



Date: July 5, 2025

To: Board of Health Members, City of Toronto

From: Health Providers Against Poverty

Re: Urgent Action Required for Heat Relief Strategy - Board of Health Meeting July 7, 2025

Dear Board of Health Members,

Health Providers Against Poverty, an organization of healthcare workers committed to addressing the social determinants of health, writes to urge your immediate consideration of critical gaps in Toronto's Heat Relief Strategy at Monday July 7 2025 Board of Health Committee meeting.

As healthcare and community workers, we witness firsthand the devastating health impacts of extreme heat on our most vulnerable community members. Heat events are one of the deadliest weather-related emergencies we face, and with extreme heat expected to only increase, we must work together to take decisive action now.

The current heat emergency has exposed dangerous inadequacies in our city's response system. We are particularly concerned about unhoused individuals who lack access to air conditioning and safe indoor spaces, vulnerable tenants (44% of whom lack air conditioning access) including people with disabilities, seniors and those with chronic health conditions who are at highest risk of heat-related illness.

We commend Mayor Olivia Chow's and Councillor Alejandra Bravo's amendment (MM31.21) on Addressing Gaps in the City's Heat Relief Strategy on June 26, 2025. We urge the Board of Health Committee to consider and urgent act of these measures as part of emergency public health measures:

1. Immediate reinstatement of 24/7 Cooling/Respite Centers

The current directory of semi-public air-conditioned spaces is inadequate. We commend the recent opening of Metro Hall as a 24/7 cooling space. We advocate for the reinstatement of the network of dedicated, accessible 24/7 cooling/respice centers that are:

- Open and accessible throughout the season to ensure reliable services that are not dependent on the uncertainty of when or if a heat alert will be called which may result gaps in communication and lower uptake
- Barrier-free and inclusive of people with disabilities
- Staffed appropriately to provide basic health monitoring
- Designed as dignified spaces that people will actually use

2. Maximum Temperature Bylaw

Fast-track implementation of a maximum indoor temperature bylaw at 26°C, which has proven safe and effective in British Columbia and other jurisdictions. This is essential for protecting vulnerable tenants.

3. Enhanced Water Access

Support the allocation of \$50,000 from corporate extreme weather reserves to ensure frontline agencies can distribute water bottles, and expand water trailer deployment beyond current heat relief timelines as per Ontario's Safe Drinking Water Act and UN resolution on the human right to water and sanitation. Designate water trailer locations in consultation with advocates, including unhoused people sheltering outside.

4. Healthcare Worker Support

Ensure nurses and paramedics can support outdoor pool operations during heat events, recognizing that these spaces serve as crucial cooling spaces for many residents.

5. Comprehensive Door-to-Door Wellness Checks

Support the pilot program with Canadian Red Cross for door-to-door wellness checks in areas with vulnerable populations, with appropriate healthcare professional oversight.

Long-term Health System Considerations

The Board of Health must also advocate for:

- **Moratorium on encampment clearings**, especially during heat emergencies, as displacement during extreme weather creates acute health risks
- **Restoration of no-fare transit** during heat emergencies to reduce barriers to accessing cooling spaces
- **Expansion of shelter capacity** to address the 1,000 respite and shelter spots closed since February 2025. Until adequate shelter space is available, implement the operation of "cooling centres" as low-barrier, year-round, 24-hour respites with surge capacity for extreme weather conditions. Ensure these respites are accessible and usable for physically disabled unhoused people.

As health and community workers, we have a duty to advocate for policies that protect population health. The current heat relief strategy fails to meet basic public health standards for emergency preparedness. We are seeing preventable heat-related illnesses and deaths that could be avoided with proper municipal infrastructure and planning.

We share the hope that a world where people's right to safe, accessible and dignified shelter and housing conditions are realized. However, the reality of today is that many people are sheltering and surviving outside under inhumane conditions. Their rights to a safe indoor space, to clean and safe drinking water, and to exist without harassment, must be protected.

We hope that you will take the steps to advocate for an expansion of the City's Heat Relief Strategy and we will be paying attention to your actions on this matter.

In summary, we respectfully request that the Board of Health:

1. Declare the current heat relief strategy inadequate from a public health perspective
2. Advocate for immediate implementation of 24/7 cooling centers
3. Support fast-tracking of the maximum temperature bylaw
4. Recommend dedicated health funding for extreme weather emergency response
5. Call for a comprehensive review of heat emergency protocols with healthcare professional input

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to meaningful consultation with the Board of Health and City Council to implement short and long term solutions that protect our community's health and wellbeing.

Thank you for your consideration of these urgent public health matters.

Sincerely,



Dr. Paige Homme, on behalf of

Health Providers Against Poverty

Shelter Justice Housing Network