



June 29, 2020

Dear Members of the Board of Health,

Sub: Written Deputation – HL 18.1 – Toronto Public Health’s Response to COVID 19 – Context, Status Update, and Next Steps

Sherbourne Health is a dynamic provider of integrated health services, community programs and capacity-building initiatives that enable people and diverse communities to achieve wellness. As part of its mandate Sherbourne works in the neighbourhood of North St. James Town providing health, mental health and health promotion services. It plays a key role in the Downtown East Ontario Health Team (OHT) Planning Table and also co-leads a collaborative of 15 health and social service organizations called Health Access St. James Town.

St. James Town is one of the most-dense neighbourhoods in North America. It is home to more than 20,000 people, with a density 18 times that of the City of Toronto (Wellesley Institute, 2011). It also has the highest levels of marginalization amongst all neighbourhoods in Mid-East Toronto (TC LHIN neighbourhood profile, 2016). Almost two-thirds of the residents are visible minorities and 1.3 % have reported an Aboriginal identity. An additional factor is that there is a high proportion of seniors above 65 living alone (49.6%).

An article on April 21<sup>st</sup> 2020, in the Globe and Mail titled – In the Pandemic, Toronto’s St. James Town Needs Room to Breathe, described the challenges during a pandemic when families live in cramped conditions or when unrelated individuals stay together. Sometimes there could be as many as 7 people living within 500-600sq.ft. of space. The COVID 19 Toronto Neighbourhood Map updated as of June 27<sup>th</sup>, reports 183 positive cases in North St. James Town which makes it a hot spot for community spread. It is important to note that there has not been any neighbourhood-based testing so far in St. James Town, so it is likely that the numbers might increase significantly when testing begins.

It is imperative that dense neighbourhoods like St. James Town that face significant social and economic disadvantages including but not limited to overcrowding, isolation, racism, discrimination and poverty have access to the resources and supports needed to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Sherbourne Health recommends that:

- 1. Recovery sites be established for people in dense neighbourhoods like St. James Town who are not able to self-isolate at home.**



- *For families already facing social and economic disadvantages, those who have tested positive might need to be separated from other family members as this might be important to help working members continue to provide for the family*
  - *There might not be supports in place – meals, health care etc., that can help with families self-isolating at home*
  - *When unrelated individuals are sharing an apartment, there should be a space available to those who have tested positive to self isolate*
  - *Seniors living alone, and those facing mental health and addiction issues might not have the supports to self-isolate at home*
- 2. Recovery sites should be tailored to support the needs of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) communities as many people living in dense and disadvantaged neighbourhoods are part of these communities**
- *Determining and investing in the basket of services needed at these isolation sites to help support the population specific needs of those who are not able to self isolate at home. This would need to prioritize the distinct characteristics of neighbourhoods and sub populations within the neighbourhoods.*
  - *Services should include but not be limited to health and mental health care, addictions support, food security, income supports and social and other supports.*

We appreciate the Board's consideration of these important recommendations.

Regards

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