

**To City of Toronto Council Members:
cc. Shelter Support and Housing Administration**

In the lead up to the 2014 Budget.

We, the undersigned represent community agencies and organizations in the City of Toronto who are concerned with the ongoing homelessness crisis in our city. We are writing to you to urge you to take action now.

As you are aware, City Council voted to bring shelter occupancy rates down to 90% more than 9 months ago, but have failed to keep their promise. Capacity for all shelters remains well over 90% in almost all sectors, even with the use of the flex beds, and the overall overcrowding or worsening conditions have not been adequately addressed.

We call on you as City Councilors to support the motions and directions set at the December 4, 2013 Community Development and Recreation Committee.

Everyone agrees that long term housing is preferable to shelter beds but it is necessary to recognize that we are operating in a context where social housing options are minimal and efforts to pit 'housing allowance' strategies against maintaining shelter spaces have only deepened the crisis of overcrowding within the hostel system. Adequate shelter provision must be provided until real viable housing options reduce the need for it. Therefore, we ask that City Council:

- Ensure that the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF) be maintained at 2013 funding levels in order to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability and restore the criteria around the provision of furniture and household items. As it stands right now, there is a proposed \$4.3 million cut to HSF funding. This is unacceptable and must be voted against and full funding restored!
- Include in the budget the necessary resources (\$4.5 million according to Shelter Administration budget briefing note) to increase access to shelter beds so that shelter capacity does not exceed 90% in ANY category of shelter. New shelter space is needed immediately in order to decrease the capacity and crowding in the shelters.
- Support the continued funding for the new women's shelter that has been opened recently and to increase the capacity in this sector. Support the development and opening of LGBTQ youth focused shelter and transitional housing. Ensure a moratorium on the closing of any further shelter.
- Provide new funding for and immediately open 24 hour or after hour safe space for women in the downtown east and west ends. These spaces

should consider the unique access needs for women in these areas, should be low barrier and operate with a harm reduction approach. This issue has been referred over to further reports and consultations, but we need action now.

- Open 24 hour warming centres during the extreme cold weather alerts that are:
 - 1) located in neighborhoods across the city where they are needed
 - 2) that are accessible, low barrier with a harm reduction approach, and pet friendly
 - 3) provide cots and blankets for people to rest (as were provided previously during the ice storm) and some sense of privacy
 - 4) provide healthy, hot food
 - 5) provide access to health care provision on site

Until the time that housing and adequate income is available and accessible to all, we require that the very basic need of safe space, shelter and food is met. We call on the City of Toronto to implement the above recommendations in order to take the step towards this goal. We hope to see your support for this critical issue at the next city council meeting.

Sincerely,

- Angela Robertson, Executive Director of Central Toronto Community Health Centres
- Bathurst United Church
- Cathy Crowe, long-time Street Nurse, co-founder Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and appointed distinguished visiting practitioner at Ryerson University's Faculty of Arts
- Health Providers Against Poverty
- Jane Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP)
- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- Ontario Coalition Against Poverty
- ONA (Ontario Nurses Association) Local 054
- Parkdale Community Legal Services

- Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC)
- Regent Park Community Health Centre
- Sanctuary
- Sistering
- Social Planning Toronto
- South Riverdale Community Health Centre
- St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society
- Street Health
- Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape

*To sign on to this letter as community agency or organization, please write: ocap@tao.ca or call: [416-925-6939](tel:416-925-6939)