

## **Cold Alert Trigger and Response Process Survey Summary**

On March 2, 2023 a survey was sent via email to 39 staff (both management and frontline) working in various Community Service Provider organizations including: Emergency Shelter, Street Outreach, Drop In Program, Shelter Health Network, Homelessness Prevention, Violence Against Women's Shelter, Housing First Intervention, and Supportive Housing. The survey was open for a period of two weeks and closed on March 16, 2023. The purpose of the survey was to reach out to Community Service Providers such that they may share feedback specific to Cold Alert thresholds and response plans which could be used to inform further policy.

There were a total of 14 participants providing services in various locations in the City of Hamilton who completed the survey including 5 Emergency Shelter, 2 Drop In Programs, 1 Homelessness Prevention, 1 Violence Against Women's Shelter, 1 Housing First Intervention, and 4 Others such as Supportive Housing. 86% (12/14) identified that they support vulnerable individuals within the homelessness serving systems. However, only 43% (6/14) indicated that it was their organization's primary mandate to serve individuals in the homelessness serving system.

86% (12/14) of Community Service Provider staff indicated that they have concerns specific to the current cold alert thresholds which are set for when temperature drops or is expected to drop below  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  or the temperature feels like  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The concerns raised include cold weather injuries (CWIs) (i.e. frost bite and hypothermia) experienced by their service users at warmer temperatures above the thresholds, other adverse outdoor environmental conditions such as freezing rain, hail, and heavy snow which can exacerbate CWIs, and the use of unauthorized spaces for shelter (i.e. building vestibules) during times when the thresholds are not met which can be a safety issue for both their service users and the public.

More than half 57% (8/14) indicated that the current cold alert thresholds did not align with their organization's cold response protocols and 71% (10/14) shared that they believed the current cold alert thresholds did not meet the health and safety needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity.

When asked if Community Service Provider staff would support an annual Winter Response Strategy operating from December 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> that provides low-barrier overnight warming spaces for individuals experiencing homelessness, more than half 57% (8/14) indicated that they would whereas the other 43% (6/14) had concerns pertaining to their current limited resources (i.e. staffing) and capacity (i.e. space) to support the demands of an annual Winter Response Strategy.

71% of the participants shared that expanding services to include: increased communication, Indigenous Services, more shelter spaces, additional outreach workers, inclusion of faith-based organizations, private sector food donations, warm clothing and blanket supplies and a medical warming bus are to be considered as part of an annual Winter Response Strategy.