



Region of Durham Winter Warming Program Guidelines

**This document captures the guidelines for
Durham Region Winter Warming
December 1 to March 31**

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Winter Warming Program Guidelines

The Winter Warming Program Guidelines help ensure warming centres across Durham Region are safe, respectful and consistent. They provide clear expectations for services built on dignity, compassion and care.

Durham Region's role and responsibility

Durham Region is legislated by the Province of Ontario as a Service System Manager (SSM) under the Housing Services Act, 2011. This means the Region plans, funds and delivers homelessness services for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes emergency responses such as warming centres.

The Government of Canada has designated The Regional Municipality of Durham as a Community Entity under the Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy. This enables the Region to use federal funding to support local homelessness programs.

The Region may contract with organizations to operate services, including warming centres. The contracted service provider may use private buildings if they meet safety and service standards.

The Region recognizes that addressing homelessness is a complex issue and is grateful for the numerous community organizations, faith-based groups and individuals working to help people experiencing homelessness across the Region.

Purpose of the Winter Warming Program

The Winter Warming Program, also known as the Out of the Cold Program, is meant to give people a safe overnight place during cold months, December 1 to March 31. The program aims to reduce risks of serious health problems such as hypothermia and frostbite.

The Winter Warming Program provides warmth, basic necessities and access to support services. Winter Warming centres operate under specific rules and policies to maintain an environment of safety, dignity and care.

Site selection

Choosing locations for Winter Warming centres follows a clear and structured plan. Planning starts in the spring and decisions are made in the fall to prepare for the upcoming winter season.

The Region responds to concerns and implements service changes as needed throughout the Winter Warming season. In the spring, a review of the service data, outcomes and lessons learned is prepared and presented to Regional Council.

The Region meets with Local Area Municipalities and community partners to identify possible seasonal locations for Winter Warming each year. The Region uses a formal framework to guide this process, aiming to find the most suitable sites based on safety, accessibility and service needs.

The Region considers several key factors when selecting a site:

- Fire Services and Health Department approvals are required for all sites to ensure safety and compliance.
- Service demand determined using data including the By-Name List, which shows how many people have consented to receive services in the Region, and Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) data collected by system service providers.
- Geographic accessibility: Durham's large geography means locations must be easy to reach for people in different communities.
- Facility requirements: Features such as washrooms, showers, laundry, outdoor space, parking and fencing are preferred but may not be available at every site.
- Community factors: Access to transit, proximity to schools or child care, and taxi access.
- Information provided by community members and partners through ideas, solutions and complaints.

Eligibility and admission

Maintaining a safe and respectful space for all is essential. If someone does not follow the expectations in the Winter Warming Program Guidelines and compromises safety, they may be asked to leave or be denied service. To support safety and compliance, service providers must have policies and protocols for inspecting personal belongings in alignment with the Guidelines.

Eligibility

Winter Warming Programs serve people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Durham Region.

Service providers must follow the Ontario Human Rights Code, which protects people from discrimination based on protected grounds such as race, ancestry, gender identity, disability and other grounds. Individual Winter Warming centres may have age limits for services such as requiring individuals to be at least 18 years of age, 16 to 24 years of age or having limited accessibility features. Durham Region offers Winter Warming Programs to youth aged 16 to 24 and individuals requiring accessible facilities. Transportation is arranged as needed to support access to Winter Warming centres.

Eligibility for children under 16 years old

In situations where a family with child(ren) under 16 years old arrives at a Winter Warming centre accompanied by a parent or guardian, the service provider will help the family connect with HomelessHelp@durham.ca or 311 ext. 5510. The Regional Street Outreach Team operates 24/7 and will respond to support the family's immediate needs.

If a child under 16 years old arrives at a Winter Warming centre, the service provider will contact the [Durham Children's Aid Society \(DCAS\)](#) after hours contact number. Additional reporting to [Durham Regional Police Service \(DRPS\)](#) may occur to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

Coordinated access for Winter Warming centres

Winter Warming centres are expected to participate in the Winter Warming System Communication Tool to ensure spaces in the system are accessed efficiently, including individuals requiring specialized services. Transportation to warming centres with space is included in coordinated system.

Service providers are expected to participate in weekly meetings to review service demands and operations to ensure prompt adjustments are made as required.

Transportation

Winter Warming centres will coordinate and set up transportation for individuals to and from the warming centre.

Admission process

Service providers are required to have an established written process for staff to follow to admit patrons into Winter Warming Programs.

- All individuals must be checked in and checked out, during the designated hours of operation, using a form to gather the demographic, health and safety, and service data required to update HIFIS.
 - HIFIS updates must be completed within 24 hours of check in/out to ensure reporting accuracy.
- Identification (ID) may be requested; services will not be denied based on lack of ID.
- Expectations for conduct will be clearly explained during the admission process.

Expectations for conduct

Policies and procedures

Service providers will develop written policies and procedures for Winter Warming centre processes or protocols that require clarification beyond the policies and procedures used in their standard operations. Service provider policies and procedures will be available for Regional review.

Conflict resolution and complaints:

Patrons are encouraged to address any complaints or conflicts directly with staff on-site. If further action is necessary or the issue remains unresolved, patrons should contact Durham Homeless Help for assistance; they will be connected with a Housing Program Co-ordinator for support.

Inquiries or complaints related to the Winter Warming Program should be directed to Homeless Help.

Email: HomelessHelp@durham.ca

Phone: 311 extension 5510

Toll free: 1-800-372-1102 extension 5510

Behaviour expectations: participants responsibilities

Participants accessing the Winter Warming Program are expected to help create a calm, safe and respectful space for everyone. Expectations must be clearly explained at admission and reinforced positively throughout their stay.

The service provider must ensure participants understand expectations for:

- Cleanliness.
- Respectful behaviour.
- Appropriate use of facilities.

These expectations apply within the program site, and during arrival and departure, and participants should be encouraged to act with consideration for the surrounding community and the importance of being a good neighbour.

The following behaviours are not permitted:

- Violence or threats.
 - Use of controlled or illegal substances in the program.
 - Disruptive actions and noises.
 - Discriminatory, racist or hateful language.
 - Property damage.
 - Possession of illegal substances or weapons.
-

Warming centre staff may take action to maintain a calm and safe environment, including searching belongings and denying service or asking someone to leave the program.

Behaviour expectations: staff approaches

Staff will:

- Help create plans for departure in the morning and expectations to return no more than 30 minutes before the site opens in the evening.
- Review expectations for cleanliness, respectful behavior, appropriate facility use and prohibited behaviours.
- Reinforce the importance of avoiding behaviours that may negatively impact the site or its neighbours.

Staff must remain professional and calm, even in challenging situations.

Managing disruptions

If someone does not follow the expectations, staff may take action to maintain a peaceful and safe environment. Responses must be:

- Fair and based on the specific circumstances.
- Clearly explained.
- Focused on safety and respect.
- Documented according to the service providers protocols.

Conflict resolution strategies should be used before resorting to serious consequences. These may include:

- Talk and redirect: Remind the individual of expectations and explain their importance.
- Offer choices: When possible, provide options.
 - Example: "You can rest on your cot or in a chair, or I may need to arrange transportation for you to leave the program for tonight."
- Distancing from the program (as a last resort).
 - Asking someone to leave for a night or longer.
 - Issuing a trespass notice.

If necessary, staff may:

- Contact DRPS for assistance or to report incidents.
- Coordinate with other Winter Warming programs and Regional Street Outreach to support individuals who are distanced, if needed for their safety.

Documentation related to actions to manage disruptions must be available for the Region to review. All occurrences of distancing must be reported to the Housing Co-ordinator the next business day. If there is a safety concern, then Emergency Services or Outreach should be notified as appropriate.

Process for distancing

- Verbal warning
 - Address the inappropriate behaviour, offer an opportunity for improvement and clearly outline the consequences of continued actions.
- Temporary distancing:
 - If behaviour is severe or persistent, the patrons may be asked to leave or not access services for a set period of time (e.g., the night).
 - Help with the plan to leave and transportation as needed.
- Permanent distancing:
 - If disruptive behaviour continues or if there is a serious safety concern, the patrons may be distanced indefinitely.
- Documentation:
 - Record all steps and actions taken to ensure fairness and accountability.
- Referral to other resources:
 - Assist with referrals to other shelters, warming centres or support services if needed.

Program expectations

Health and Safety

Service providers will ensure all relevant legislated, regulatory and recommended Health and Safety protocols are in place. At minimum, the key areas of focus will include:

- Infection prevention and control
 - Cleaning and sanitizing schedules.
 - Hand hygiene expectations.
 - Spacing out cots or chairs.
 - Managing symptoms of ill health as they arise.
- Emergency preparedness
 - Communicating and practicing fire and evacuation plans.
 - Confirming clear signage for exits and emergency contacts are posted.
 - A First Aid Kit must be visible on-site.
 - Naloxone is available on-site.
- Fire and carbon monoxide safety
 - Providing staff with training on Health and Safety procedures including proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

- Mandatory Workplace Safety Training is in place.
- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)
 - Providing staff with training on Health and Safety procedures.
 - Ensuring mandatory workplace training is in place e.g. Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) etc.
 - Provide PPE and instructions for use.

Staff on site will call 911 for incidents they deem emergencies.

Notifications and reporting to service provider and the Region as soon as it is safe to do so.

Staffing model

The site staffing model will vary based on the site capacity, facility set up and security arrangements. The model is subject to review and approval by the Region.

Staff training

All Warming Centre staff must minimally have completed:

- Emergency First-Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) with Naloxone training.
- Training to manage emergencies, including fire evacuation and severe weather protocols in accordance with their agencies policies.
- Training in de-escalation of difficult behaviours using trauma-informed practices as outlined in the agencies policies.

Hours of operation

To address health risks faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and improve consistency in service delivery, Durham Region aims to operate Winter Warming Programs daily from dusk to dawn, beginning December 1 to March 31.

This approach replaces previous temperature-based activation thresholds (e.g., -10°C) and ensures that warming centres are available every night during the cold season, regardless of nightly temperature changes.

Every effort will be made to:

- Operate seven days per week, including holidays.
- Open at dusk and close in the morning, with hours publicly posted.
- Be staffed and have resources to support consistent overnight service.

Winter Warming Program hours of operation may be extended during extreme weather conditions such as snowstorms or extreme cold warnings, or extended into April, pending weather conditions.

Information on warming centres is detailed on durham.ca/WinterWarming Food and supplies

- Snacks and drinks will be provided at warming centres.
- Food service practices will support equitable access.
- Special dietary needs will be accommodated whenever possible.

Supplies and equipment

- Winter Warming centres will provide blankets, warm clothing and hygiene kits.
- Service providers can use donated clothing, toiletries and non-perishable food items. All items must meet Health and Safety standards.
- Equipment must be clean, sanitized and maintained in good repair.

Winter Warming Program – Code of Conduct

The Regional Municipality of Durham Winter Warming Program Code of Conduct sets the expectations for a safe, respectful and supportive environment for all. These guidelines outline expectations for conduct and responsibilities. Non-compliance may result in suspension or removal from the program.

Conduct expectations

To help maintain a calm and respectful space, patrons are expected to:

- Make requests politely and clearly.
- Respond to staff and fellow patrons with patience and respect.
- Use calm language and tone during stressful situations.
- Accept redirection or feedback without aggression.
- Ask for help when needed; staff are there to support you.

Prohibited conduct

The following behaviours are not permitted at any warming centre:

- Verbal or physical abuse, which includes racial, sexual, or discriminatory language or actions.
- Sexually explicit behaviour or materials: intimate conduct or possession of explicit content.
- Violence or threats: physical altercations or intimidation.
- Substance use: possession or use of illegal drugs, alcohol or paraphernalia.
- Drug trade: selling or distributing substances on site.
- Weapons: possession of firearms, knives, sharp objects or other weapons.
- Theft: stealing from the warming centre, staff, patrons or nearby properties.
- Property damage: vandalism or destruction of facilities.
- Loitering: congregating near neighbouring homes or businesses.
- Unauthorized movement: leaving the premises after sign-in without permission.
- Early arrival or late departure: arriving more than 30 minutes before opening or remaining after closing.
- Disrespectful conduct in the community: patrons must act considerately toward surrounding areas.

Patron responsibilities

- Personal hygiene: shower and wear clean clothing when available and requested.
- Honesty: provide accurate information to staff.
- Respect for property: no spitting or damaging facilities.

- Washroom use: use designated facilities only.
- Smoking: in accordance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, smoking, vaping or using e-cigarettes is only permitted in designated areas, at least nine metres from entrances. Dispose of cigarette butts properly.
- Pets: allowed only at designated centres. Follow site-specific rules.
- Personal belongings: patrons are responsible for their items. Lockers or bag programs may be available.
- To support safety for all, staff may request to inspect personal belongings in accordance with Program Guidelines.

Distancing process

If expectations are not met:

- Verbal warning – Staff will explain the issue and offer a chance to improve.
- Temporary distancing – You may be asked to leave for the night.
- Permanent distancing – For repeated or serious issues, you may be removed indefinitely.
- Referrals – Staff will help connect you to other services if needed.

Conflict resolution

- Speak with warming centre staff if you have concerns.
- If unresolved, contact Durham Homeless Help:
 - Email: HomelessHelp@durham.ca
 - Phone: 905-668-4113 ext. 5510
 - Toll-Free: 1-800-372-1102 ext. 5510
 - 311: ext. 5510