



**Stop The Cuts- Open Shelter Now
Public Delegation to the Mayor's Office to Prevent Winter Deaths
Tuesday November 8, 10AM**

To the Board of Health,

Dropping temperatures, rising COVID cases and an extreme shortage of shelter beds are creating a dangerous situation for people who are homeless. The shelter crisis has reached dire proportions and will grow even worse as the City unleashes major cuts to shelters and other critical services. According to city data, 221 people experiencing homelessness died in 2021 at a median age of 45. Unless immediate action is taken, homeless deaths will continue to rise this winter.

Accessing emergency shelter is now nearly impossible. Every day an average of 170 people are turned away due to bed shortages and are forced to sleep outside in the rain and cold. Countless others have lost hope and no longer try to access a bed. Recent funding cuts and shelter hotel closures will put more pressure on a system already overloaded.

Despite an extreme shortage of shelter and continued COVID outbreaks the City plans to close the Novotel and cram an additional 500 sleep spaces into existing congregate shelters. The 251 beds at the Novotel are set to close at the end of this year right in the dead of winter. Non-congregate hotel beds have provided safer shelter for many people. Closing non-congregate facilities and reducing social distancing measures in congregate settings will worsen shelter conditions and contribute to infectious disease outbreaks and poor health outcomes.

The City has recently slashed funding to many crucial programs including housing support workers, eviction support programs, employment services and drop-in programmes. These service cuts will reduce access to food, safe spaces to be indoors and support to exit homelessness.

The City has failed to address the shelter shortage and is now cutting essential services yet they continue to violently evict homeless encampments. People have nowhere to go. Encampment evictions only lead to destroyed survival equipment, isolation and harm. Rather than criminalizing homelessness the City must prioritize creating safe shelter for everyone.

On November 8th, 2022 we will be bringing a public delegation to your office. We would like to meet to discuss immediate actions that could save lives this winter.

We demand the City of Toronto:

1. End the planned closure of shelter hotels. Existing hotel programs must remain open
2. Add an additional 2,700 non-congregate spaces to the shelter system and ensure the 90% capacity mandate is met and everyone can access safe emergency shelter
3. Stop the cuts to drop-in programming and other essential services
4. Immediately stop the eviction of encampment residents
5. Collaborate with provincial and federal governments to build rent geared-to-income social housing in Toronto: 10,000 units immediately to address homelessness and 90,000 units to address the growing waitlist
6. Institute a mask mandate for all indoor public spaces and ensure shelter staff and residents have needed PPE
7. Ensure all congregate shelters, warming centers and 24 hour drop-in centers provide at least 2.5 metres between sleep surfaces and implement social distancing measures and proper air filtration and exchange. Shelter hotel rooms must be single occupancy unless shared by a couple
8. Resume outreach efforts to deliver easy access to COVID and flu vaccinations for those who are homeless
9. Publicly report the number of COVID outbreaks in shelters, warming centres and 24 hour drop-ins

Sincerely,

Shelter Housing and Justice Network

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