

ICHA Deputation to the Budget Committee: January 10, 2017

My name is Dr. Michaela Beder, and I represent Inner City Health Associates, a group of physicians working with homeless and vulnerably housed individuals. Our doctors care for men, women and children who are experiencing homelessness in more than 40 sites across the city. We see first-hand the impact of programs funded by Shelter Support & Housing and have significant concerns with this year's budget as it pertains to services for homeless individuals in our city.

In particular, we are concerned that the city is debating whether to cut meaningful services in order to balance the city budget, with a 2.6% reduction to all city programs. We call on the city to stop these cuts that differentially impact the poor, and to invest instead in strategies that will positively affect the lives of Toronto's most vulnerable citizens.

Particularly worrisome is the budget's proposed \$10M service cuts, which include cuts of \$1.8M to Shelter, Support and Housing, including more than \$1M in staffing cuts. As a doctor working in the shelters, it is clear to me that they are packed to capacity, and there is a dire need for a significant increase in funding for both TCHC housing and shelter beds. In addition, the \$30,000 proposed budget cut to shut down emergency cooling stations around the city is shortsighted and will undoubtedly have detrimental effects on the most vulnerable members of our city – marginally housed young children and the elderly – who have no alternative during heat alerts. These cooling centers provide a lifesaving service to many of Toronto's homeless and underhoused. Much like the city's 24h cold weather drop-in centres, cooling centres are a necessity during extreme heat alerts that cannot be overlooked.

In addition to the aforementioned cuts, the 2017 budget mentions a program delivery service model change at Adelaide Resource Centre that is not clearly outlined, with a cut of almost \$800,000 in funding. Further information is needed on the impacts of this proposed change, as the services provided at this site, including drop-in medical care, case management, meal services and harm reduction services are vital.

Further elaboration, and assurance that no-one will lack services, is also needed regarding the 10% decrease in homelessness nursing care that is found on page 18 of the SSHA budget.

We are extremely concerned by some of the items on the list for consideration to cut in the 2017 budget. Specifically, the closure of Downsview Dells, where up to 27 patients served through Seaton House live while attending programs for addiction management, would be detrimental for the well-being of those who urgently require treatment for their addictions. The elimination of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, which provides funding for supports to prevent homelessness through a network of 76 community based partners, would also be devastating. This cut of \$18.5M would be short-sighted, as it will lead to increased costs downstream. There is a tremendous risk to cutting homelessness prevention services, as this will lead to increased rates of homelessness, and result in a need for increased healthcare and social expenditures.

We are hopeful that going forward, the city will do the right thing when deciding whether to further cut services to Toronto's most vulnerable citizens - those who continue to struggle to meet even their most basic needs - and to instead look more carefully at the implementation of revenue generating strategies that do not target the poorest in our communities.

Dr. Michaela Beder, Psychiatrist
Mental Health Lead, Inner City Health Associates