

Right to Housing Peel Coalition

Date: March 24, 2022

Regional Chair Nando Iannicca
Region of Peel
10 Peel Centre Drive, Suite A,
Brampton, ON L6T 4B9

Dear Members of Regional Council,

Re: Improving Health Care Services for the Homeless in Peel

The Right to Housing Peel is a coalition of service providers and housing advocates that are working together to educate and advance Canada's commitment to the right to housing at the local level. The Government of Canada recognized housing as a human right through the National Housing Strategy Act, 2019. This includes a commitment at all levels of government to enact policies and measures that ensure housing is affordable, adequate, habitable, and accessible for all Canadians, in particular, those most impacted by the housing affordability crisis, such as people experiencing homelessness.

We are writing you today in support of the proposal to extend the operation of the Region of Peel's COVID-19 isolation centre and to develop a permanent, integrated model of care for people experiencing homelessness. These initiatives are essential to the continued provision of health care services to the homeless population in the Region of Peel, and to support their transition out of homelessness, an essential step in the realization of their right to housing.

Background

Prior to the pandemic, Peel's homeless population frequently relied on hospital emergency rooms to meet their healthcare needs. However, in addition to putting a substantial strain on emergency services, hospital emergency rooms are not well suited to service the complex needs of many individuals experiencing homelessness.

In response to the pandemic, a temporary COVID-19 isolation centre for people experiencing homelessness was established through provincial funding, with coordination support from the Region and healthcare services provided by Homeless Health Peel. While the primary intention of the isolation centre was to provide COVID-19 care, its services expanded to include medication management, palliative care, mental health and addictions support, geriatric care, hospital preparation and step-down and primary care workup. The centre very quickly showed positive results for the health of the homeless occupants, offering an opportunity to develop a better model for providing healthcare services to this population.

These additional healthcare services have filled an essential gap in primary care for people experiencing homelessness, which had been overlooked prior to the pandemic. The isolation site has demonstrated that there are better and more innovative ways of integrating health, housing and other social supports.

Our Recommendation

The Right to Housing Peel coalition would like to acknowledge the great work that the Region's housing services division has done throughout the pandemic and the invaluable support they have provided to ensure that the isolation site has been able to remain operational.

Lessons from the Region's COVID-19 response highlight that integrated health support is essential to meet the complex needs of those experiencing homelessness and support their sustained transition out of homelessness and towards more stabilized forms of housing – an essential step in the realization of the right to housing. As recognized in the staff report, this will require both immediate measures to sustain the health services provided by the isolation site, and a longer-term plan developed through meaningful engagement of service providers' impacted communities.

We fully support their recommendation that this facility continues to operate, and that Council approves the required one-time funding for the transition of the centre to the site of the previous family shelter at 1767 Dundas St. East, Mississauga, for a period of up to 19 months. To ensure a seamless transition of services, we support the Region's proposal to enter into service agreements for the 19-month period with the providers who currently operate the COVID-19 isolation site.

The Housing Services' recommendation to develop a long-term plan for a permanent integrated model of care for the homeless community is a necessary initiative that will result in better outcomes for both their health and housing options. We fully support this initiative, and further request the creation of an advisory committee that includes representatives from Health Services, local health care organizations, community partners with expertise in housing and homelessness, and people with lived experience. Ensuring the meaningful participation of these stakeholders in all stages of the planning process through an advisory committee will strengthen the effectiveness of this initiative, in line with a rights-based housing approach.

Finally, we wish to thank the Region for its support for the homelessness-serving sector and Housing Services for its commitment to an integrated solution to serve the housing and healthcare needs of the homeless population. We look forward to our continued work and collaboration on addressing the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Peel.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sean Keddy
Senior Stakeholder and Outreach Advisor
Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation
on behalf of the Right to Housing Peel Coalition