The impact of centralized shelter access data
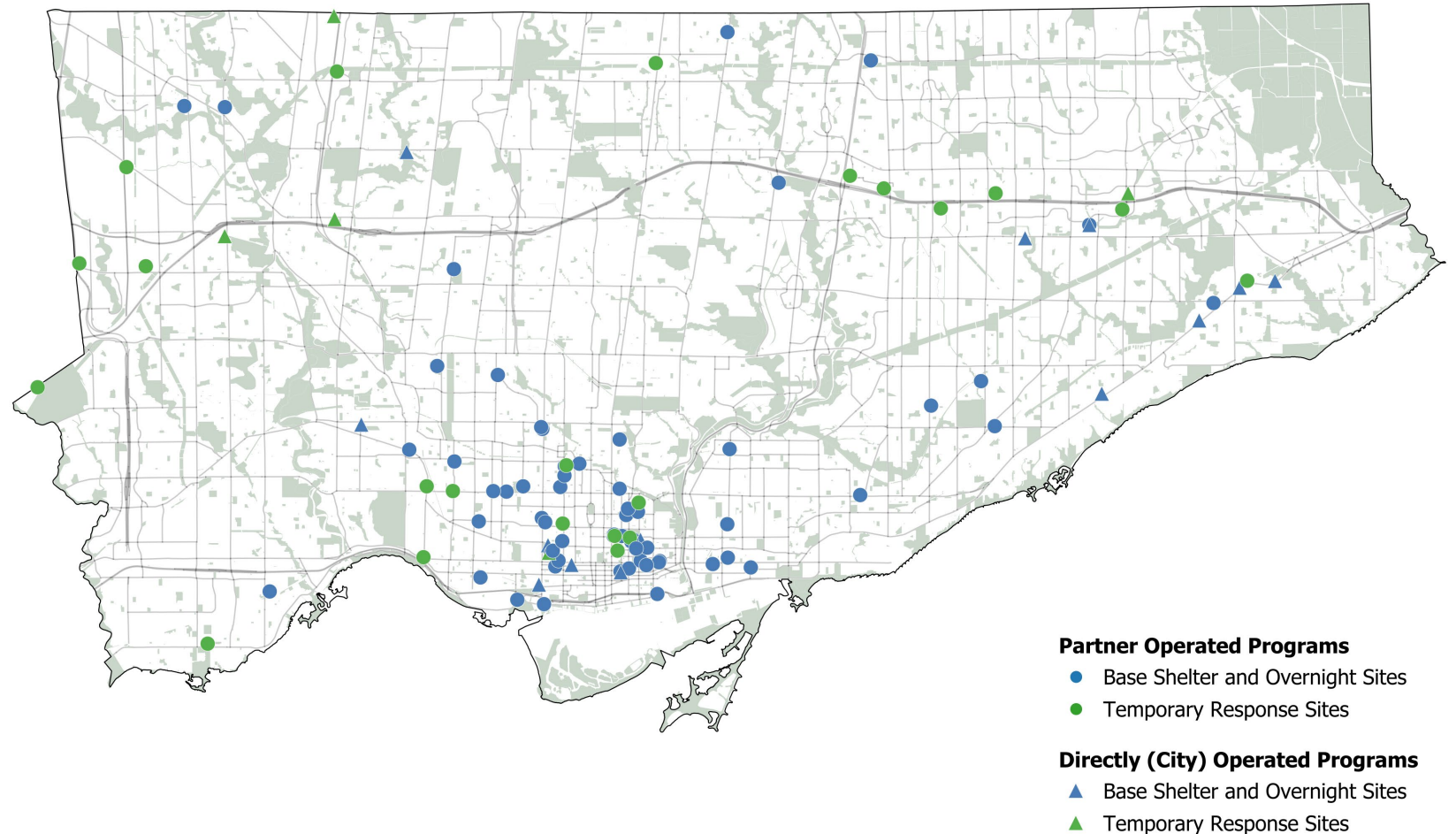
A view from Toronto's shelter and allied services system

Heath Priston,
Toronto Shelter & Support Services,
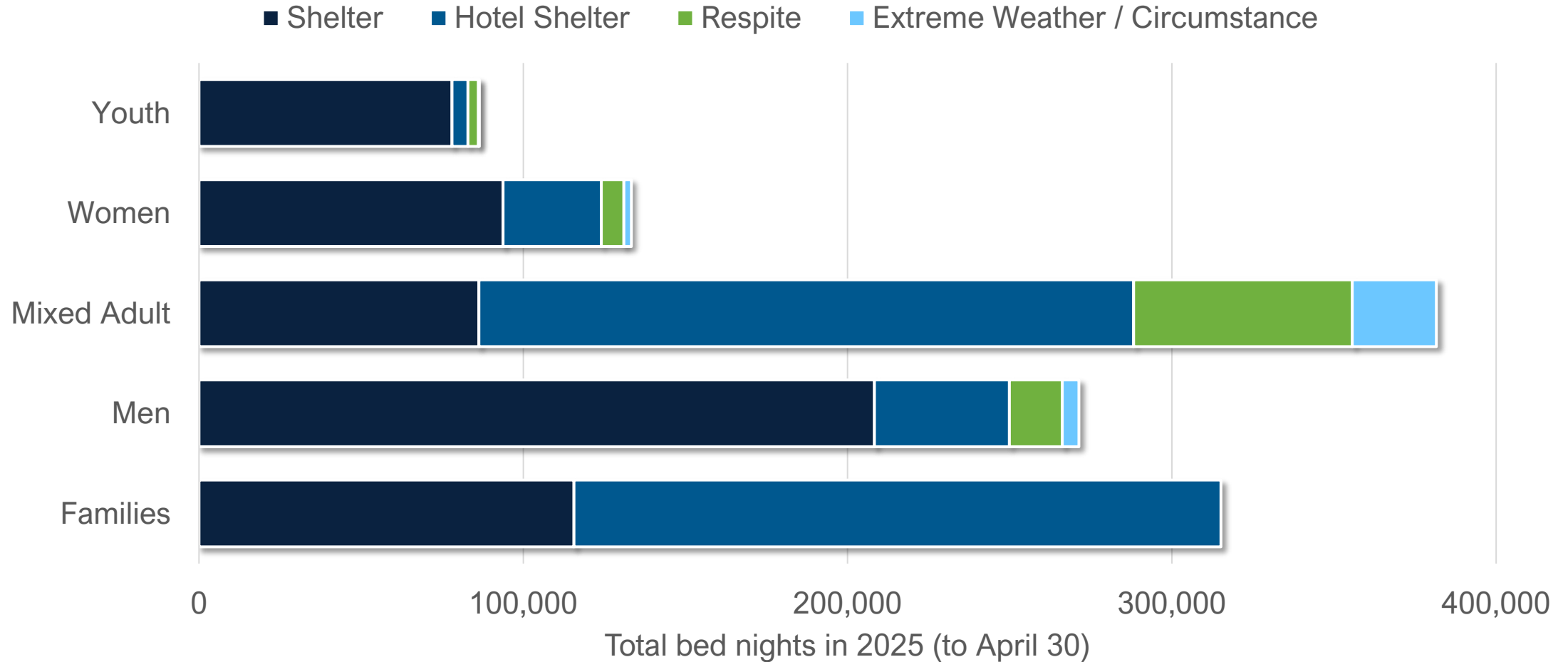City of Toronto

Toronto has a large and complex shelter and allied services system

- System serves about 10,000 people nightly

- Services provided in 111 locations across the city, including shelters, shelter hotels, 24-hour respite sites and warming centres

- 80% of beds/spaces are delivered through purchase of service from 36 community agencies, 20% delivered through directly operated City programs.
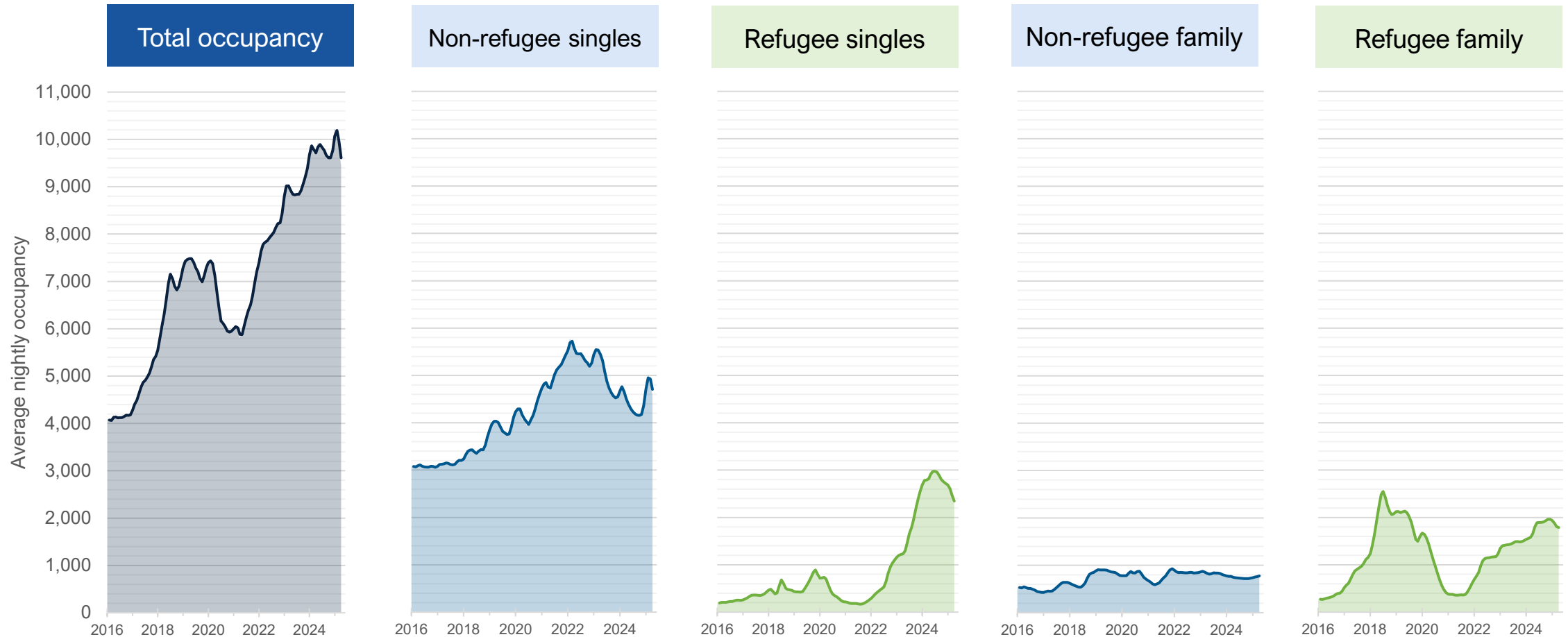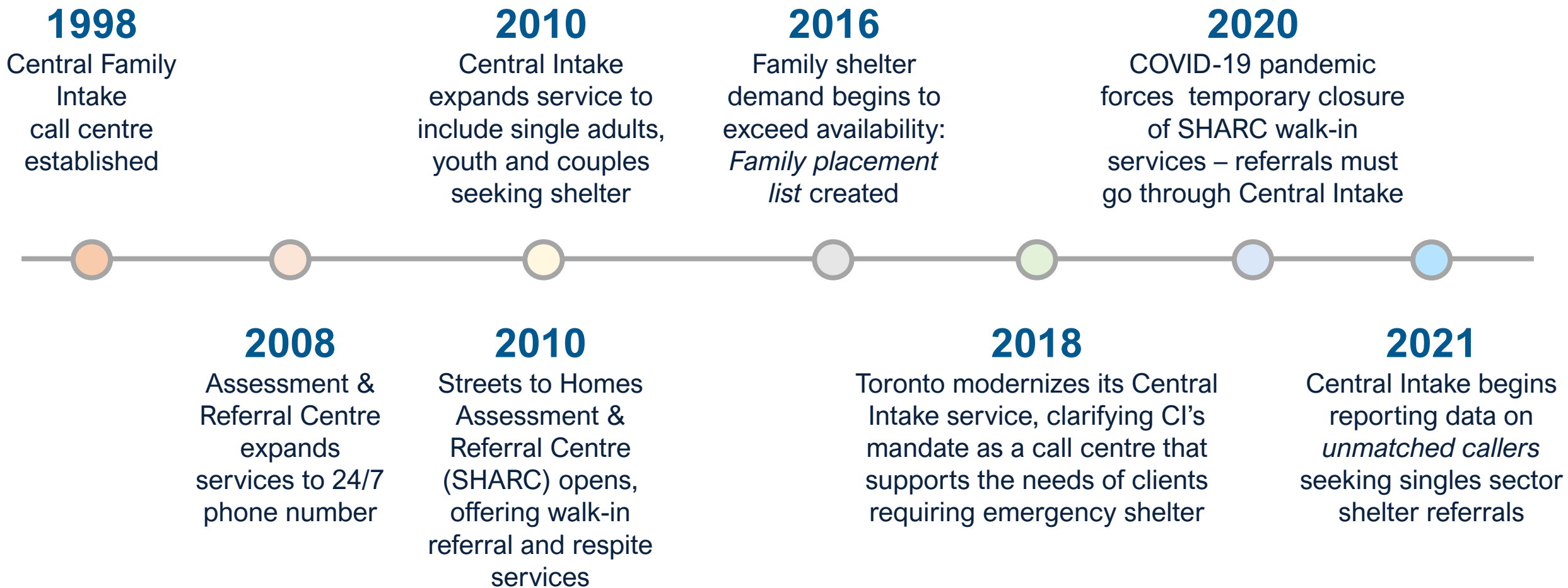
Partner Operated Programs
- ● Base Shelter and Overnight Sites
- ● Temporary Response Sites

Directly (City) Operated Programs
- ▲ Base Shelter and Overnight Sites
- ▲ Temporary Response Sites

TORONTO

Family sector programs provide just over 25 per cent of all system bednights

Legend: ■ Shelter ■ Hotel Shelter ■ Respite ■ Extreme Weather / Circumstance

Categories (y-axis): Youth, Women, Mixed Adult, Men, Families

X-axis: Total bed nights in 2025 (to April 30) — 0, 100,000, 200,000, 300,000, 400,000

TORONTO

Toronto has grown its shelter services significantly in the last 8 years

A brief history of Toronto's centralized intake services

1998
Central Family Intake call centre established

2008
Assessment & Referral Centre expands services to 24/7 phone number

2010
Central Intake expands service to include single adults, youth and couples seeking shelter

2010
Streets to Homes Assessment & Referral Centre (SHARC) opens, offering walk-in referral and respite services

2016
Family shelter demand begins to exceed availability: *Family placement list* created

2018
Toronto modernizes its Central Intake service, clarifying CI's mandate as a call centre that supports the needs of clients requiring emergency shelter

2020
COVID-19 pandemic forces temporary closure of SHARC walk-in services – referrals must go through Central Intake

2021
Central Intake begins reporting data on *unmatched callers* seeking singles sector shelter referrals
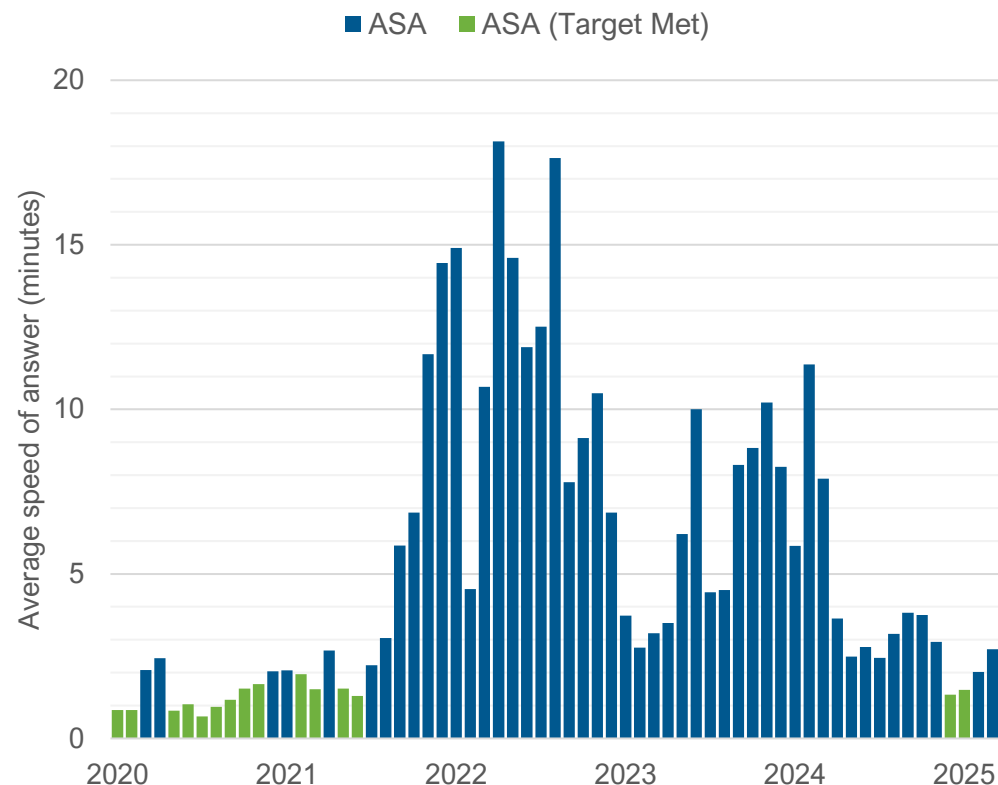
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Central Intake has rarely met its KPI targets

Average daily calls, target of <10+2% abandoned

Legend: Answered · Answered (Target Met) · Abandoned

Total calls to Central Intake (y-axis: 0 to 1,750), years 2020–2025
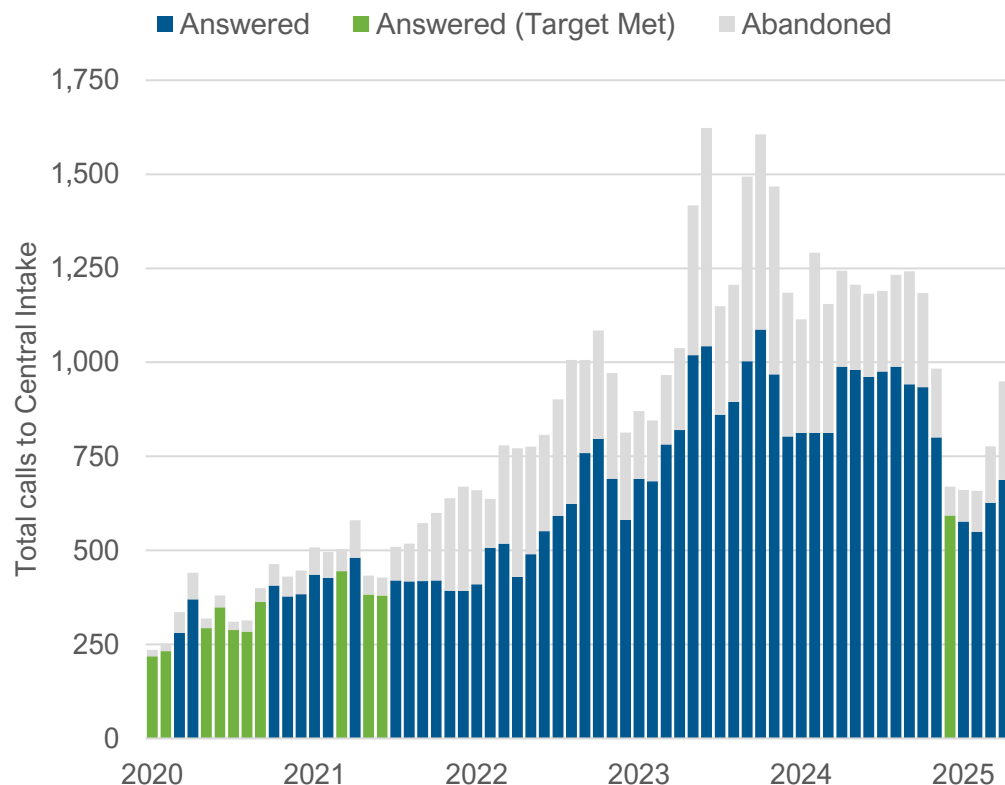
Average speed of answer, target of <2 minutes

Legend: ASA · ASA (Target Met)

Average speed of answer (minutes) (y-axis: 0 to 20), years 2020–2025

TORONTO

The centralization of shelter referrals has yielded data with significant impacts

Data that shifted the debate on shelter system capacity

Data that validated refugee claimant shelter demand

Data that supports modelling of shelter demand

Shelter system "turn-aways" have replaced occupancy rate as the key capacity measure

2019

PressProgress

ANALYSIS

Toronto's Shelters Are Now Consistently Above 90% Capacity – And That Is Extremely Dangerous

'It's like a scene after a natural disaster ... They are packed like sardines'

by PressProgress
January 28, 2019

Data from the City of Toronto shows occupancy at local shelters and overnight centres has been above its 90% limit for years.

19/01/19 14:44:36

⏱ This article is more than 6 years old

2022

HOME | SOCIETY | POVERTY ⬤CBC

New city data shows 40 people a night on average turned away from Toronto homeless shelters

Advocates say number is unacceptable because unhoused people have nowhere else to go

A view of Seaton House, a large homeless shelter in downtown Toronto, in May 2022.
PHOTO: CBC/MURIEL DRAAISMA

The debate about appropriate capacity used to focus on "available" beds and occupancy rate

This is a detail of the City's Daily Occupancy and Capacity reporting web report.

Shelter Programs, Room-Based	Individuals	Occupied Rooms	Unoccupied Rooms	Actual Room Capacity	Occupancy Rate
Family Sector, Total	**2,523**	**752**	**0**	**756**	**99.5%**
Families, Emergency Shelter Programs	653	198	0	199	99.5%
Families, Transitional Shelter Programs	315	104	0	106	98.1%
Families, Motel/Hotel Programs	1,555	450	0	451	99.8%
Single Sector Motel/Hotel, Total	**667**	**335**	**0**	**335**	**100.0%**

Shelter Programs, Bed-Based	Individuals	Occupied Beds	Unoccupied Beds	Actual Bed Capacity	Occupancy Rate
Singles Sectors, Total	**3,771**	**3,771**	**22**	**3,793**	**99.4%**
Emergency Shelter Programs, Total	**3,122**	**3,122**	**6**	**3,128**	**99.8%**
Mixed Adult, Emergency	587	587	0	587	100.0%
Men, Emergency	1,441	1,441	2	1,443	99.9%
Women, Emergency	686	686	0	686	100.0%
Youth, Emergency	408	408	4	412	99.0%
Transitional Shelter Programs, Total	**649**	**649**	**16**	**665**	**97.6%**
Mixed Adult, Transitional	139	139	5	144	96.5%
Men, Transitional	213	213	2	215	99.1%
Women, Transitional	117	117	0	117	100.0%
Youth, Transitional	180	180	9	189	95.2%

When this was the only dataset available, lots of focus on the fact that there were some beds showing as available every night.
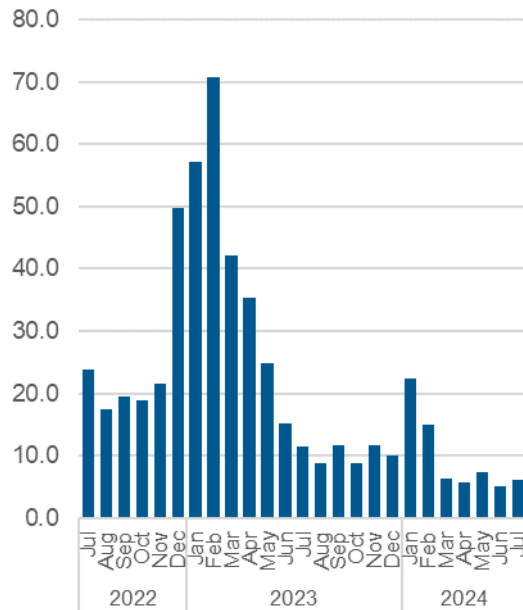
Central Intake service queues provide a more accurate view on shelter access

Unmatched callers

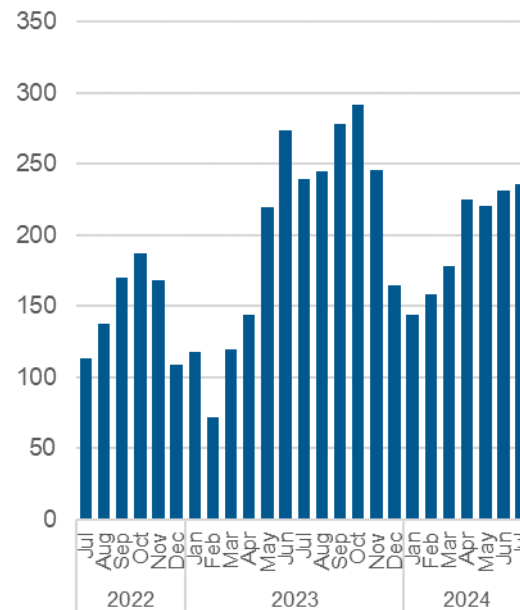Families awaiting shelter placement

TORONTO
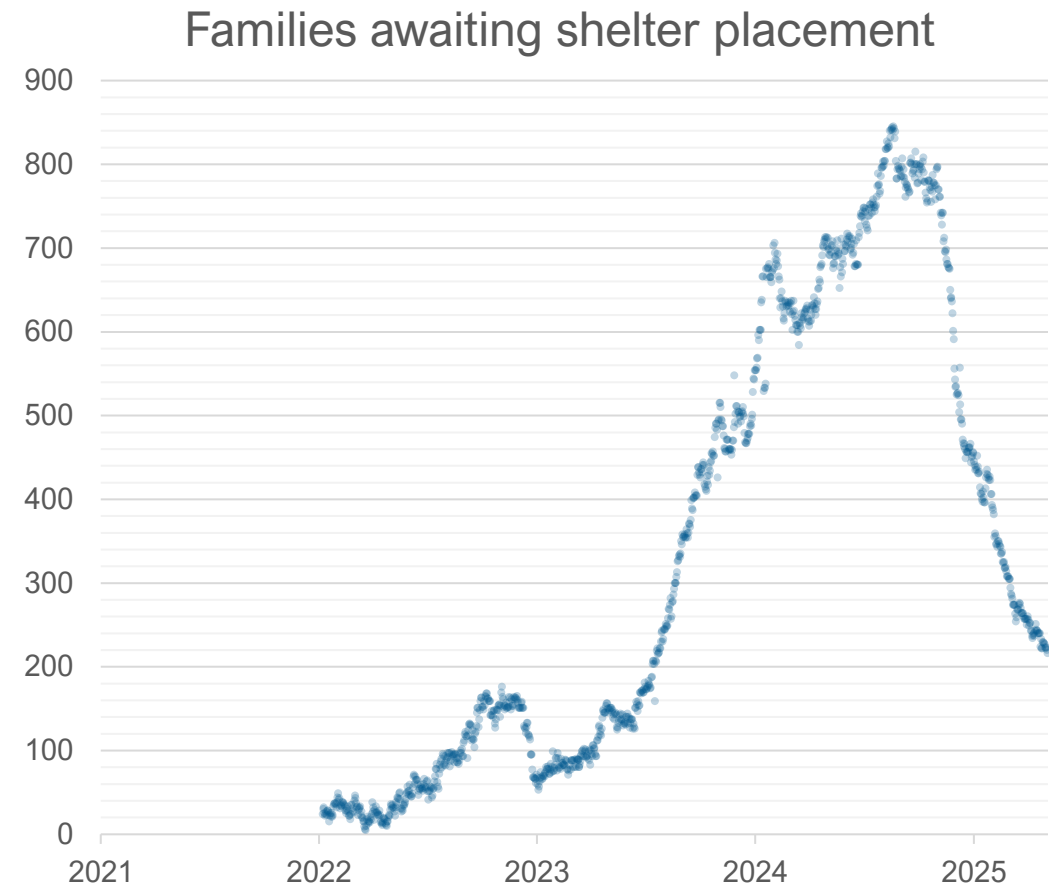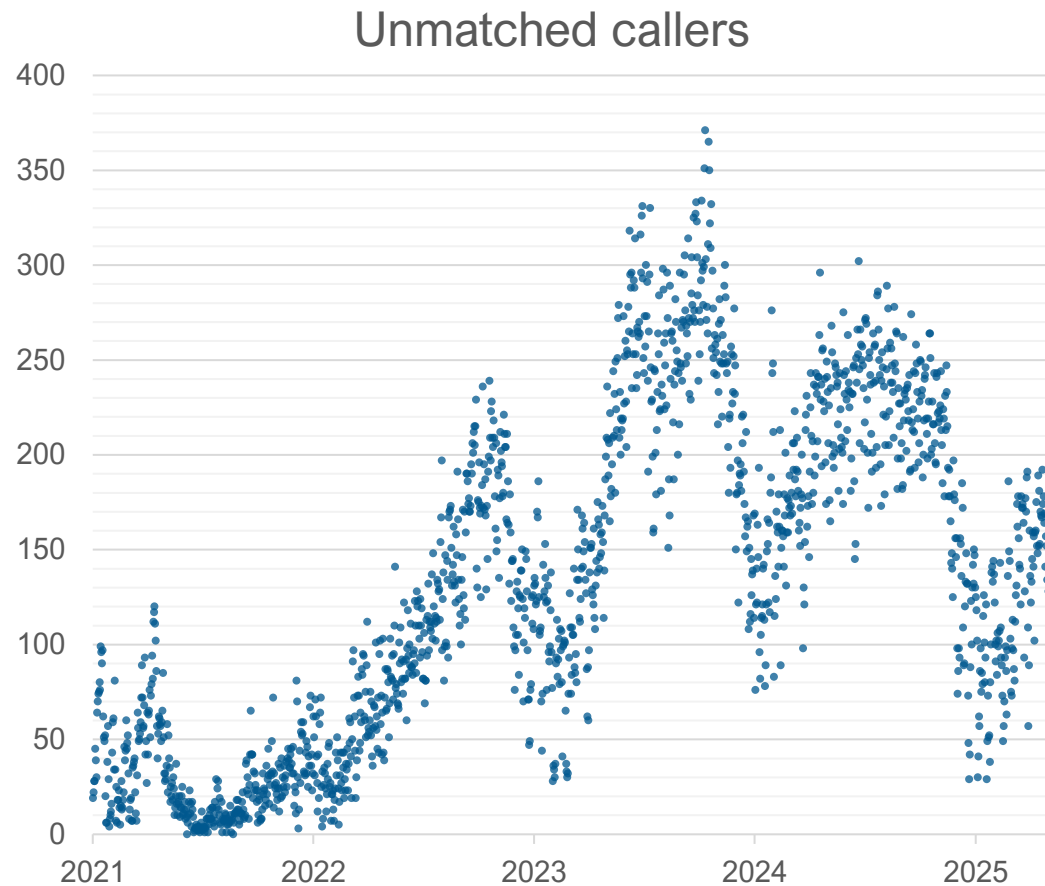
Centralized access statistics tell the story more effectively

Average daily number of calls resulting in a referral to a shelter space

The number of calls to Central Intake resulting in a referral to shelter space was **6.2** per day in July 2024

Average daily number of unmatched individual callers

The number of individual callers who are not matched to a shelter space per day was **235.7** per day in July 2024

Average daily number of calls handled
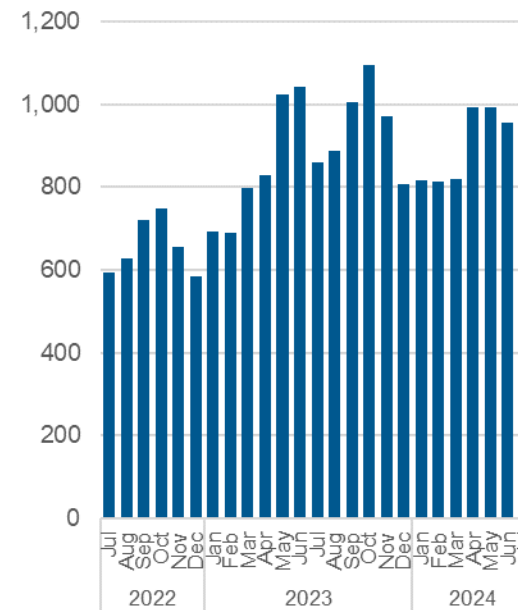
Central Intake continues to handle elevated call levels, with an average of **978** calls handled per day in July 2024.
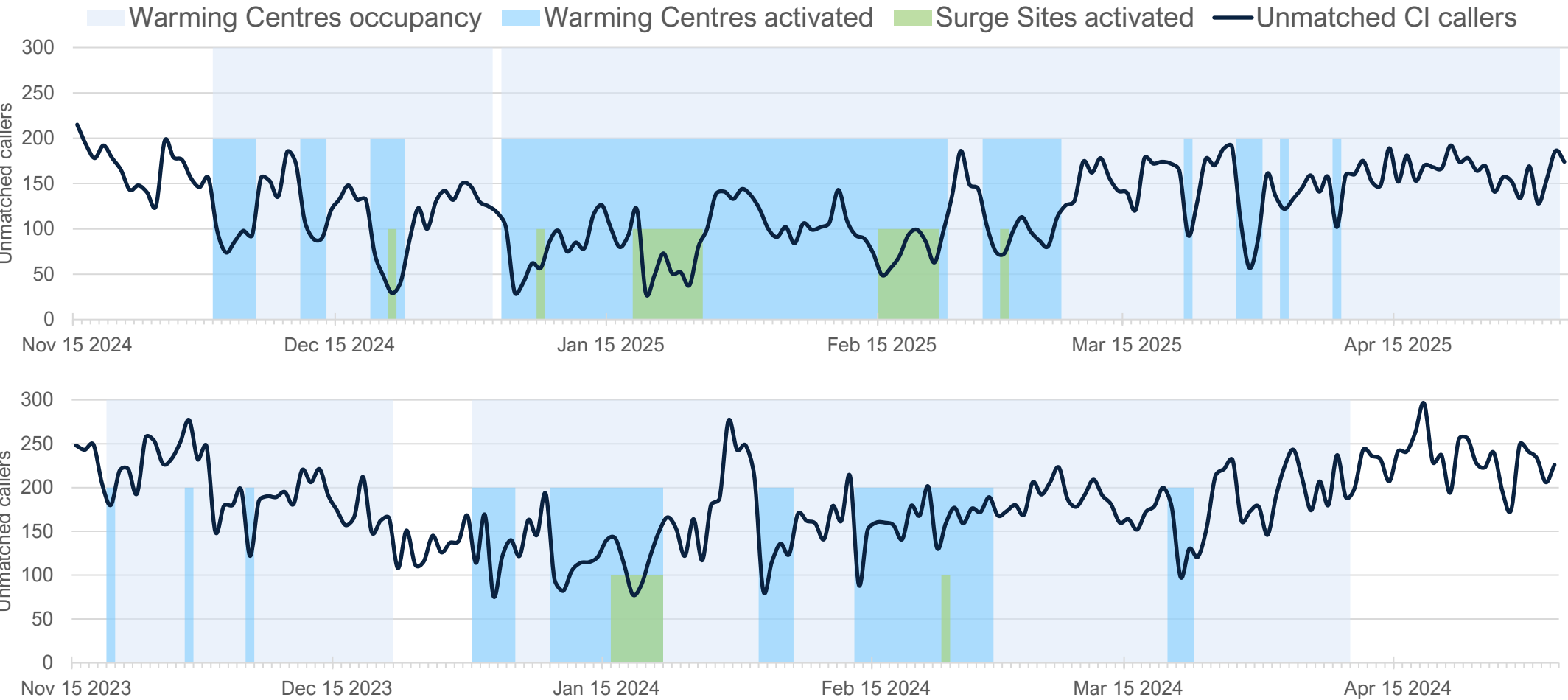
Average nightly shelter & overnight service occupancy
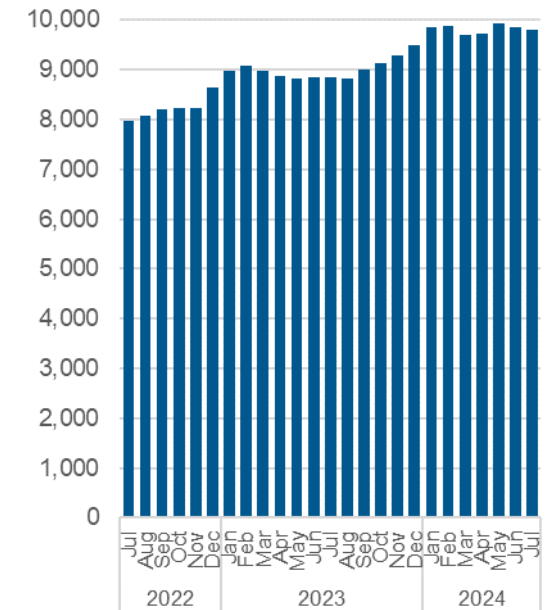
These trends are taking place despite the shelter system serving an average of **9,815** people a night in July 2024.

Centralized "unmatched caller" data has become a core operational statistic

Legend: Warming Centres occupancy · Warming Centres activated · Surge Sites activated · Unmatched CI callers
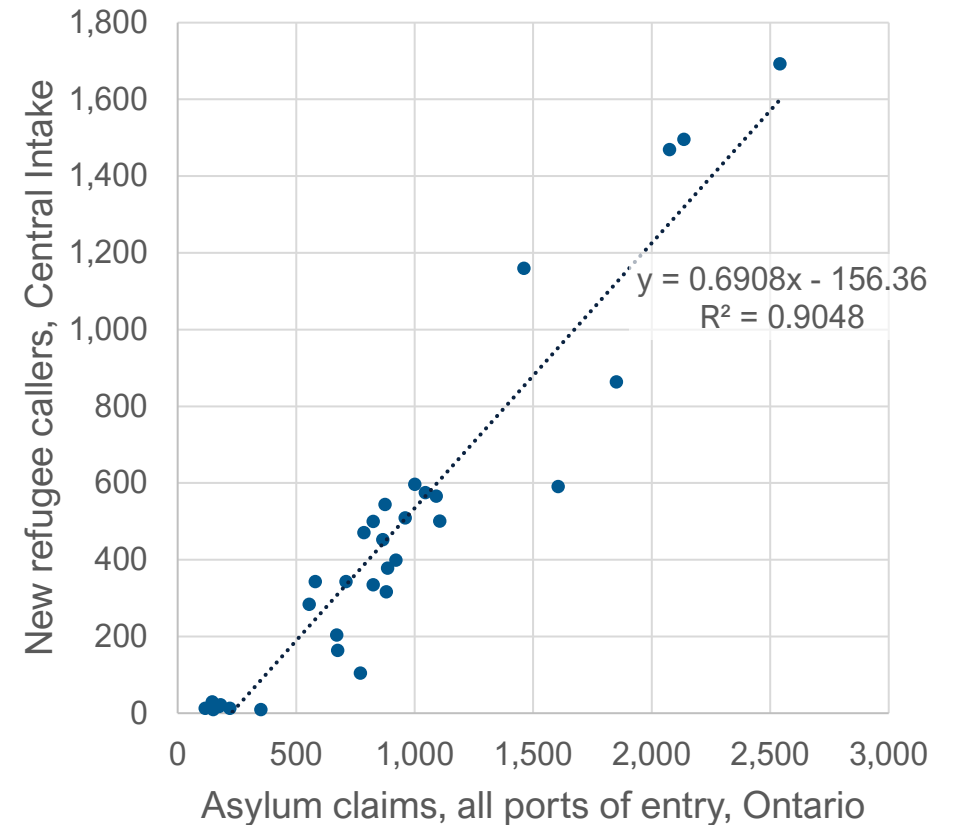
A centralized view on shelter demand has supported more effective advocacy

Asylum claims at ports of entry in Ontario & new refugee intakes with Central Intake

— Asylum claims, all ports of entry, Ontario   — New refugee intakes at CI
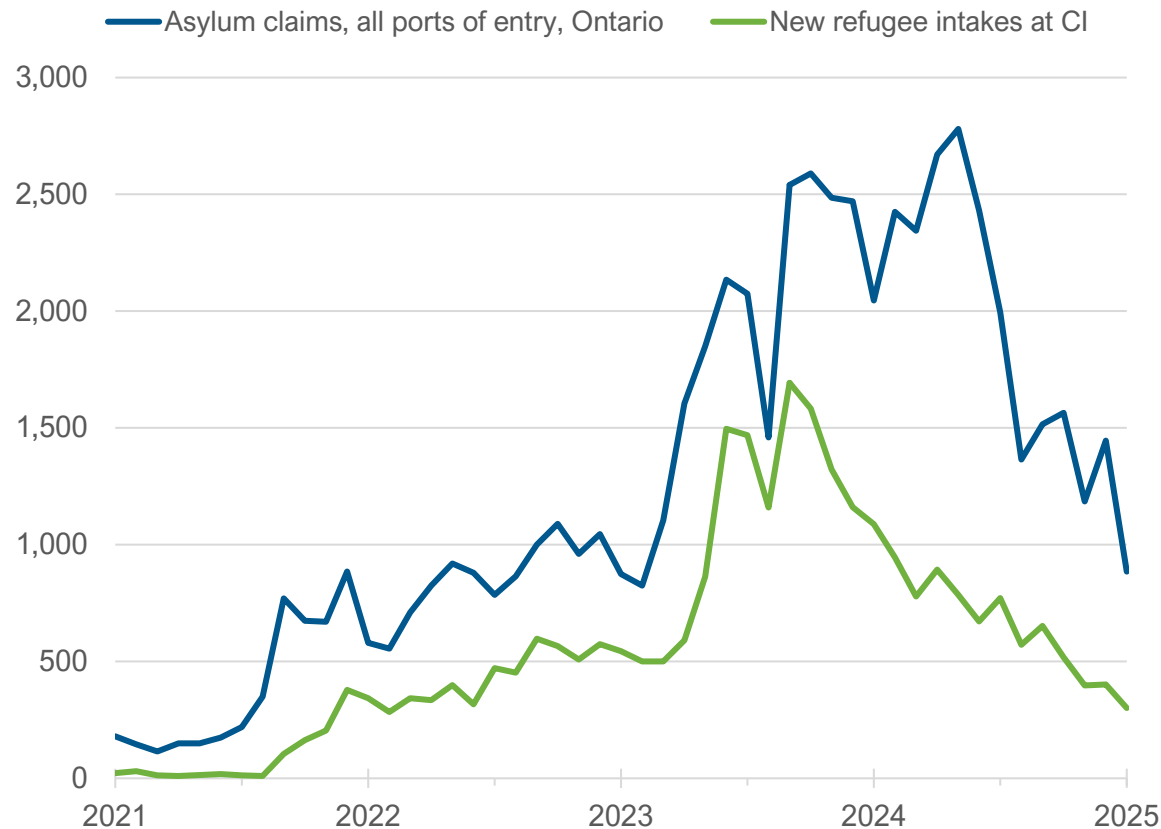
Refugees at ports of entry in Ontario and Central Intake, Toronto, Jan 2021-Sep 2023
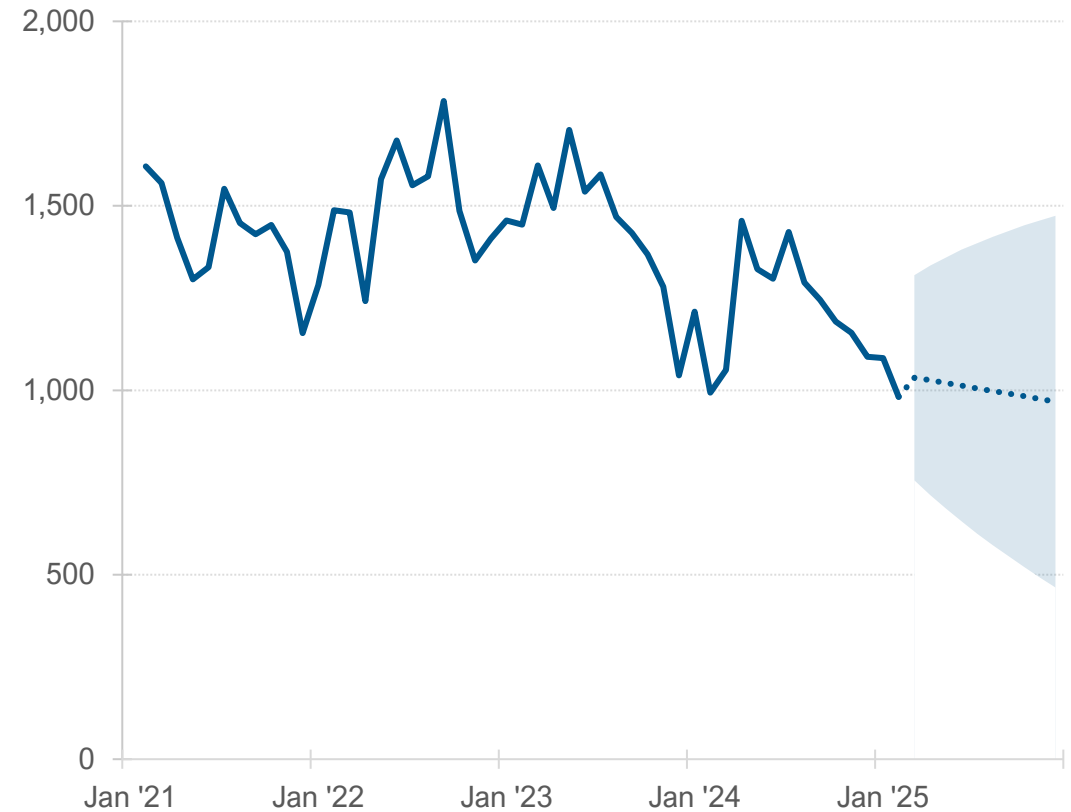
$y = 0.6908x - 156.36$
$R^2 = 0.9048$

Centralized intake data supports forecasting of shelter demand

New refugee callers to Central Intake

95% confidence interval, refugee demand
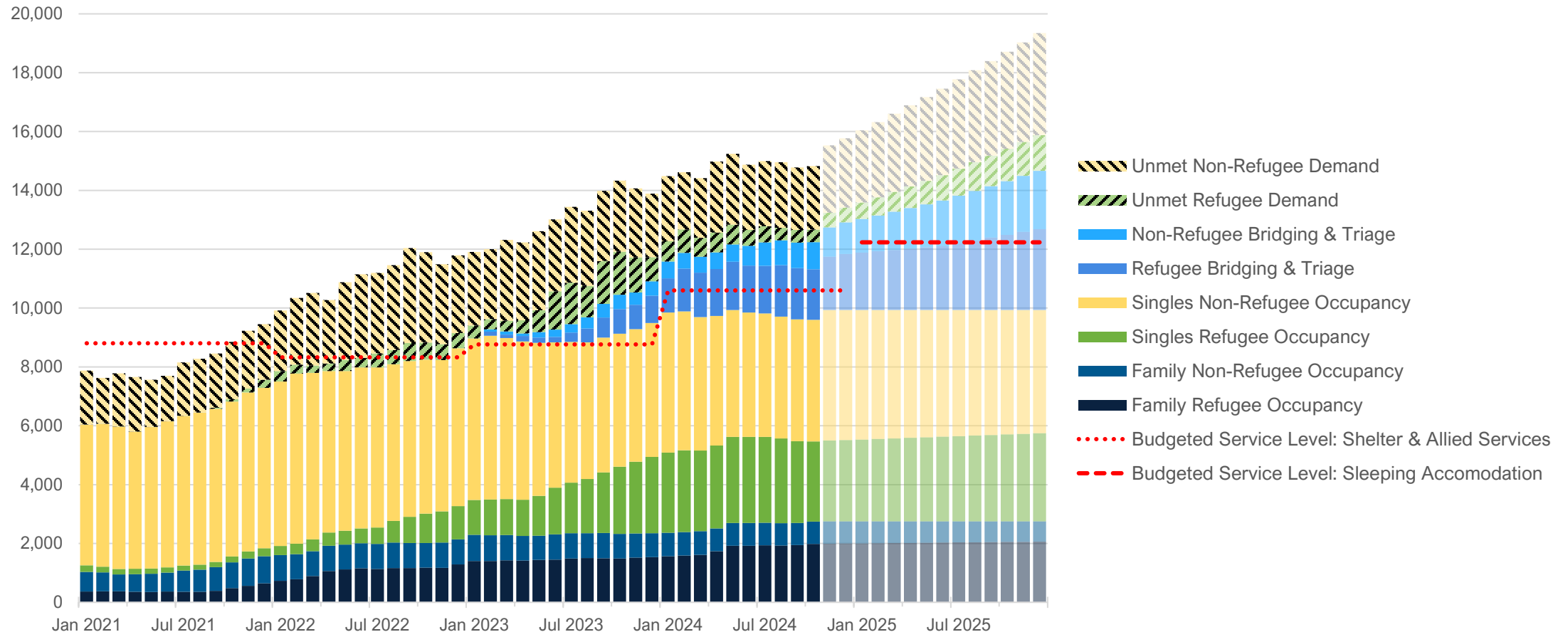
New non-refugee callers to Central Intake

95% confidence interval, non-refugee demand

Demand forecasts improve planning and budgeting for system capacity needs

Occupancy in shelter and bridging/triage programs and unmet shelter demand

Legend:
- Unmet Non-Refugee Demand
- Unmet Refugee Demand
- Non-Refugee Bridging & Triage
- Refugee Bridging & Triage
- Singles Non-Refugee Occupancy
- Singles Refugee Occupancy
- Family Non-Refugee Occupancy
- Family Refugee Occupancy
- Budgeted Service Level: Shelter & Allied Services
- Budgeted Service Level: Sleeping Accomodation

Where to from here?

- Better leveraging Central Intake data to understand who the shelter system is not able to serve
  - Incorporate the centralized shelter access perspective into reporting such as the Community Homelessness Report
  - Resolve the balance between keeping intakes short and the need for better client information
- Investing in better data quality
  - Low barrier services require diligent data oversight to maintain a consistent view on clients across the service system
- Confirming a whole-of-system view on turn-aways
  - Incorporate shelter level insights, starting with winter programming which welcomes walk-ins

Slides prepared by
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