

For Immediate Release

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPOSED TORONTO'S MISHANDLING OF THE HOUSING CRISIS

"This thoughtful and powerful book explores the devastation of the pandemic on Toronto's homeless. *Displacement City* relates our long, disgraceful history of dispossessing the vulnerable."

Linda McQuaig, Journalist and Author of *The Sport & Prey of Capitalists*

"Greg Cook and Cathy Crowe have compiled a staggering collection of dispatches from the frontlines of Toronto's catastrophic housing crisis. Featuring writing from advocates, artists, and the displaced themselves, we are given an unvarnished, raw look at a city at war with its own citizens during the biggest public health crisis in modern history."

Rollie Pemberton a.k.a Cadence Weapon, Rapper, Activist, and Author of *Bedroom Rapper*

Canada's cities can no longer keep homelessness hidden in plain sight. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a massive deficit in Toronto's social programs and a widespread disregard for human rights. Are the city's municipal public services essentially designed to produce displacement? Or can we do something to alleviate this housing crisis? In *Displacement City: Fighting for Health and Homes in a Pandemic*, outreach worker Greg Cook and street nurse Cathy Crowe explore these pressing questions through a series of interviews, essays, poems, and photographs.

Nestled between a forward by Robyn Maynard and an afterword by Shawn Micallef, the stories in this collection illustrate how the pandemic disproportionately impacted Toronto's homeless, BIPOC, LGBTQ2S, and disabled communities. Quashing the narrative of "we're all in this together," the book chronicles the plight of citizens left behind by the government's COVID-19 strategy. Activists responded to the outbreak in many inspiring ways, including providing tiny shelters for encampments and fighting for more shelter-hotels so that unhoused people could physically distance. The book also mourns the hundreds of preventable deaths that resulted from the toxic mix of an unjust shelter system and the lack of a national housing program.

Coverage of Canada's housing crisis rarely includes the voices of people living through it. The first-person accounts in this book testify to the hope, ingenuity, resilience, and solidarity of displaced citizens, especially during COVID-19. By mapping the rips and holes in Toronto's social safety net, *Displacement City* offers a framework for examining homelessness in other urban centres. It is essential reading for anyone interested in this vital conversation.

GREG COOK is an outreach worker at Sanctuary Toronto. He partners with many community groups to advocate for a more just society. He is on the steering committee of the Shelter and

Housing Justice Network and volunteers for the Toronto Homeless Memorial. He has worked on two documentaries: *Bursting at the Seams*, about the shelter crisis, and *What World Do You Live In*, about police brutality.

CATHY CROWE is a recipient of the Order of Canada and a pioneer of street nursing. She is currently a public affiliate in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at Toronto Metropolitan University. She has fostered numerous coalitions and advocacy initiatives that have achieved significant public policy victories, including the 1998 Disaster Declaration. She is the author of *A Knapsack Full of Dreams and Dying for a Home* and producer of the *Home Safe* documentary series. Her work is the subject of the documentary *Street Nurse* by filmmaker Shelley Saywell.

ROBYN MAYNARD is an assistant professor of Black feminisms in Canada in the Historical and Cultural Studies Department at the University of Toronto, Scarborough. She is the author of *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Fernwood, 2017) and the co-author of *Rehearsals for Living* (Knopf/Haymarket, 2022).

SHAWN MICALLEF is a columnist at the Toronto Star, co-owner of *Spacing* magazine, and the author of *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto* and *Full Frontal TO*.

SELECT ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *DISPLACEMENT CITY*

"At first glance, this is a story of suffering, pain, and trauma. But far more, this book brims with resistance, hopefulness, and solidarity. The authors labour in the shadow of every duplicitous 'we are all in this together' platitude and emerge with a powerful vision of care, health, and love. I urge you to read it – you will not regret the effort, and it will leave you with a powerfully different story of what community health can look like."

Matt Hern, Co-director of Solid State Community Industries and the Author of *What a City Is For: Remaking the Politics of Displacement*

"From the beginning of the book with its historical timeline and list of the deceased, we are in a very special publication that is both gripping and compelling. It reminds us how the ravages of COVID-19 have worsened the risk of those who are homeless. This is a clarion call for action, based in trans-disciplinary analysis, to address the social crisis of homelessness."

Ken Moffatt, Jack Layton Chair, Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University, and Author of *Postmodern Social Work*

"*Displacement City* tells the story of Toronto's pandemic health and homelessness crisis, tracing the structural roots and disastrous impacts of organized state abandonment. It exposes the brutal failure of the settler-colonial capitalist state to provide housing and care, while documenting inspiring stories of collective struggles for survival, life, and human rights. Essential reading for all who share their vision."

Martine August, Associate Professor in the School of Planning, University of Waterloo

"Our collective failure on housing as a human right has very real human and health costs. *Displacement City* is exactly what we need to better understand why the status quo on homelessness has been so cruel. The authors illuminate what is ultimately the strength and resilience of communities fighting for a more just city. We must dedicate ourselves to these learnings to truly honour all of the lives lost."

Dr. Andrew Baback Boozary, Primary Care Physician and Founding Executive Director of the Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine at the University Health Network

"This is a timely and necessary book, and one I wish didn't have to be written. It paints a stark picture of the pandemic and the City of Toronto's housing crisis – and what many recognize as a complete disregard of people's human right to housing. Bringing forward the voices of those most affected by the crisis, the book shows a way forward and what needs to happen to create a city that makes room for everyone."

Elizabeth McIsaac, President of Maytree

"*Displacement City* is a timely and unique exploration of how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated urban homelessness in Canada. It centres the voices of practitioners on the ground and those with lived experience of homelessness. This forward-looking book offers powerful insights into the central role played by frontline workers in advancing the fundamental human rights of access to health care and housing."

Idil Atak, Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology and the Faculty of Law, Toronto Metropolitan University

"*Displacement City* is an urgent call to recognize and oppose the willful abandonment of and deadly violence against community members who are the targets of colonization, racial capitalism, and hetero-patriarchal and ableist institutions and policies. The truth-telling, insight, grief, and rage expressed in these pages must move us to demand radically different responses to housing and health crises from all levels of government and society, grounded in the lived experience and expertise of unhoused people."

Anna Willats, Coordinator/Faculty with the Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program, Social and Community Services, George Brown College

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Displacement City: Fighting for Health and Homes in a Pandemic, co-edited by Greg Cook and Cathy Crowe, is part of Aevo UTP, a new trade imprint from University of Toronto Press.

Aevo UTP books delve into major issues facing today's world. Written by leading experts and intended for the intellectually curious, these titles tackle a range of topics, including the climate crisis, urban development, and mental health. Drawn from the University of Toronto's coat of arms, "Aevo" loosely translates to "passing through time." Aevo UTP books put the present in context and bring the future into focus.

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Advance Reading Copies of *Displacement City: Fighting for Health and Homes in a Pandemic* are available upon request.

Greg Cook and Cathy Crowe are available for interviews and events.