

Submission from Dr. Maggie Hulbert



&

Street Nurses Network
Toronto



DECENT WORK &
HEALTH NETWORK



December 3, 2020

To: Mayor John Tory, City of Toronto Council Members, Mary Anne Bedard, General Manager of of Shelter Support & Housing Administration, and Janie Romoff, General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department

Health Providers Against Poverty, the Decent Work and Health Network, the Shelter & Housing Justice Network, and the Street Nurses Network call for a Moratorium on Encampment Evictions

Health Providers Against Poverty urgently calls on the City of Toronto to end efforts to clear encampments across the city. As healthcare and social service providers, we are gravely concerned that the City's continued eviction efforts will, in effect, condemn encampment residents to preventable suffering and needless death this winter.

In the absence of safe, dignified alternatives, forcing unhoused people out of their communities of choice in the midst of twinned overdose and COVID-19 crises, represents an unconscionable threat to the health and wellbeing of our clients, patients, friends, family members and neighbours living in encampments. Although an October court decision granted the City the right to clear encampments, this decision reflected an assumption that enough shelter spaces existed to meet the needs of unhoused people in our city. The 560 additional shelter spaces that the city will open as part of the 2020-21 Winter Plan are insufficient: demand for shelter spaces already outstrips supply most nights, and with winter coming and more people in our city facing eviction, this nightly crisis will only escalate. Moreover, many of the shelter spaces the City has made available, take individuals out of their communities and away from vital health services. This represents particular life-threatening danger to encampment residents who rely on harm reduction services concentrated in the downtown core, and goes against the 2020 CDC recommendations to stop encampment clearances in the COVID19 pandemic as a means of controlling the spread of infection (9).

Instead of criminalizing encampment residents, or the community members volunteering to provide them with supplies to survive the winter, the City must recognize encampments as a symptom of their own inaction in the face of Toronto's housing crisis. The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right, affirmed in Canadian and international law, and the formation of encampments reflects the City's failure to provide its people with adequate, permanent housing. Ample evidence underscores the relationship between access to safe, dignified housing and health (11) and as healthcare providers, we are gravely concerned for the health and wellbeing of encampment residents. We therefore call on the city to take action accordingly by:

1. Immediately implementing a full moratorium on evicting encampment residents from their homes, including Toronto Tiny Shelters (TTS);;
2. Providing encampment residents with services, supplies, and support that facilitate their self-determination, safety, and wellbeing, including the urgent provision of winter survival gear;
3. Immediately implementing robust harm reduction supports and overdose prevention services in shelters and transitional housing;
4. Creating permanent housing options for encampment residents;
5. Developing and implementing policies that address the structural origins of Toronto's housing crisis.

“Any decision that does not lead to the furthering of inhabitants’ human rights, that does not ensure their dignity, or that represents a backwards step in terms of their enjoyment of human rights, is contrary to human rights law.”

- 2020 United Nations National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada

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