

Ex-mental patients serve food for thought

By Alfred Holden Toronto Star

Mayor Art Eggleton and several other politicians ate stale sandwiches and lukewarm soup yesterday to dramatize the position of ex-psychiatric patients who want improved living conditions.

The lunch was put on by the former patients in a committee room at Toronto City Hall to underline problems faced by an estimated 800 to 1,500 former patients living in boarding and rooming houses in Parkdale.

They are upset over provincial government apathy toward recommendations made by a mayor's task force last February, which urged a cleanup of run-down, crowded rooming houses.

The city has committed itself to implementing the recommendations but mental health programs are a provincial jurisdiction. That means the city's hands are tied unless Queen's Park agrees to help, Alderman David Reville said.

But Premier Bill Davis and Health Minister Keith Norton have yet to comment on the proposals, Eggleton said, toying with a bologna and margarine sandwich, described as luxury fare at the rooming houses.

At the lunch, also attended by Liberal MPP John Sweeney and NDP MPP Ross McClellan, both health critics for their party, the former patients tried to recreate the atmosphere of a decrepit rooming house — with spider webs, broken tables and rude staff. The city is offering to donate a \$200,000 house and help establish "crisis" housing aimed at keeping ex-patients out of hospitals, Reville said.

He said it also would help coordinate a pilot project to help boarding house operators improve their buildings.

The province must commit \$50,000 toward renovating the house, \$700,000 to set up the "crisis hous-

ing" and \$1 million to assist the home operators.

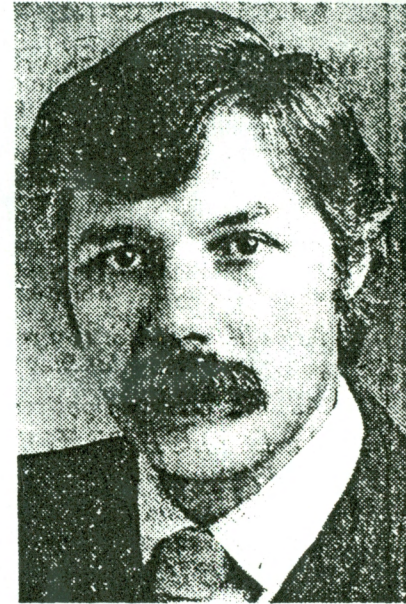
Reville said the program could actually result in savings by providing conditions that would keep many former patients from returning to hospitals and institutions.

"Originally they (Queen's Park) told us it was all terrific — then they come to us and say they don't know what we're talking about," Reville said.

The Star was unable to reach Norton's office for comment yesterday.

Last year, the task force, headed by prominent psychologist Reva Gerstein, was told many discharged, homeless ex-patients are being victimized by unscrupulous boarding house operators.

Some charge up to \$350 a month for shared rooms and in some cases make former patients sign and hand over social assistance cheques, the task force was told.



David Reville: Alderman says city can't help patients until Queen's Park acts.