

June 24, 2020

Statement from Board of Health Chair Joe Cressy on Voluntary Accommodation Options to Support Self-Isolation

On Thursday, July 2nd, the Toronto Board of Health will consider a report from our Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa, which includes new recommendations for how we can reduce transmission and protect vulnerable people in our communities from COVID-19. To reduce virus spread, Dr. de Villa has requested that all three levels of government work together to create voluntary accommodation options for people who test positive for the virus but are unable to isolate at home.

I wish to express my strong support for Dr. de Villa's recommendations, and to stress just how important it is that we provide accommodation for people who are underhoused or do not have enough space to safely isolate without putting their families or other members of their household at risk.

Our local data shows that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts households in low-income communities. We also know that the rate of transmission within households is high. The basic medical advice for people who test positive for the virus is to self-isolate at home, in a separate bedroom and bathroom in order to minimize risk to the rest of the household. But for many Torontonians, the luxury of a home with multiple bedrooms and bathrooms is not a reality. People may be able to recover at home, but not without potentially infecting those closest to them.

Toronto has moved quickly to ensure accommodation options for people experiencing homelessness who test positive for COVID-19, through the establishment of dedicated isolation and recovery centres. These centres have already provided a safe place for hundreds of people without homes to recover. Now, we need inter-government collaboration to create accommodation for people who have homes but need a separate place to stay while they recover from the virus.

Chicago and New York City have already begun to address this very issue. In Chicago, a dedicated isolation facility has been established in a hotel, with private single rooms and bathrooms along with food services, available free of charge to people who need this service. In New York, the City provides free hotel rooms to people who need a place outside the home to self-isolate.

Everyone in our city deserves to have access to a safe space to recover from COVID-19 without putting their loved ones at risk. This recommendation, along with others from Dr. de Villa regarding the need to gather data and address social determinants of health in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, are critical to tackling health inequities and protecting vulnerable residents across Toronto.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Cressy", with a long, sweeping underline.

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