

January 12, 2016

To: Budget Committee Members

From: Dr. Stephen Hwang, MD
Director, Centre for Research on Inner City Health
St. Michael's Hospital
Contact: Hwangs@smh.ca

St. Michael's
Inspired Care.
Inspiring Science.

Re: 24-hour Warming Centres, 2016/17

Dear members of the Budget Committee,

I am writing to urge you to fund 24-hour drop-in warming centres in Toronto for January and February 2017 through the current budget process.

As a physician at both St. Michael's Hospital and the Seaton House men's shelter, I have seen first-hand the effects of cold on people experiencing homelessness including:

- Frostbite, which, in its severest forms, can lead to gangrene and amputations
- Immersion foot, which can cause pain and blisters, and lead to infections
- Hypothermia, which requires emergency treatment and in its severest form can cause death
- Exacerbation of existing conditions such as cardiovascular disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario and from the St. Michael's Hospital emergency department demonstrate that cold-related injuries and deaths occur in Toronto at temperatures well above the current threshold for cold weather alerts of -15 C. A recent scientific study in *The Lancet* has also demonstrated that cold-related deaths occur at moderately cold temperatures.¹

As a result, I strongly endorse the Medical Officer of Health's call for continuous drop-in services in Toronto in the months of January and February.² I urge the Budget Committee to include funding for these services in the city's 2016 Operating Budget, to cover the 2016-2017 winter season. The availability of continuous drop-in services are a vital component of efforts to prevent suffering, injury, and death among people experiencing homelessness in our city.

Sincerely,



Dr. Stephen Hwang

1. Gasparrini, Antonio et al. (2015). Mortality risk attributable to high and low ambient temperature: a multicountry observational study. *The Lancet*. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)62114-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)62114-0)
2. McKeown, David. (2015). Update on Toronto's Cold Weather Protocol. Available at: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-84586.pdf>