



**Comments to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee on item
2016.PW17.14, Preventing Injuries from Wintertime Slips and Falls in Toronto,
Nov. 21, 2016**

I present these remarks on behalf of Walk Toronto, a grassroots, all-volunteer advocacy group dedicated to making Toronto a better city for walking.

Walk Toronto is very pleased that Toronto Public Health has prepared this report on the impact of wintertime slips and falls. Walk Toronto has been advocating for the importance of improving winter sidewalk snow clearing for several years, and has often identified slips and falls as one of the primary consequences of poor winter sidewalk snowclearing.

Until now, however, we did not have any systematic research that we could point to in order to evaluate the full extent of this issue. This report, "Preventing Injuries from Wintertime Slips and Falls in Toronto," provides the kind of systematic, evidence-based analysis that advocates, city staff, and politicians can use to develop improvements to Toronto's sidewalk winter maintenance practices.

The report demonstrates that there is a clear correlation between winter conditions and increased slips and falls. It also shows that wintertime slips and falls create a significant cost to the city both in terms of reducing the health and quality of life of those who suffer these injuries, and in terms of a financial impact for the city, for the province, and for the individuals involved. There is also an equity impact, in that the danger of slips and falls most strongly impacts people without cars, seniors, and people with both mobility and visual disabilities.

We would also like to draw attention to the psychological impact of slips and falls. Anecdotal evidence from those who have suffered them suggests that a fall that results in



injury can have a lasting psychological impact, especially for those who are most vulnerable such as people with disabilities and seniors. After suffering a fall, they may be reluctant to walk in winter conditions even after recovering their physical health, and this reluctance can have a detrimental effect on their physical and social health. This issue might be worthy of further study.

Altogether, the report shows the urgency of continuing to improve Toronto's winter sidewalk maintenance. We strongly support the idea of establishing a 2 cm sidewalk snow clearing threshold for all sidewalks, which will be both safer and more consistent. We continue to urge extension of municipal sidewalk snow clearing to older residential neighbourhoods, and are working with councillors to establish pilot projects to explore potential solutions. In the meantime, we strongly support expansion of the greatly under-used shoveling service for seniors and the disabled, better information about snow-clearing responsibility, and improved bylaw enforcement.

The good news is, the report shows that investing in improved winter sidewalk snow clearing and maintenance can have a significant positive effect. If the number of winter slips and falls were reduced, the City itself would save money in liability claims, provincial health care costs would be reduced, and the health of many individual citizens of Toronto would be improved, both through less injury, and through greater confidence in walking during the winter. We strongly support the adoption and distribution of this report, and the implementation of its recommendations.

Thank you,

Dylan Reid

On behalf of Walk Toronto