

April 25, 2023

Dear Economic and Community Development Committee,

We are writing on behalf of Regent Park Community Health Centre to express our deep concern about the dangerous situation facing people without housing in Toronto. Many of us have worked with people who are homeless for over a decade and have never witnessed such a severe shortage of shelter and housing. The situation reached crisis proportions years ago and it continues to grow worse. Now, a large budget shortfall threatens existing shelter services. We urge the City to take leadership- publicly declare homelessness an emergency and strongly advocate for the provincial and federal governments to provide the funds necessary to build housing and create shelter.

In March this year, an average of 120 people trying to access a shelter bed were turned away daily. We are seeing clients every day who cannot access emergency shelter. People are arriving at our office in crisis- they are exhausted and distressed from spending nights on the street. We call central intake, often wait on hold for up to an hour and are told to call back because no beds are available. Many of our clients do not have access to telephone and cannot call for a shelter bed after we close. We are often left with no choice but to offer TTC tickets, coffee shop gift cards or tents to provide an option for shelter even though people may be targeted by police or security while trying to rest in these spaces.

There are rare circumstances when we have managed to help people access a hotel room. We have seen hotel rooms transform lives in a positive way. Non-congregate shelters provide more privacy, improved living conditions and reduced infectious disease risk compared to congregate settings. Hotel rooms are unfortunately not permanent. Over 300 non-congregate hotel beds were closed by the City this winter and there are plans to shut down another 330 beds in other shelter-hotels by the end of August. When shelter hotels close it's very challenging for people to access housing or even an alternate hotel bed. We have seen our clients end up on the street after shelter hotel closures, resulting in destabilization and further health challenges.

Despite the dire shortage of shelter and housing people in encampments continue to be harassed and evicted by the City. Often survival equipment is destroyed. This violence towards people who are homeless has resulted in stress, trauma, isolation and increased risk of death. As long as the shortage of dignified housing and shelter persists, people will continue to be outside. The city must take a human right's based approach and prevent encampments by creating more shelter and housing. Until safe shelter exists for everyone, encampment evictions must end.

In 2022, 187 people in Toronto died homeless at a median age of 55 for men and 42 for women. Over the years we have seen many people die prematurely as a result of the shortage of affordable housing and the harsh conditions in shelters and on the street. Ottawa, Niagara Region and the city of Hamilton have publicly declared homelessness an emergency. Toronto

should do the same. The City must take leadership to ensure everyone can access safe shelter. Lives depend on it.

Thank-you,

Sincerely,

Regent Park Community Health Centre