

February 6, 2023

Mayor, Councillors
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Tory and Councillors,

As physicians and leaders in the city's Emergency Departments (EDs) we strongly encourage you to vote in favour of the recommendations being brought to City Council on February 7, 2023 by the Board of Health, including the proposed motion that would allocate funding for expanding the number of 24-hour warming locations during the winter months and ensure that these services are low barrier and provide walk-in access.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both contributed to and exacerbated the crisis we are seeing on our city's streets. An increase in poverty, homelessness, mental illness, and substance use disorders has heightened pressure on our shelter system and our EDs. Every day our waiting rooms are filled with people who need care due to drug poisoning and overdoses, and injuries sustained from sleeping outside and in unsafe areas. Serious harms directly related to cold-weather conditions are preventable. We also see people in our EDs who do not need clinical care, but simply have nowhere warm to go. Therefore, it is crucial that the City expand the number of 24-hour warming locations during the winter months and ensure that these services are low barrier and provide walk-in access. We also support the Board of Health's recommendation to establish an expert working table to review and make recommendations on the intersection of homelessness and health. We are happy to offer our services to this table.

While respite spaces and warming locations are urgently needed, longer-term solutions to prevent and address homelessness are also required. We encourage the City to continue to work with other levels of government to rapidly develop more affordable, supportive housing. The Mayor's recent call to address the mental health crisis is much appreciated, and we are hopeful that a national dialogue will lead to a comprehensive system of supports and services across Toronto. We must all work together to address poverty, homelessness and mental illness in our city. We look forward to your support.

Sincerely,

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