

Hello,

My name is Greg Cook. I am an Outreach Worker at Sanctuary, I volunteer for the Toronto Homeless Memorial and I am on the Steering Committee of Shelter and Housing Justice Network. I am speaking on behalf Shelter and Housing Justice Network.

The shelter system is in crisis. The consequence for the health of those without housing has been catastrophic.

There were 132 deaths in the shelter system in 2021. There were 74 deaths in 2020 and 48 deaths in 2019. This tells us that the number of deaths in the shelter system have almost tripled compared to before the pandemic. COVID and the City's response to it has had a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of people without housing.

Those who died in the shelter system in 2021 had an avg life expectancy of only 47 years. About half of those deaths are from a poisoned drug supply.

As an outreach worker I can't get someone a shelter space. Sometimes when we call we can't even get a hold of a human person on the phone line. The shelters are full, people can't get inside out of this frigid weather. The Warming Centres only open when it's -15 degrees and there are only 4 of them in the entire city of Toronto.

Currently 50 shelters are reported with COVID outbreaks. Over 400 people currently have COVID in the shelter system.

The shelter flow data and also the stories I hear of what people are experiencing make it clear that evictions, the number of people who are houseless keeps increasing. 300 or more a month are being displaced into houselessness. At the same time the City is only moving 40% of the amount of people they were moving into housing when compared to 2019, before COVID.

The shelter system has collapsed. Naming these institutions shelters or respites at this point is an inaccurate term.

It is clear to me that the city government needs to act, they need to do much more to address this unprecedented situation. People deserve to be able to follow the same public health guidelines that those of us with housing can. Much more needs to be done to address this health catastrophe that is killing an alarming number of people.

It is imperative that the Board of Health speak up so that the necessary action is taken to ensure the health and wellbeing of people without housing is valued and prioritized.

Please ask for federal relief? We echo Leilani Farha, the former United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing who writes in a public letter, "we urge you to convene an intergovernmental meeting immediately with provincial/territorial, city and Indigenous officials. (eg. International and Canadian Red Cross, UNHCR, Doctors Without Borders, the University Health Network and others).

Please ask that the city gov to open more COVID recovery rooms.

Please ask the city to create more shelter-hotel rooms available for people. In 2020 they opened over 2000 rooms in a 4 month span. We know the gov can do more than they are doing currently. It isn't OK that people need to be in congregate settings during COVID.

Please make ensure that shelters expand overdose prevention, education, training, and response. Training must include CPR using a bag-valve-mask (BVM). And that shelter-hotels implement [Toronto Shelter-Hotel Overdose Preparedness Assessment Project](#).

Please ask the city government to stop evicting people from encampments. It is well established that evicting people from encampments is bad public health policy at anytime. This is especially true during a pandemic.

Please speak up to ensure the health and wellbeing of the thousands of people in Toronto without housing.