



# Cold-weather response: a homeless-centred guide for keeping Winnipeggers safe in winter

July 17, 2017





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## Why a cold-weather response

When a woman died after spending the night outside in frigid temperatures last December, End Homelessness Winnipeg convened a meeting of stakeholders to ensure that the community developed a coordinated response to prevent a similar tragedy. Many organizations participated including the City of Winnipeg, Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, Manitoba Housing, shelters and Housing First agencies, social service organizations, United Way of Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

People experiencing homelessness often spend extended periods outside in winter. This places them at a high-risk for extreme cold weather injuries and even death. Their risk is increased if in addition to being homeless they have inadequate clothing, are malnourished, challenged by physical or mental health issues or addictions, or if they use certain medications or alcohol.

Cold weather risks include the following:

- hypothermia, which occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 37 C. Hypothermia can lead to unconsciousness, cardiac arrest, and death
- frostbite, which can lead to permanent nerve damage, blisters, and even to infection and loss of limbs
- trench foot, which results from prolonged exposure to a damp or wet environment and can lead to numbness, leg cramps, swelling, tingling pain, blisters or ulcers, bleeding under the skin, and gangrene

Cold-weather's harmful effects are not limited to homeless populations. Studies in countries around the world have found that the risk of premature death or hospitalization increases in the general population as temperatures get colder. Periods of unusually cold weather are also linked to higher rates of hospitalization and premature death that may extend several days and up to several weeks after exposure to cold weather.

## How the cold-weather response works

The cold-weather response will come into effect every year from November 15 to April 15. The response includes provisions for extreme-cold alerts on any day (Monday-Sunday) when Environment Canada's 24-hour forecast calls for temperature of -15 C or colder or a wind chill of -25 C or colder.

When these forecasts occur, End Homelessness Winnipeg will consult with members of the Notification Alert Committee to determine whether to issue an extreme-cold alert. In addition to the forecast, the committee may consider other factors that increase the impact of cold weather such as precipitation, low daytime temperatures, the number of consecutive days and nights of cold weather, and sudden extreme cold weather.

Once an alert is issued, the committee will review the situation daily and decide whether to retain or cancel the alert.

Regardless of whether an extreme weather alert has been issued, individual shelters and other organizations may decide to add or extend services that offer protection from the cold.



Extreme cold weather alerts will do the following:

- warn people who are vulnerable to extreme cold weather and warn service providers and caregivers that such conditions are expected or already exist in the city
- urge vulnerable people to take steps to protect their health
- trigger responses by key stakeholders and community partners that include enhancing services, extending hours, waiving loitering rules, etc.

### **Notifying the public about an alert**

When a decision has been made to call or extend an extreme-cold alert, End Homelessness Winnipeg will issue a media release to notify the public.

### **Notifying stakeholders, partners, and others about an alert**

End Homelessness Winnipeg will notify the following by telephone: City of Winnipeg Emergency Preparedness Department, the Winnipeg Police Service, the WRHA, and perhaps others.

End Homelessness Winnipeg will notify by email all other stakeholder and partner organizations including various City of Winnipeg departments.

End Homelessness Winnipeg will notify by email any other organization or individual that asks to be included on the notification list. All such requests should be directed to End Homelessness Winnipeg's housing support manager.

### **Stakeholders' responsibilities**

The annual cycle for the cold-weather response is divided into three stages.

- **The green stage** is in effect during spring, summer, and fall (from April 16 to November 14) when the previous winters' response is evaluated and plans developed for the next winter.
- **The yellow stage** is in effect all winter (November 15 to April 15) except when an extreme-cold alert is issued.
- **The red stage** is in effect only when an extreme-cold alert has been issued and remains in effect.

During each stage, cold-weather response stakeholders have specific responsibilities as outlined on the following pages.



ALERT STAGE: Green			
PRIOR TO ONSET OF WINTER (April 16-November 14)			
End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW)	City of Winnipeg	Shelters	Agencies
<p>Convene periodic meetings for all cold-weather response stakeholders to evaluate the prior winter's response, prepare for the upcoming winter, or conduct a mid-winter assessment if required</p> <p>Email Cold-weather response updates to stakeholders as required</p>	<p>(Unless stated otherwise, the city's lead is the Winnipeg emergency preparedness coordinator (WEPC))</p> <p>Attend cold-weather response stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Advise the Winnipeg Emergency Preparedness Coordination Committee (EPCC) about the cold-weather response</p> <p>Review City of Winnipeg plans for extreme cold</p> <p>Monitor email updates from EHW</p>	<p>Attend cold-weather response stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Provide clients with information about the risks of extreme cold and how they can protect themselves</p> <p>Review internal operating plans for extreme cold and ensure they include provisions for additional staffing and supplies</p> <p>Educate staff and volunteers about operating plans for extreme cold</p> <p>Monitor email updates from EHW</p>	<p>Attend cold-weather response stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Identify vulnerable populations and high-risk clients</p> <p>Provide vulnerable populations with information about the risks of extreme cold and how they can protect themselves</p> <p>Develop targeted strategies/plans for responding to extreme-cold alerts</p> <p>Prepare messages to advise staff, volunteers, clients, and partners about the agency's response to extreme-cold alerts.</p> <p>Monitor email updates from EHW</p>



ALERT STAGE: Yellow COLD WEATHER OPERATIONS IN EFFECT (November 15-April 15)			
End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW)	City of Winnipeg	Shelters	Agencies
<p>Email annual reminder to cold-weather response stakeholders to begin stage yellow, cold weather operations</p> <p>Consult with cold-weather response stakeholders as needed to coordinate responses and solve problems</p> <p>Email a notice to cold-weather response stakeholders signaling the end of cold weather operations</p>	<p>(Unless stated otherwise, the city's lead is the Winnipeg emergency preparedness coordinator (WEPC))</p> <p>Receive annual cold weather reminder from EHW</p> <p>Make city facilities (libraries, recreation centres, etc.) and transit buses available to the public as cold relief/warming areas during normal business hours</p> <p>Relax loitering rules in city facilities and on buses serving as cold relief/warming areas</p> <p>Provide citizens with cold weather preparedness information via media release/social media</p> <p>Monitor service delivery by department (Emergency Preparedness and Coordination Committee and City of Winnipeg departmental managers)</p> <p>Advise the Chief Corporate Services Officer (CCSO) or the EPCC of all service delivery issues related to cold weather</p> <p>Prepare to activate internal operating plans for extreme cold if needed</p> <p>Connect/meet with cold-weather response stakeholders as required</p>	<p>Receive annual cold weather reminder from EHW</p> <p>Deploy outreach vans</p> <p>Coordinate with other shelters to accept clients who are turned away</p> <p>Prepare to activate internal operating plans for extreme cold if needed</p> <p>Connect/meet with cold-weather response stakeholders as required</p>	<p>Receive annual cold weather reminder from EHW</p> <p>Coordinate resources to ensure high-risk clients are monitored</p> <p>Prepare to activate internal operating plans for extreme cold if needed</p> <p>Connect/meet with cold-weather response stakeholders as required</p>



ALERT STAGE: Red			
EXTREME COLD WEATHER ALERT (As required, November 15-April 15)			
End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW)	City of Winnipeg	Shelters	Agencies
Determine whether an extreme-cold alert should be issued	(Unless stated otherwise, the city's lead is the Winnipeg emergency preparedness coordinator (WEPC))	Receive notices that an extreme-cold alert is in effect or been cancelled	Receive notices that an extreme-cold alert is in effect or been cancelled
Email extreme-cold alerts to cold-weather response stakeholders and media	Receive notices that an extreme-cold alert is in effect or been cancelled	Activate extreme cold response plans	Activate extreme cold response plans
Convene meetings of cold-weather response stakeholders to coordinate responses and solve problems	Open additional warming centers if requested by shelters	Work with the Winnipeg Police and Fire Paramedic services on formalized interventions	Provide outreach to high-risk clients and arrange for additional services/care if needed
Communicate updates provided by stakeholders	Extend operating hours for cold relief/warming areas	Continue operating outreach vans	Target preparedness messages at staff, volunteers, clients and funded agency partners
Send email notice to all response stakeholders advising when an extreme-cold alert has ended	Issue media messages to citizens  If a local state of emergency is declared: Use winnipeg.ca home page as "Emergeweb"	Do not turn people away without a referral to other shelters  If capacity is reached: Contact the City of Winnipeg's emergency preparedness coordinator to assess the need for additional warming centres to be opened	



## Cold-weather response stakeholders and partners

Stakeholders and partners support the cold weather response in a variety of ways. Some provide direct services to people who are homeless or at particular risk of harm due to cold weather while others provide a wider range of services or funding and supports to individual agencies, the homeless sector, or the broader community.

Stakeholders and partners will receive extreme-cold alerts, have their own plans for responding to such alerts, and participate in periodic meetings to evaluate the cold-weather response and consider improvements that can be implemented immediately or incorporated into plans for the next winter.

### **211 Winnipeg**

211 Manitoba is an online database of health, government, and social services that are available across Manitoba. The site is designed to help Manitobans find community and social resources.

211 Manitoba is a partnership between the United Way of Winnipeg and Volunteer Manitoba.

[mb.211.ca](http://mb.211.ca)

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### **Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg**

The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg is a community-based, membership-driven organization whose mission is to be a strong political voice working towards a unified and cohesive urban Aboriginal community of Winnipeg. The ACW's vision is to support a self-sufficient, healthy, vibrant urban Aboriginal community where families and children are ensured a good quality of life, through equal opportunity and choice so that Aboriginal people are a part of all things – a distinct presence throughout Winnipeg.

[abcouncil.org](http://abcouncil.org)

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### **City of Winnipeg**

#### **Community Services**

- During extreme cold or hot weather, the city makes facilities such as aquatic centres, libraries, and recreation buildings available to the public for relief. Staff at these facilities can also reference community resources for people who are vulnerable.
- The City of Winnipeg formally administers the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) on behalf of the federal government. HPS distributes federal funding to address local needs and specific homelessness priorities. HPS has supported the cold-weather response by approving approximately \$127,000 for Main St. Project's outreach van for the winter of 2017-2018.





**Fire Paramedic Service Office of Emergency Preparedness:** The Fire Paramedic Service is responsible for coordinating and supporting overall preparedness for major or unusual emergencies. Its activities include research, training and education, disaster exercises, public information and the response to an emergency event. The emergency preparedness coordinator maintains the readiness and operation of the Emergency Operations Centre.

The city activates its specialized emergency web site, EmergeWeb, when there is an emergency such as a severe snow or ice storm, rising river levels, or a large scale hazardous material incident. In such an emergency, EmergeWeb will provide Winnipeggers with up-to-date information 24/7.

Emergency preparedness: [winnipeg.ca/epp](http://winnipeg.ca/epp)

**Winnipeg Police Service:** When notified of an extreme-cold alert, police officers pay special attention to areas where homeless and other vulnerable people may be found and encourage them to go to a safe, warm place.

Non-emergency 204-986-6222

**Winnipeg Transit**

- The Emergent Need Policy allows a citizen who does not have the means to pay a fare and whose personal safety is threatened by the weather to board a bus without paying.
- Request Stop Program allows passengers to get off their bus between regular stops when it is safe to do so. The program is designed to enhance personal safety and minimize time in cold or other inclement weather. This program is in effect after 7:00 p.m. but can be accommodated throughout the day – schedule permitting.
- Passengers are also permitted to stay on their bus when it reaches the end of the line and to ride back around to avoid inclement and cold weather.

[www.winnipeg.ca/interhom](http://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom)

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**Downtown Winnipeg BIZ**

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ markets the city centre on behalf of 1,300 businesses, runs programs, and provides services that target downtown image, cleanliness, safety, transportation, and parking.

204-958-4640  
426 Portage Ave.  
[downtownwinnipegbiz.com](http://downtownwinnipegbiz.com)

The BIZ's **Community Homelessness Assistance Team (CHAT)** of outreach workers facilitates individuals transitioning from homelessness to enhanced stability – inclusive of housing, employment and educational support.

Christy Stewner-Kornaga, outreach coordinator  
[christy@downtownwinnipegbiz.com](mailto:christy@downtownwinnipegbiz.com)

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## **End Homelessness Winnipeg**

End Homelessness Winnipeg provides backbone supports to networks and collaborations that are addressing homelessness. The organization uses a collective impact approach to advance eight priorities:

- Create pathways to permanent housing for people released from hospital, prison, or other institutions.
- Prevent people who are provisionally accommodated from becoming homeless.
- Increase the number of affordable housing units available to people who are homeless, in the private, non-profit and public sectors.
- Maintain and improve accommodations accessible to people who might otherwise be homeless so they can live safely, securely and with dignity.
- Ensure emergency accommodation is available when needed, providing support to help people move to permanent housing as quickly as possible.
- Establish a comprehensive, culturally proficient, person-centered system of care for the homeless with a range of permanent options.
- Develop a comprehensive profile of the homeless population that supports evaluation, monitoring, and continuous improvement in a homeless system of care.
- Conduct research to better understand the circumstances and characteristics of homeless people in Winnipeg.

[endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca](http://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca)

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## **Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.**

Ma Mawi has over 50 programs, 11 sites, and over 200 staff and volunteers who support families to better care for children by creating meaningful opportunities for community and family involvement.

445 King St. (community meeting space)  
204-925-0300  
[mamawi.com](http://mamawi.com)

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## **Macdonald Youth Services**

Macdonald Youth Services (MYS) provides placement (foster and group care) and community support services for children, youth, adults, and families. Services include the Youth Crisis Stabilization program, clinical services, the Family Navigator program, and resources to assist youth transitioning to adulthood.

**The Youth Resource Centre (YRC) and Emergency Shelter** is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The shelter offers short-term, overnight, emergency stays for youth ages 12–17. Youth accessing the shelter may use the showers and receive crisis intervention, counselling, case management, advocacy, and supplies to meet basic needs (food, hygiene, clothes).

The YRC offers referral, advocacy, resources, information and short-term basic needs services to youth ages 12–21 on a walk-in basis

175 Mayfair Ave.  
204-477-1804 (Winnipeg)  
1-888-477-1804 (outside Winnipeg)  
[mys.ca/services/youth-crisis-services](http://mys.ca/services/youth-crisis-services)

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**Main St. Project**

Main St. Project uses a Housing First philosophy to work with men and women aged eighteen and older to support positive changes and transition them towards stable, permanent housing.

Programs include a drop-in, overnight shelter (7:00 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.), showers, meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), an outreach van (11:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.), and supplies (clothing, winter outerwear, hygiene products).

75 Martha St.  
204-982-8245  
mainstreetproject.ca

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**Manitoba Housing**

Manitoba Housing provides a wide range of subsidized housing throughout Manitoba. It partners with other governments, community organizations and private groups to create safe and affordable housing.

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/mh>

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**Ndinawemaaganag  
Endaawaad Inc.  
(Ndinawe)**

Ndinawe is a 16-bed facility that is open every day, all year. It provides accessible 24 hour shelter and basic necessities for Winnipeg children and youth ages 11 to 17 who are living on the street and at risk of abuse and exploitation.

472 Selkirk Ave.  
204-589-5545  
www.ndinawe.ca

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**Ni-Apin at Aboriginal  
Health & Wellness  
Centre of Winnipeg,  
Inc.**

Ni-Apin is one of several programs offered by Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre of Winnipeg, Inc. Ni-Apin provides a range of services for urban Aboriginal people who are homeless and experience multiple barriers to actively participate in programming services. To be eligible, people must have Aboriginal ancestry (Metis, Inuit, First Nation) and live in the City of Winnipeg.

181 Higgins Ave.  
8:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday  
204-925-3706  
[ahwc.ca/ni-apin-program/](http://ahwc.ca/ni-apin-program/)

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**Resource Assistance  
for Youth, Inc. (RaY)**

RaY works with St.-entrenched and homeless youth up to the age of 29. RaY is non-judgmental, non-partisan, and employs a harm reduction approach to all interactions with youth in need.

RaY operates a drop-in centre that offers showers and laundry facilities and provides food (sandwiches and water), and supplies such as warm clothes, hygiene products, safe sex products, and resource information.

125 Sherbrooke St.  
204-391-2209  
rayinc.ca

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**Siloam Mission**

Siloam Mission is a Christian humanitarian organization that alleviates hardships and provides opportunities for change for those affected by homelessness.

Siloam operates a drop in for women and men (6:30 to 8:00 p.m.) and an overnight facility (7:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.). It has showers; serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and provides clothing, hygiene products, and winter outerwear.

300 Princess St.  
204-956-4344  
siloam.ca

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**Spence  
Neighbourhood  
Association (West  
End 24/7 Youth Drop-  
in)**

The West End 24/7 Youth Drop-in is for youth ages 13-26 who are in crisis, exploited, or unsafe at home. The program operates from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. including holidays. It provides food, sleeping mats for use on site, and supplies such as toiletries, feminine hygiene products, safe sex products, and clothing.

A van operates between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. for pick-ups and between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. for drop-off.

430 Langside St.  
204-333-9681  
www.spenceneighbourhood.org

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**The Salvation Army -  
Booth Centre  
Ministries**

Booth Centre Ministries provides 24/7 services for individuals and families coping with homelessness, poverty, addictions and mental illness. It serves women and men by providing short- and long-term accommodation, meals, and winter outerwear. It also operates the 60-day Anchorage Addiction Treatment program for men and women and the Haven residential program that helps men with mental illness transition back into the community.

When the temperature gets to -10 C, Booth Centre opens its cold weather space, which accommodates 50 people. No one is turned away and everyone is allowed in to warm up. The centre also operates a van patrol from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. when temperatures drop to -15 C.

180 Henry St., 75 Martha St.  
204-946-9402  
wpgboothcentre.ca

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**United Way of  
Winnipeg**

United Way is a community impact organization that focuses on changing social conditions and creating opportunities for a better life for individuals, families and communities. It supports 100 agency partners and many more programs and services.

580 Main St.  
204-477-5360  
unitedwaywinnipeg.ca

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**Winnipeg Regional  
Health Authority  
(WRHA)**

**Downtown Health Access Centre:** In addition to being a one-stop health centre, during regular business hours Access Downtown is a place where people can warm up and use the bathroom. It also has a community phone that is available for use at no cost.

640 Main St.  
204-940-3160

**Health Outreach and Community Support (HOCS):** During regular business hours, HOCS can be contacted to follow up with individuals who are homeless, have been identified by the night patrol, and may require assistance in connecting to appropriate health care services.

80 Sutherland St.  
There is no central phone number

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**WRHA Winnipeg**

**St. Connections'** staff members travel around the city in an outreach van providing nursing services, distributing safer sex and safer drug use supplies, and performing other activities that reduce the spread of STBBIs. The van's usual route includes Point Douglas, Downtown, North End, and West End neighbourhoods between 6 p.m. and midnight every night but Sunday.

496 Hargrave St., main floor  
204-981-0742  
[wrha.mb.ca/community/publichealth/services-healthy-sexuality.php](http://wrha.mb.ca/community/publichealth/services-healthy-sexuality.php)

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## Appendices

### Organizations that participated in developing the cold-weather response

The following organizations and groups participated in meeting(s) to develop the cold-weather response.

1. 1JustCity with Augustine United Church
2. Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg
3. Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre of Winnipeg
  - Doorways
  - Ni-Apin Program
4. City of Winnipeg
  - Community Services Department
  - Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service
  - Winnipeg Police Service
  - Winnipeg Transit
5. Downtown Winnipeg BIZ
6. End Homelessness Winnipeg
7. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
8. Macdonald Youth Services
9. Main St. Project
10. Manitoba Housing
11. Ndinawe Youth Shelter
12. Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)
13. Siloam Mission
14. Spence Neighbourhood Association (West End 24/7 Youth Drop-In program)
15. The Salvation Army Booth Centre
16. United Way of Winnipeg
17. Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle
18. Winnipeg Regional Health Authority



## Annual schedule

End Homelessness Winnipeg provides the backbone support required to manage Winnipeg’s cold-weather response. As such, End Homelessness Winnipeg takes the lead convening meetings, collecting data, and performing the other administrative functions listed in the annual schedule.

	Oct 15-30	Nov 1-15	Nov 15-30	Dec.	Jan	Feb.	Mar	April 1-15	Apr 15- Jun 30
Update contact list for cold weather response stakeholders and send a test email to all contacts	*								
Convene stakeholders' meetings									
Review and confirm plan for upcoming winter	*								
Conduct mid-winter assessment if required					*				
Evaluate prior year's response and plan for upcoming winter									*
Confirm stakeholders participation, identify and engage new stakeholders	*								
Activate cold weather response		*							
Activate the Notification Alert Committee to review forecasts, issue alerts, and cancel alerts									
Activate cold weather response plans and extreme weather response plans as needed									
Collect data for monitoring and evaluating the response									
Prepare an annual report that includes data and an evaluation of the prior winter's response									

\* Key milestone

## Map of overnight drop-in centres

