

January 14, 2015

Re: safe space shelters.

To members of the Community Development and Recreation Committee:

It's winter and it's freezing cold outside.

We in Toronto have recently lost three men, frozen to death, along with too many other men and women in previous years. In this wealthy city of ours, this is shameful, immoral and a serious health issue.

We know from research that life expectancy for men and women using shelters is already significantly lower than the general population. (1)

These past 10 days have shown that for people living at the lowest end of the spectrum of marginalized existence, living outside, life expectancy is clearly further cut short.

For reasons of personal safety and basic survival, of limiting contagious respiratory infections and skin infestations, the city needs to provide adequate safe shelter space for men, women and trans people. This means maintaining shelter occupancy rate at below 90% occupancy as agreed upon last year. As well, the city needs to act NOW on its promise to open a dedicated drop-in space for women and trans people.

In a city as affluent as ours, is it too much to ask that there be warming centres open during the calendar winter months, rather than basing decisions on questionable cold weather alerts?

Increasing street outreach vans and patrols in the winter months would also be a beneficial strong addition to reaching out to very marginalized populations and help negotiate the transition from outdoors to indoors.

With over 100,000 people on the wait list for affordable housing, these measures remain a harsh reality we need to work with and the city needs to prioritize them NOW.

We, members of Health Providers Against Poverty urge this Committee to support these two critical health measures:

- 1) The city of Toronto needs to work to reduce the shelter overcrowding to below 90% and maintain that measure.
- 2) The city of Toronto needs to immediately open the already council approved 24-hour drop-in for women and trans people.

We fear if these measures are not acted upon immediately, more cold weather related injuries, illnesses and deaths would occur.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Anne Egger, NP

On behalf of: Health Providers Against Poverty.

Cc: David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health

(1)<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15078846>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2767481/>

