

Appendix A to Motion respecting
Correspondence to the
General Issues Committee

To: City of Hamilton, General Issues Committee

From: Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities

Re: Homeless Encampments

The mission of the City of Hamilton's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) is to identify and raise awareness of the barriers that impact the lives of persons with disabilities and to make recommendations on how to prevent and eliminate barriers.

The ACPD has learned of a number of trends that have exasperated the housing crisis especially for those with disabilities which can lead to homelessness. The ACPD recognizes the difficulties surrounding and resolving homelessness and encampments and encourages that consideration be given to the long-term elimination of homelessness as well as the consequences of any short-term interventions. Solutions should consider multiple causes, including City policies and growing inequality and work to end homelessness and the use of shelters for the long-term.

Multiple issues compound the problem of homelessness. The original crisis, losing a home, is repeated by dismantling encampments and the trauma of numerous losses can spiral into unexpected and unintended consequences that can damage mental health and can lead to interactions with law enforcement. As a result, the homeless require greater health

care, face potential penalties and/or criminal changes and escalating costs related thereto. Individuals impacted can take longer to recover and to meaningfully participate in society.

Because policy and practice were found to be central to the court determination regarding encampments in Hamilton, the municipality and the province must re-evaluate related practices that unexpectedly can cause homelessness. Evidence, even when constrained by legal veracity, remains abundant that dismantling camps and the use of crowded shelters potentially harm and provide no form of long-term, safe solution. Related health care and emergency service costs continue to increase. Thus, the ACPD would like to raise concerns related to escalating costs of disabilities and barriers to social inclusion:

- Stable housing is a Social Determinant of Health (SdoH). People who are not properly housed become marginalized. They cannot lead productive lives, contribute to the economy and maintain family.
- Evidence indicates that the homeless can experience significant health consequences that can exacerbate disabilities, illness and chronic disease, prolong incapacity and shorten their lives.
- Once an individual declines to homelessness, their needs become more complex with more difficulty to connect to

services such as housing that stabilizes these individuals for employment. They lose the skills and abilities to manage their daily lives and are more likely to be given a mental health diagnosis. They lose the ability to advocate for themselves and their needs.

- Illnesses such as depression, which are often unrecognized, lead to disability and are associated with loss of work, home, family or an accident and initial problems multiply and accumulate.
- Shelters are not suitable for people with any form of disability as they exacerbate health concerns such as mental health, addiction and depression and increase the potential for harm, acting out and desperate actions. Often nearby facilities and businesses have to increase security while events requiring emergency response continue to grow as displaced persons seek shelter and assistance.

Dismantling encampments without anything better is replicating and repeating the trauma of previous losses and does little to change a person's circumstances. Constructive action for long-term resolution will undoubtedly be less costly and damaging. The ACPD fully supports action that includes working with existing groups that have front-line knowledge of the problems. Inequality and related policy and practice are implicated in increasing and sustaining homelessness and must be acknowledged and addressed.