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DATE 16 March 1998

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissionær, Social Services Department

SUBJECT/OBJET **RESPONSE TO INQUIRY CSC NO. 04(98): DEATHS AMONG
 STREET PEOPLE**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

At the Community Services Committee meeting of 19 February 1998, Councillor D. Holmes made the following inquiry:

“How many deaths have occurred among street people, on the street, in the last couple of years.”

This report responds to the inquiry and also attempts to identify the number of homeless persons who have died of other causes during the same period. This will provide some indication of risk to persons who are homeless.

BACKGROUND

The Social Services Department contacted several community agencies (emergency hostels, day programs, and community and housing support agencies) to obtain information concerning the deaths of homeless persons on the street.

Please note that the results in this report are based on anecdotal information and the ability of agency staff to recall incidents over the past two years. No registry to collect information on homeless persons who have died on the street exists.

As a result, it is estimated that the number of deaths, whether on the street or elsewhere, is under reported. However, attempts were made to ensure that double counting of the same individual did not occur.

The information received provides the following picture of homeless persons who have died in Ottawa-Carleton:

A total of 19 deaths of men under the age of 60 could readily be identified as homeless related deaths. An additional 25 men, slightly more than half of them over the age of 60, were also identified. The reported cause of death for this group was determined to be related to physical causes, such as heart attack, cancer, diabetes, asthma. However almost all of these men had substance abuse problems. Some also had behavioural problems that limited the possibility of accommodating them in other community accommodations, e.g. residential care facilities, rooming houses.

Of the 19 deaths of men under the age of 60:

- One man died on the street. He was allegedly intoxicated.
- One man committed suicide.
- Four men drowned. All four were reportedly substance abusers.
- Five men with substance abuse problems died of an overdose.
- Five men died as a result of heavy substance abuse use.
- Two men died in accidents.
- One man died after being discharged from hospital, cause of death was not indicated.

A total of three deaths of women were reported:

- One woman in her 20's committed suicide.
- One woman of 43, who had previously been homeless, died in her apartment but was not found for 3 weeks. No cause of death was established.
- A woman of 52, who had been previously homeless, died in her apartment. She had substance abuse problems.

No deaths of homeless youth were reported.

COMMENTS

From the information obtained only one death was reported to have occurred on the streets of Ottawa-Carleton. However as a result of the life style of the persons who are homeless their life expectancy is severely compromised. Cause for concern exists especially when considering that the number of reported deaths related to homelessness is under reported.

Homeless persons are at greater risk than the general population of contracting an infectious disease such as tuberculosis, AIDS, or hepatitis. The lack of shelter is not the only problem facing homeless people. Associated with their situation is a lack of good nutrition, access to adequate

health care, support from a healthy social network, exposure to violence and the high incidence of substance abuse.

Even though there are no deaths reported among homeless youth, there is great cause for concern in light of the risk they face of contracting tuberculosis, AIDS, hepatitis, etc. Young women in particular are at risk for pregnancy. When they do become pregnant, it is seldom possible to ensure that the foetus is well nourished. The birth of a child in these circumstances puts added burdens on the young homeless mother and seriously affects the growth of the new-born child.

What emerges as a result of this brief review into the death of persons who are homeless is the high risk they face in terms of their physical health. In addition many are addicted to substances that further puts their health and life at serious risk. As a result the life span of persons who are homeless is seriously jeopardised.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*

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