



Joe Cressy, Chair  
Board of Health  
City of Toronto

April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Councillor Cressy and Board of Health members:

**Re: HL27.1 Response to COVID-19**

As a Street Nurse who works primarily with people who are homeless, I am writing to demand immediate action on prioritizing the safety of all people experiencing homelessness within the shelter system and in encampments.

Public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 include having your own space to physically distance, wearing proper PPE including N95 masks, practicing infection control and getting the COVID-19 vaccine when available. Since the start of the pandemic, folks who are homeless were not given adequate support to enforce these critical public health measures, despite many front-line workers and homeless people speaking out. There has been difficult access to safe shelter beds, limited access to masks and now a slow vaccine rollout. With over 300 COVID-19 cases within the shelter system, things have gotten out of control.

For people who reside in shelters, the current practices make it impossible for anyone to avoid getting COVID-19, as we have seen with several shelters currently on outbreak status and with the designated Recovery Hotel at or near capacity. Some shelter users have been asked to isolate in place, forcing those who have COVID-19 to live among those who don't, increasing the needless risk of spreading the disease. Without means to properly isolate, there is no way to protect shelter users from becoming exposed to COVID-19.

Given the increased risk of getting COVID-19 within the shelter system, many people have taken to living in encampments. Many homeless folks have expressed that they feel safer outside than in a congregate setting where the risk of getting the disease is real. Despite homeless people trying to live in a way that is safe for them, the City has issued trespass notices to encampment residents and has been forcing them off parks and into shelters that are already full and potentially overrun with COVID-19.

As a nurse, I know how dangerous getting COVID-19 can be, especially for people experiencing homelessness. A study by the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences shows that homeless people are 20 times more likely to be hospitalized, 10 times more likely to be admitted to the

ICU and 5 times more likely to die from COVID-19<sup>i</sup>. Given that we are in the third wave of the pandemic with COVID-19 cases still on the rise and ICUs being more overwhelmed than ever, we need to do everything in our power to protect people from getting the disease.

The City needs to retract the trespass notices and put a moratorium on encampment evictions all while looking for more Recovery Hotels for people to safely isolate as well as implement single room shelters to prevent the spread. The City also needs to ensure every homeless person and shelter worker has timely access to the COVID-19 vaccine and proper PPE, including N95 masks. People deserve safe places to live with access to proper measures to help avoid getting COVID-19. It is vital that we do all we can to protect the lives of homeless people before this dire situation becomes even worse.

Thank you,  
Roxie Danielson, RN  
Street Nurses Network

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ices.on.ca/Newsroom/News-Releases/2021/People-experiencing-homelessness-are-more-likely-to-be-infected-with-and-die-of-COVID-19>