

Canada January 10, 2017 6:48 pm

Updated: January 10, 2017 10:35 pm

# Toronto to better track deaths of homeless people on city streets



By Marianne Dimain

Reporter Global News

**WATCH ABOVE: Data collected will track deaths both inside and outside city-funded shelters. Marianne Dimain explains.**

Toronto Public Health says it is improving the way it tracks the deaths of homeless people in the city.

Up until now, city officials only tracked the deaths of homeless people in city-funded shelters. But a new initiative involving 200 health and social service agencies will allow them to collect data on deaths not only in shelters but also on the street and other locations, such as a friend or family member's home.

"The information we collect will provide much needed evidence on which we can base city-wide efforts and enhance already existing efforts such as the poverty reduction strategy," said Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Toronto's acting medical officer of health.

**READ MORE: Homeless shelters in Toronto bursting at the seams: report**

That data will also help provide a better snapshot of who is dying and how.

When a homeless person dies, agencies would fill out a special form with information on the person's age, gender, cause of death and history. That information would then be given to Toronto Public Health.

"It's the tool we need to begin influencing decision making at all levels of government to bring purposeful policies and legislation together to help the homeless and sick who live here on the streets of Toronto," said Coun. Paul Ainslie.

**READ MORE: Addiction a top cause of homelessness across Canada, but not always No. 1**

It's initiative many who work with the homeless have been demanding for years.

Street nurse Cathy Crowe says expanding how homeless deaths are tracked could help improve social services in the future.

"Potentially the need for more culturally sensitive Aboriginal-run organizations like shelters and drop-ins, harm reduction sites for sure," said Crowe.

"There's a lot of things we can learn."



Outside the Church of the Holy Trinity in downtown Toronto, dozens gathered for a candlelight vigil to remember all of the homeless people who have died in the city.

Three new names from 2016 were added to the list.

Katt, a homeless woman who did not want to give her full name, says she knows too many people who have died on the streets.

**READ MORE: Homeless man reconnects with long-lost nephew after viral photo**

She and her boyfriend live in a tent right beside the memorial and say they feel safer outside than in the shelter system. But in this cold, she has to keep moving.

The city has already warned her to take down her tent by Thursday.

“I don’t know what we’re going to do,” she said.

© 2017 Global News, a division of Corus Entertainment Inc.