

January 14th, 2022

Re: Proposed Funding Increase for City-Funded Drop-ins & The Provision of Menstrual and Incontinence Supplies

As a City of Toronto Agency dedicated to the health, happiness, and full participation of 2SLGBTQ communities and our local neighbourhood, and as a member of the Toronto Drop-In Network, The 519 is writing to share our experience of running drop-ins throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the dire need for free and accessible menstrual and incontinence supplies.

Proposed Funding Increase

In March of 2020, The 519 quickly shifted its weekly SSHA-funded drop-ins to a twice a day, take away meal service for local residents and 2SLGBTQ community members. From March of 2020 to December 2021, we have served approximately 130,000 fresh and frozen meals to our community members experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, job loss, and social isolation. We have also worked in partnership with Second Harvest to cook and distribute over 100,000 meals to partners throughout the Downtown East and the rest of Toronto. This drastic increase in the number of meals served – we served approximately 25,000 meals in 2019 – speaks to the increased need for access to low barrier, affirming, and nutritious food opportunities across 2SLGBTQ and other equity deserving communities.

As a long-time drop-in provider, we know that drop-in spaces are so much more than a place to get food. They are places where people come together and create community. Where they share jokes and learn skills, and where they celebrate achievements and mourn the loss of friends and loved ones. They are key tools for engaging with Torontonians who have been marginalized by other systems and are vital to ensuring people have access to basic goods, referrals, and most importantly, social peers and friendship.

COVID-19 has created incredible strain on Toronto's drop-in system. The impact of the loss of life within the communities we work with due to COVID-19 and the drug poisoning epidemic is difficult to put into words. The operational, logistical, and administrative challenges of operating programs and services for individuals experiencing homelessness or food insecurity over the past two years have added layers of complexity for the sector. The long-tail impact of this pandemic on Toronto's growing homeless communities will not go away with the end of COVID-19. Having appropriate and sustainable funding levels for drop-ins so that they are able to better support and work alongside people experiencing homelessness is vital to ensuring that City-funded drop-in providers are able to provide the level of support expected by the city and deserved by the communities we serve.

Menstrual and Incontinence Supplies

The 519 distributes approximately 500 menstrual kits a month to women, trans, and non-binary community members who access our drop-in and food security programming. While we are fortunate and grateful to on occasion receive donations of supplies, we regularly purchase supplies to meet the needs of the communities we serve. It is very rare for us to receive donations of incontinence supplies, and given their cost we are rarely able to purchase them.

However, we are asked regularly by community members experiencing homelessness, older adults living alone on fixed income, and individuals living with chronic health conditions for incontinence supplies. We estimate that we would be able to distribute 350-450 incontinence supplies a month if they were available.

Free and affirming access to menstrual and incontinence supplies are fundamental to individual health and wellness. Many of the community members we work with are unable to afford a regular supply of these medically necessary items. This is further compounded by the stigma, shame and discrimination that community members face because of their gender identity or expression. Increasing access to menstrual and incontinence supplies is an important step in addressing health inequities that disproportionately affect queer, trans, and non-binary communities and those experiencing homelessness.

The 519 welcomes additional supports for Toronto's vital and overburdened drop-in system. We look forward to continuing to work with our partners across Toronto and with the communities that we serve to build a more supportive, equitable, and just city.

Sincerely,

Curran Stikuts
Director, Communications & Advocacy
Pronouns: [He/Him](#)
[The 519](#)