

For release September 17, 2024

25 people experiencing homelessness have died between 1 December, 2023 and 31 May, 2024.

[HAMILTON, ONTARIO, September 2024]. Today, we release our sixth dataset on deaths among people experiencing homelessness in Hamilton that occurred between December 2023 to May 2024. Since our last report, we have learned of an additional 25 deaths – the largest number of people for all HHMD 6-month report periods to date. The cumulative mortality count from June 2021 to May 2024 now includes 116 recorded deaths - this continues to represent an average of 1 death every 10 days. The deadliest month for this period was January, where 7 people died - on average 1 person every 4.5 days. These deaths demand immediate attention.

Sixteen of the individuals who lost their lives during this period were reported to be living unsheltered - outdoors - at the time of their death. During this same period of December 2023-May 2024, the City of Hamilton's rough estimates indicate that approximately 200 people were living outside. If so, these 16 deaths represent 8% of the total population of people outside in Hamilton during this 6-month period. We are deeply saddened and concerned about the tremendous grief and mourning for people living unsheltered and are reminded of the impact these deaths have on the mental and material well-being of our unhoused neighbours (many of whom benefit from one another's informal support). It is imperative to keep this high mortality rate in mind as conversations about sanctioned encampment sites in Hamilton moves forward.

Overdose continues to be the leading cause of death among the individuals we learned about. In fact, nearly half of the 116 deaths we have learned about since starting this project were due to overdose: in other words, entirely preventable. In this context, we are disheartened to learn of the planned closure of the supervised consumption site in Hamilton, an evidence-based way to prevent overdose deaths. We fear that we will only see overdose-related deaths rising, and that these deaths will go undocumented due to reducing crucial interaction with health and social services.

As health care providers, we are concerned and call for inquiry and intervention to improve service sector and system responsiveness and accountability to people without housing. Given so many accessing health and social services leave and die shortly thereafter, we invite and encourage service providers and policy makers to examine, reflect and contend with the meaning of care. As the city of Hamilton reconvenes discussions about sanctioned sites and establishing 'temporary outdoor shelters', we strongly encourage immediate attentions to the meaningful provision of care and accountabilities to people without housing.

Full data is available at:

<https://hamiltonhomelessmortality.weebly.com>.

Please direct media enquiries to:

Gessie Stearns, MSW Dr. Inna Berditchevskaia (MD)