

Joe Cressy, Chair  
Board of Health  
City of Toronto

Oct 25, 2019

Dear Councillor Cressy and committee members:

Re: HL10.4 Strengthening Heat Resilience in the City of Toronto

We are writing to you as a group of concerned nurses who work with people experiencing homelessness, and precariously housed people in Toronto and the GTA. We see first-hand the impact that this climate crisis has on people experiencing poverty and homelessness, particularly during extreme weather.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) reports the effects of heat on people, such as heat-stroke, cardiovascular complications and death, accounting for approximately 120 deaths per year in the City. TPH also understands that certain groups of people are more at risk during extreme heat, such as seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and people with chronic illnesses. As front-line nurses, we see the effect heat has on people and understand the dire consequences. Hot weather can cause heat-related illness or death and can exacerbate other medical conditions such as COPD, diabetes, and heart disease.

This past summer, the City of Toronto implemented a Heat Relief Network which touted more than 300 cool spaces for people across the City, including swimming pools and splash pads. This heat relief network provided little reprieve for folks as many places listed on the network weren't accessible to most people, some locations provided no relief from the sun and none of these locations provided any important resources, such as support services, food, reusable water bottles, hats or sunscreen. This "Strategy" was in contradiction to the 2017 Stakeholder workshop where important ideas were discussed such as having accessible Cooling Centres with healthcare staff, food, and activities; extended hours at drop-ins; a registry for people vulnerable to heat; more outreach to high-risk individuals; and an improved "Heat Warning" system that better reaches the people who needed the services. This was done in consultation with front-line experts, including Street Nurses, whose ideas were ultimately ignored. The Heat Relief Strategy did not work and the City needs to do better.

According to the Municipal Licensing and Standards Executive Director 2018 Report "Mitigating the Negative Impacts of Extreme Heat in Apartment Buildings" only 6 percent of apartments in Toronto have air conditioning. Homes should be safe and comfortable. Someone's home should not cause them to suffer heat-related illness or death, which unfortunately we have seen in the past.

The City has encouraged landlords to create air conditioned common rooms for tenants to access but is there follow-up to see if this is being done? We would argue that all people should

have the right to live in spaces that contribute positively to our health and safety which would include access to affordable housing with air conditioning for all. Ideally, people should not have to leave their homes to seek refuge from the heat, whether due to disability, illness, or just wanting to stay in the privacy of one's own apartment. There should be funding for all social housing units and boarding homes in Toronto to be equipped with air conditioning with a maximum temperature bylaw in place.

Some critics would argue that every person having air conditioning has a negative environmental impact. We would argue the onus to solve environmental pollution and climate change should not be on poor people. The responsibility is on our governments to regulate industry polluters.

We also need to include other places of residence into the conversation about heat. The City needs to expand shelters and respite centres, and ensure they are air conditioned, as extreme heat can continue into the night. People staying at these sites should be able to stay indoors during hot summer days or have appropriate cooling centres available that are accessible, and welcoming for people experiencing homelessness.

Cooling centres should also be available for anyone out during the day or night needing a break from the heat. These cooling centres should have healthy food and reusable water bottles, free transportation to these sites, have engaging activities, have health care staff, and be inclusive for people experiencing homelessness.

All vulnerable people should have access to air conditioning in their apartments, shelters, and respite centres and not rely on a Heat Relief Network that largely has inaccessible spaces for people without proper supports. But we are in a housing and homelessness emergency; without affordable housing and enough shelter beds there are people sleeping on the streets that should have access to well-resourced 24/7 cooling centres during extreme heat alerts to mitigate the risk of morbidity or death. We need our governments to listen to those most affected by the climate crisis and frontline workers and take action to prevent heat-related deaths.

Sincerely,  
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Street Nurses Network  
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#### References

Municipal Licensing and Standards Office. 2018. Mitigating the Negative Impacts of Extreme Heat in Apartment Buildings. Available at:

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/ls/bgrd/backgroundfile-114428.pdf>