

April 22, 2020

To: Homelessness Service Providers

Re: Update on April 22, 2020 – Responding to COVID-19

1. New confirmed cases in shelters and data posted by Toronto Public Health

As you may have heard in the media, there have been a number of outbreaks of COVID-19 in our shelter system. This is not unexpected, and as we conduct screening and referral to testing throughout the shelter system, confirming these cases means we are able to quickly take action to refer those clients to appropriate isolation and recovery programs and prevent the further transmission of the virus.

To date, there are 105 cases confirmed at 11 locations.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) is now posting the number of confirmed positive cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 for clients who have been in the shelter system on the Toronto Public Health [website](#). This report will be updated three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

2. What to expect when a client tests positive for COVID-19 at your shelter

As we have worked through a number of case and contact investigations with our colleagues in Toronto Public Health, we have all learned about how to improve our processes. SSHA have worked with TPH to prepare an Info Sheet that outlines what you can expect when a client tests positive for COVID-19 and how to prepare for the TPH investigation. The info sheet is attached and will be available on our website.

Toronto Public Health has also prepared a [new graphic](#) to help delineate their role compared to the role of shelter operators in supporting shelter clients and staff.

3. Recovery site for COVID-19 positive clients

Inner City Health Associates (ICHA), University Health Network, Parkdale Queen West, The Neighbourhood Group, SSHA and TPH had previously partnered to launch a 200-bed COVID-19 isolation site for people who experience homelessness and were waiting for their test results.

However, with turnaround time for test results having significantly improved, the partners recognize that there is an immediate need for an interim COVID-19 positive site for people experiencing homelessness and have agreed to transition this site for COVID-19 positive clients. This interim COVID-19 positive site has been active as of April 16 and can support up to 200 people.

When a positive COVID-19 test result is received at the testing site, the client is transferred from the physician at the testing site to an ICHA physician at our COVID-19 recovery site who will manage their case.

The site is run using a harm reduction and trauma-oriented approach, and staff includes peer supports and harm reduction workers. Clients are housed in individual hotel rooms, and will be required to spend most of every day behind a closed door. Consideration will be given, therefore, to clients' ability to tolerate this type of isolation for 14 days.

Planning for an expanded recovery facility is also underway.

4. Additional service updates this week

Given the critical need to ensure rapid action is taken to protect people experiencing homelessness, we continue to implement and expand our tiered response.

As of April 22, we have secured 11 hotels with more than 1,020 rooms for physical distancing, plus one hotel for a recovery program with 200 rooms. Seven hotel locations are operational for physical distancing, with more than 700 clients moved into rooms. Ramp up of those programs to full occupancy at those locations is underway, as well as activation of four additional hotel locations. Ensuring staffing supports are in place, along with other logistical considerations such as food, cleaning, and transportation is a key part of this activation plan. Shelter staff are working with our health partners to identify those most vulnerable to COVID-19 to move into these spaces.

In partnership with Toronto Public Health, we are exploring opportunities for further mobile testing at shelter locations. A prioritized approach to testing on-site is underway, focussed first at locations that have confirmed outbreaks, and then at other sites identified as higher risk. Providers may be contacted by hospital or community health providers regarding testing at their shelter. In order to be effective, this process should be coordinated by Toronto Public Health. Please contact SSHA or TPH if this is something you are in discussions with health partners about.

5. Updated daily shelter and overnight service usage online

SSHA is now posting a point-in-time snapshot on the number of clients in our shelter system on the City's [website](#). This is an interim measure while we work to establish full and accurate reporting on current program capacities. This snapshot will be updated once a week.

6. New quality assurance processes underway

SSHA has undertaken an initial assessment of what proportion of our existing shelter sites are able to meet the 6 feet physical distancing guidelines and how to mitigate locations that aren't able to meet that. We have encouraged shelters, respites and 24-hour drop-ins to implement additional spacing between beds/cots where possible to achieve the 6ft/2m guideline, as well as to take additional physical distancing measures in your program common areas.

We have an ongoing process underway to validate and confirm that these guidelines are being achieved, through a site visit that will assess whether physical distancing standards have been met.

We also have a Quality Assurance assessment process underway to assess and audit compliance with standards and good practices at the new sites we are establishing. Each new site is assessed before it opens to ensure appropriate measures are in place to reduce risk of contagion or spread of COVID-19. Ongoing assessment will also be conducted to ensure ongoing maintenance of these standards once new sites open. Methodology for site assessments will include alternative methods of communication to minimize on site visits.

7. Updated Client Screening Tool and Staff/Visitor Screening Tool

An updated *COVID-19 Client Screening Tool for Homelessness Service Settings* and an updated *COVID-19 Screening Tool for Staff and Visitors in Homelessness Services Settings* are now available. (See attached.) The updated screening tools incorporate Toronto Public Health and Ontario Ministry of Health guidance. The updated screening tools will be posted on the [City's website](#) shortly.

8. Providing documentation with clients sent for COVID-19 testing

SSHA's transportation/dispatch team has been receiving many questions about the process for sending clients to assessment centres and/or to the isolation or recovery sites. Please be reminded to send the completed COVID-19 screening tool and ICHA medical directive with the client to the assessment centres. Omitting this information may lead to clients being returned to the original shelter site rather than being redirected to the isolation or recovery sites.

9. Resource on Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

The City of Toronto has compiled and posted [Resources for non-health care community settings: Understanding when personal protective equipment \(PPE\) is needed](#), which provides links to guidance around PPE.

10. COVID-19 Alert Risk Evaluation (CARE) project

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and Inner City Health Associates (ICHA) are partnering on the COVID-19 Alert Risk Evaluation (CARE) project. See attached Project

Overview for a description of the CARE project, how it works, and the role of ICHA physicians in supporting our clients.

11. New posters available to promote physical distancing in common spaces

Three new posters have been developed for shelter operators to promote physical distancing in common spaces:

- [Sleeping areas](#)
- [Common areas](#)
- [Dining areas](#)

Please share these resources with staff and post them in relevant areas.

12. Next webinar date with Toronto Public Health

Save the date for the next webinar with Toronto Public Health, scheduled for **Thursday April 23, 2020 at 2:30pm**. This webinar will share updated information on COVID-19 for homelessness service providers.

Webinar details:

<https://toronto.webex.com/toronto/onstage/g.php?MTID=e0f4f3d20d746d7a7952c2eadad9b784b>

Call-in: 647-484-1598 OR 416-915-6530

Access code: 289 878 392

13. Homelessness Service Provider FAQ

We are continuing to update the **FAQ** (attached) for homelessness service providers that may help answer questions during the COVID-19 response.

Please keep yourself informed of new developments by referring to credible sources of information, such as Toronto Public Health's [website](#). As the situation continues to evolve rapidly, we will continue to provide you with regular updates and new information. This includes scheduling additional Webex and Teleconference meetings to share information with the sector. If you have questions, we encourage you to contact your Agency Review Officer or continue to send us your questions to the centralized email address (sshadoc@toronto.ca) and we will provide responses in our future email communications.

Please share this document with staff in your organization, as it may answer questions they may have about the current situation.

We truly thank all of you and your staff for your commitment to providing services to the most vulnerable members of our community during this challenging time.