



Media Release

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## **Shelters are full. Open more warming centres!**

### **The City's Winter Plan is cruel and inadequate.**

It was -20C this morning, people can't access shelter beds and the warming centres weren't open. Even with warming centres opening tonight, the City's plan is wholly inadequate.

Last night, the adult emergency shelter system was at 97% capacity, and the family sector at 99% capacity and there were 29 shelters classified as being in active COVID-19 outbreak. "Even though unhoused people are at increased weather-related risk of injury at this temperature and especially vulnerable to COVID-19, the City has not opened sufficient beds," says Lorraine Lam of Shelter & Housing Justice Network (SHJN).

"There are about 375 fewer shelter spaces today than there were before the pandemic began – even with the 200 spaces from the City's Winter Plan,"<sup>1</sup> says A.J. Withers, lead author of SHJN's [Emergency Winter and Shelter Support and Infrastructure Plan](#). They continue, "the City's real winter plan is violent evictions, full shelters and dozens of people turned away every night. We told the City the shelters would be full and the system would be on the brink of collapse this winter that's why we put together a real winter plan with real solutions."

The City of Toronto released its Winter Plan in October 2021. It adds only 203 spaces into the emergency shelter system and makes no changes to how cold weather alerts are called. "We need at least 2,250 beds to bring the shelter system to what the City says a reasonable level. Further, the current cold weather alert system is unscientific and based on next to no evidence," Withers adds. "We put forward a humane winter plan that includes emergency response for inclement weather. The cold, freezing rain, and excessive snowfall endanger people's health. I've seen serious health impacts when the temperature is warmer than -15 degrees, when the City opens warming centres. The City says it is concerned for unhoused people but doesn't open additional spaces during inclement weather," says Lam

SHJN has released a report, authored by a group of researchers, people with lived experience, front-line workers and advocates. The key needs identified are:

1. Immediately incorporate 2,250 permanent, non-congregate shelter beds into the system.
2. Repeal the 'no camping' bylaw.
3. Extend shelter-hotel leases.
4. Increase the target of newly attributed housing allowances in 2021 from 1,440 to 3,000.
5. Freeze all evictions with the emergency powers of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.
6. Issue an inclement weather alert when necessary and open inclement weather sites during alerts.
7. Implement COVID-19 indoor air quality safety measures.

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<sup>1</sup> This number varies slightly with couples and family size because some spaces are made available or unavailable based on occupied rooms.