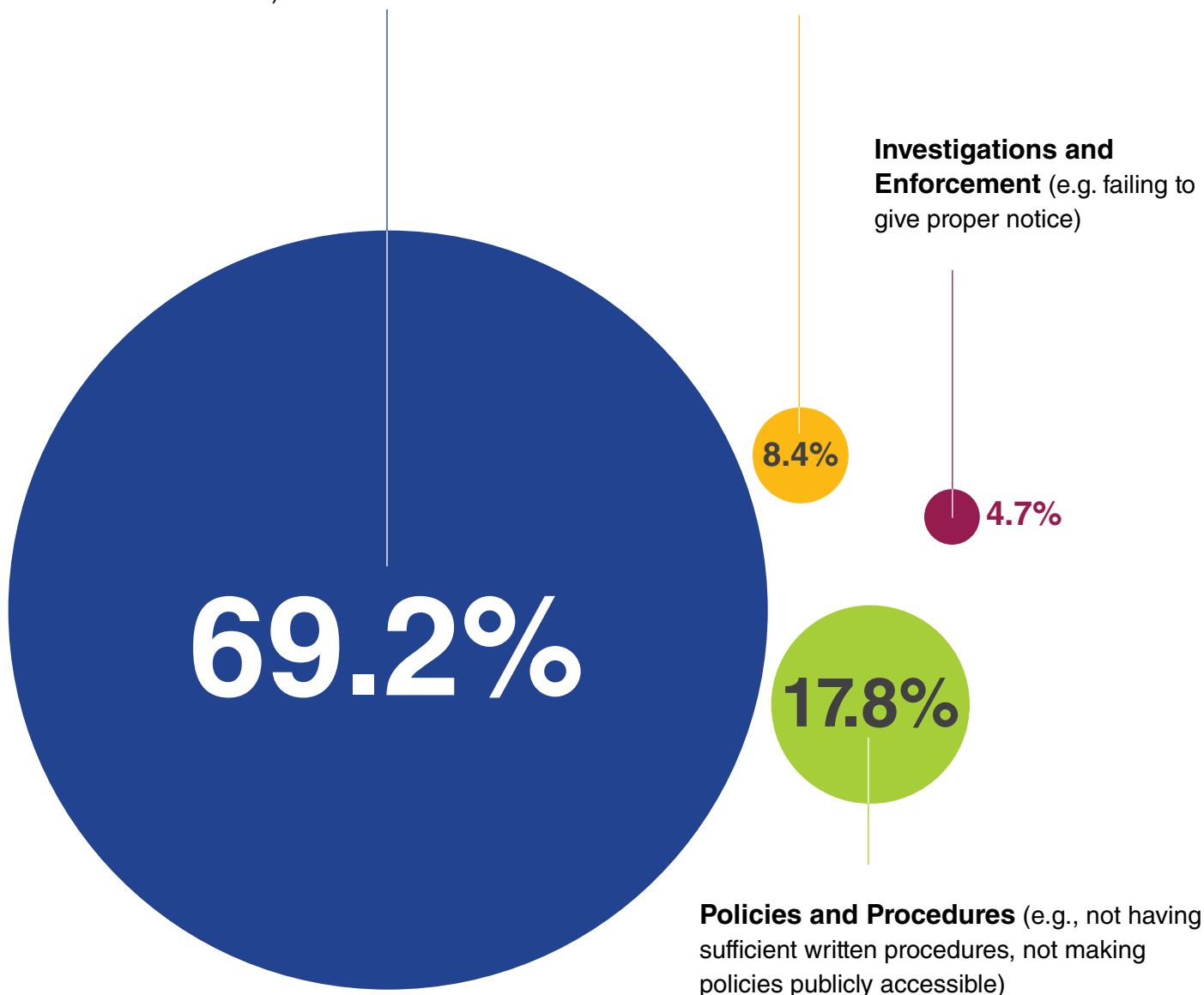
WHAT WE FOUND: FAIRNESS PROBLEMS

In 2024, we identified problems of administrative unfairness in close to half of the enquiries we made 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., lack of response or delays in getting back to people, unclear or inconsistent information)

Decisions (e.g., failing to provide sufficient reasons for a decision, making an unreasonable or unfair decision)

Investigations and Enforcement (e.g. failing to give proper notice)





Working Together

“Thank you for joining us at our last meeting and speaking about the role of your office and how to connect. It was our pleasure hosting you. Our members were glad to learn more about the important work your office does in support of the people of Toronto.”

— COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

“Thank you so much for your prompt follow-up and for providing an update on the City's ongoing investigation. I truly appreciate the time and effort you and your team have taken to address my concerns. I understand that the process is still unfolding, and I will patiently await the outcome of the City's review. I am grateful to know that your office remains available should there be further delays or if I require additional support in the future. Your willingness to listen and guide me through this matter means a great deal. Thank you again for your understanding and for all your assistance.”

— MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC



Engaging with Community

At Ombudsman Toronto, we know that the first step in accessing our services is knowing who we are and what we do. Connecting with and hearing from the public is at the heart of our work, and we remain committed to building trust with people and communities across Toronto.

In 2024, we held more than 120 engagement sessions, an increase of 9% from the year before — the most extensive engagement work we have undertaken to date. But engagement isn't just about numbers — it's about meaningful connections. Every conversation, every shared experience, and every new relationship helps us better understand the challenges people face and how we can work toward fairness in City services.

A key focus of our outreach is connecting with members of the public who may experience the greatest barriers to accessing not only our services, but City services as well. We met with more than 300 individuals and agencies, including frontline workers, community organizations, and housing advocates. We heard about the unique challenges faced by equity-deserving communities, including Indigenous, Black, and newcomer populations, people with disabilities, women, gender-diverse individuals, and those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity.

We recognize that trust takes time to build, especially for those who may be hesitant to engage with government bodies due to systemic barriers and historical distrust. That's why we strive to meet people on their terms, where they are. Whether at a community space, online, by phone, through translation services, or via trusted community organizations, we listen with empathy and without judgment. We attend community events and meetings to ensure our work remains accessible and informed by those most affected, and we exchange best practices with other ombudsman organizations to enhance our own policies and practices.

Our goal is to make sure people know they can come to us when they need help. By proactively building relationships and making our services as accessible as possible, we can foster trust and give everyone a fair chance to be heard. We will continue working alongside communities and the City to support fairness in Toronto's local government and ensure our office remains accessible to all.



Consulting with the City

We proactively address potential fairness issues before they become complaints or investigations. By working with City staff to improve the design and implementation of individual policies and programs, we take a forward-facing approach to improving service delivery.

City staff often reach out to us for our expertise — showing we are a trusted source for advice on improving their processes. These proactive consultations help ensure City services are equitable, transparent, and responsive to the people they serve. A sample of our consultation work and our results in 2024 includes:

- **Toronto Paramedic Services:** Improved processes for handling difficult behaviour
- **Children’s Services:** Supported responses to ongoing and complex complaints
- **Toronto Transit Commission:** Provided feedback on their draft Anti-Racism Policy
- **Urban Forestry:** Provided information on best practices for handling difficult behaviour

As part of this work, our Housing Unit offers specialized guidance to the City on fairness and the right to adequate housing in housing-related policies and services. Examples from 2024 include:

- **Housing Secretariat:** Provided feedback on the on the MyAccessstoHousingTO portal
- **Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation:** Shared feedback to help develop a new Tenant Human Rights Policy and complaints procedure

“Thank you for taking the time to chat.... Your insight and considerations are tremendously valuable as we determine our next steps in supporting the client.”

— SENIOR CITY STAFF MEMBER



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, policy, 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.

Our Financials

Ombudsman Toronto's operating budget allocation approved by City Council was \$3.8 million for the year ending December 31, 2024.

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

All unused funds are returned to the City Treasury.



Ombudsman
Toronto

416 392 7062

ombudsmantoronto.ca
ombudsman@toronto.ca

X: @ombudsmanTO
Bluesky: @ombudsmanto.bsky.social