

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND
RECREATION:
THE EMERGENCY SHELTER SYSTEM IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

Dear Members of the Community Development and Recreation Committee,

Given surging rates of homelessness in Toronto, the Community Development and Recreation Committee needs to take action to address the needs of this population and prevent immediate deaths attributable to lack of emergency shelter.

We are asking Members of the CDR Committee to:

1. Require Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) to revise its estimate of shelter occupancy to include those spaces that are operated by the Out of the Cold program, overnight drop-in centres and emergency cooling and warming centres to increase accuracy of reported capacity.
2. Require SSHA to develop and implement an action plan which requires opening of emergency shelters when there is documented surge in demand. This plan should be implemented when occupancy of shelters, the Out of the Cold program, overnight drop-ins and emergency programs, exceeds 90% of available shelter beds.
3. Require SSHA to conduct an immediate and independent review in 2018 of its Shelter Standards as per 2.4.5 of the Toronto Shelter Standards due to the extraordinary crowding and increased demand for services documented this year.

The deaths, hospitalization, and use of emergency resources of people who are homeless are **preventable by the City of Toronto**. By writing this letter we ask the City of Toronto to uphold its commitment to serve all its residents, including those who are most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Claudia Wong, Registered Nurse

Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT.
Chief Executive Officer
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)

Cathy Crowe, Street Nurse, Distinguished Visiting Practitioner, Ryerson University

Gary Bloch, Family Physician, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

Leigh Chapman, Registered Nurse

Joyce Rankin, Director of the Yorkminster Park Baptist Church Out of the Cold

Lanadee Lampman RN, Parish Nurse St James Cathedral

Haven Toronto (formerly Good Neighbours Club)

Erinn Oxford Executive Director for **The Dale Ministries**

The Parkdale Activity – Recreation Centre

Toronto Drop-In Network – a network of 54 drop-ins in the city

Street Nurses Network

South Riverdale Community Health Centre

Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

Inner City Family Health Team

Health Providers Against Poverty (Ontario)

The Dream Team

Sanctuary Ministries Toronto

Street Health

Laura Sky, LLD (honouris causa) Writer/ Researcher/ Documentarian. Filmmaker
'Home Safe Toronto', 'Home Safe Calgary', 'Home Safe Hamilton'.

Shelley Saywell, filmmaker 'Street Nurse', 'LowDown Tracks'

Dr. Katie Dorman, Family Physician, St. Michael's Hospital

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Pascal Murphy, Sarah Jean Harrison and Isaac Coplan, Ryerson University Homelessness in Canadian Society Instructors

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Dr. Kaitlin Schwan, Postdoctoral Fellow, York University

BACKGROUND

Emergency Shelters in Toronto

- The current capacity of emergency shelters is offset by Out of the Cold (OOTC) and overnight drop-in programs, which provide sleeping spaces, usually on mats, for those in need. Both of these types of programs report operating at maximum capacity over Winter 2016-17.
 - Although the City of Toronto reports a shelter occupancy of 4487 beds (March 16, 2017) of a possible 4679 beds, this occupancy **does not include over 800 OOTC and overnight drop-in spaces (per week).**
 - **Including the OOTC and overnight drop-in occupancy volume (estimated at 882) brings occupancy to over 5200 out of a possible 4679 beds (or 113%).** This demonstrates an unsustainable reliance on OOTC and overnight drop-in centres to offset shelter occupancy.
 - Although OOTC operated more spaces for sleeping in 2016-17 they have also reported an increase in demand for their services. Some OOTC locations report having to turn people away due to lack of capacity. They also report that individuals line up as early as noon to access a space for when their doors open at 6 pm.
- Shelters funded by the City of Toronto should adhere to the Toronto Shelter Standards (revised in 2015). It is clear that shelters are unable to do so due to rising demand and extremely limited resources. It should be noted that shelter staffing was reduced by Toronto City Council in the 2017 budget.
 - Shelter staff and front-line workers in the community report that shelter users become agitated and anxious at the prospect of having no bed to sleep in. It should also be noted that shelter staff often feel there are safety concerns for shelter users and for themselves due to lack of staffing.
 - The 2016 Group A Streptococcus outbreak at Seaton House, which is now in its 14th month, also demonstrates particular challenges for this sector.
- In the past, Toronto mayors have called for assistance and support from other levels of government to open the armouries as emergency shelter when demand for shelter space has risen. The armouries were used as emergency shelters 4

previous times in the past. In addition, there are past best practices and policy achievements when buildings, obtained for use as an emergency shelter, were then transformed into affordable housing or long-term care (2 Murray Street, (Vance Latchford Place) 87 Elm Street (YWCA), Doctor's Hospital (Kensington Gardens).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Threats and Endangerment of Human Life

- Lack of shelter is endangering the lives of Toronto residents. In February 2017, five homeless deaths were reported. One of those occurred after the person had been told there was no room at the local overnight drop-in centre for him to stay.
- In March 2017, it has been reported that at least two homeless people were hospitalized due to hypothermia. One of these two people was comatose and in critical condition at the time of writing.
- The opiate overdose emergency and homelessness necessitate the expansion of harm-reduction shelters.

Economic Impact

- A 2013 study from Homeless Hub estimates that institutional responses (including use of police, fire, EMS, jail, and hospitals) to homelessness range in cost from \$4333 to \$10,900 per person, compared to a cost of a shelter bed at \$1932 for one person.
- The City of Toronto could significantly reduce emergency response resources needed to respond to people who are homeless if emergency shelters were opened when there is a surge in demand.
 - This could result in saving resources for Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services, and the Toronto Police Division.

Duty to Uphold the Toronto Shelter Standards

- The City of Toronto is accountable for planning and management of the housing and homeless service system. The City of Toronto, and the Shelter Support and Housing Administration are responsible for ensuring that shelters are able to uphold and meet quality assurance standards.

Public Demand

- A petition calling for emergency shelter has been signed by 12,000 citizens.
- 31 organizations signed a Social Planning Toronto letter on the shelter emergency.

References

1. Statements from Rafi Aaron (Multi-Faith Coalition to Fight Homelessness) - on asks for shelter system:
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2. CTV News coverage of February 19, with statement from the Mayor's office:
<http://toronto.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1060919>
3. Public Policy and Homelessness: Calgary <http://homelesshub.ca/blog/public-policy-and-homelessness-case-calgary>
4. Toronto Shelter Standards (2016).
<http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Shelter%20Support%20%20Housing%20Administration/Article/Hostels/Toronto%20Shelter%20Standards/toronto-shelter-standards-2016-final.pdf>
5. City of Toronto Daily Shelter Census:
<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=4ec8c0e9f7301410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnnextchannel=c0aeab2cedfb0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
6. Toronto Homeless Memorial. <http://www.holytrinitytoronto.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/THM-OFFICIAL-LIST-Jan.-2017.pdf>
7. Petition for the city to open the armouries.
<http://www.change.org/OpenTheArmouries>
8. Social Planning Toronto letter on the shelter emergency.
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/568/attachments/original/1485876090/Shelterletter-Mayor.pdf?1485876090>