

Toward A Healthy City: Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan Update

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To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the implementation of the Toronto Public Health (TPH) Strategic Plan “Toward a Healthy City” over the past year (2007/08). It outlines selected accomplishments within each of the six Strategic Directions and describes the progress of TPH in achieving the overall mission of improving the health of the whole population while reducing health inequalities.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications stemming from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its July 11, 2005 meeting, the Board of Health approved the Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan for 2005-2009, “Toward a Healthy City”. The Strategic Plan was developed with extensive input from the Board of Health, the TPH divisional management team, managers and staff as well as community leaders and members of the four Local Health Committees. The Plan contains a renewed vision and mission for TPH, a set of guiding principles and six strategic directions, each containing a number of goals. In September 2007, the Board of Health received the second annual update report on implementation of the Plan. This is the third annual strategic plan implementation report.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

"Toward a Healthy City", the Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan, 2005-2009 provides a road map for Toronto Public Health to improve the overall health of Toronto's population while reducing health disparities. It builds extensively on the proud and rich history of Toronto Public Health in promoting and protecting the health of Toronto's population by ensuring responsive services; advocating for healthy public policy; responding effectively

to public health emergencies; working in partnership with others to address health needs; and being an innovative and effective public health organization and employer of choice. The Plan positions the Board of Health and TPH to act within a changing public health environment by providing a foundation and guide for planning, decision making and advocacy. It also facilitates priority setting and program implementation decisions. The plan also recognizes the importance of creating and maintaining a highly competent and vibrant public health workforce.

COMMENTS

The mission statement, “Toronto Public Health improves the health of the whole population and reduces health inequalities” fully situates TPH’s work in reducing health disparities within a population health approach. This means that addressing the needs of vulnerable or “at risk” populations are seen as integral to improving the health of the population as a whole. Thus the mandate of Toronto Public Health is situated within a broad determinant of health approach.

The following provides an overview of TPH’s implementation of each Strategic Direction. This is by no means an exhaustive list of TPH accomplishments over the past year. Examples from across TPH programs and services are meant to demonstrate achievement in all the strategic directions. Those which pertain to more than one strategic direction, are placed under only one for ease of reading.

1. Improve the Health of the City’s Diverse Population through Responsive Services

TPH has always strived to improve the health of Toronto’s population through responsive services. TPH works closely with local communities across the city to ensure specific needs are addressed while improving the health of the overall population. Ethno-racial diversity, poverty and increasing gaps between rich and poor continue to be a reality across the City. To be effective, TPH programs must adapt to new and changing needs.

A sample of accomplishments over the past year include:

- opened a new dental clinic in the North York Civic Centre to respond to the needs of the local community, including providing improved services for low income seniors in the north region of the City.
- provided dental services to street youth and low income adults in partnership with four Community Agencies (The SHOUT Clinic, Evergreen Youth Services, Parkdale Partners for Oral Health and the Scarborough Urban Health Outreach Clinic).
- Expanded One on One Mentoring in priority neighbourhoods
- Provided approval and inspection services for a large number of multi-cultural special events during the summer season and developed partnerships with a number of cultural organizations to deliver food handler training (Chinese Restaurant Association)
- Developed agreement with Sherbourne Health Centre to provide primary care services to Works clients on site

- Implemented a pedometer lending program in priority neighbourhoods to promote physical activity
- Implemented and evaluated the TB homeless initiative including active case finding, outreach, education, support and referral
- Continued to implement the Invest in Families Pilot Project, a collaborative initiative with Social Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation to address the needs of single parents and their children living in one of Toronto's priority neighbourhoods, by introducing a wrap-around approach to service delivery
- Funded 20 large and 13 smaller projects in diverse communities across the city through the Heart Health Partnership (i.e.: African Caribbean Diabetes prevention and heart health education program, Newcomer women Taking Action for Health Living, Aboriginal Diabetes Program). This funding leveraged an estimated four fold in kind contribution from community partners
- Developed a wallet card and resource guide on fish consumption including health and environmental considerations.

2. Championing Public Health for Toronto

Toronto Public Health has always been an advocate for healthy public policy in the city, the province and the nation. This Strategic Direction articulates the importance of continuing to make public health advocacy a priority for TPH and the Board of Health and to ensure that health implications are considered in all decision making.

Accomplishments over the last year include development of major policy reports with associated advocacy including:

- Advocated for the newly announced Provincial dental program for low income adults and ensured that it will be administered and delivered by local stakeholder groups including community health centres and local health units in collaboration with the Toronto Oral Health Coalition
- Prepared and circulated a discussion paper on the State of Toronto's Food with the view to developing a food strategy for the City of Toronto that takes a determinants of health approach
- Participated actively in the 25 in 5 Coalition's poverty reduction strategy ensuring that the health perspective is brought forward and integrated into all deliberations and interventions
- Advocated for public funding of the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine
- Researched and reported on the impact of food and beverage marketing to children and contributed to the work of the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada on this issue
- Supported the enactment of Smoke Free Vehicle legislation
- Provided an analysis of the risks of trans fat in the food supply, advocated for federal policy and worked with City of Toronto Children's Services in eliminating artificial trans fats from menus in child care centres.

- Collaborated with Health Canada to host a roundtable on the Peer Nutrition Program with a view to sharing best practices and applying peer support models in other program areas
- Facilitated changes to the tendering process to promote healthy eating across City divisions
- Researched and publicized the health impact of air pollution from motor vehicles in Toronto
- Continued to advocate for a centralized tuberculosis clinic network in Toronto

3. Anticipate, Prevent and Respond Effectively to Public Health Emergencies

TPH plays a major role in public health emergency preparedness and response. The experience of SARS and other emergencies has shown the importance of establishing clear and effective linkages with other city divisions, other orders of government, the health care sector and the community, in planning and implementing effective emergency response. There has been much progress in this regard, but more needs to be done to be prepared for public health emergencies such as pandemic influenza.

Over the past year TPH developed and disseminated an updated Toronto Public Health Pandemic Influenza Plan based on the 2007 provincial plan and new developments in local planning. This was done in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Monthly verbal and quarterly written updates were provided to the Board of Health. In addition TPH developed stockpiling recommendations for the City Manager in the absence of federal/provincial direction and TPH purchased the required stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment and infection control supplies for TPH staff. TPH also initiated a pilot project to use school absenteeism data from both school boards for early detection of influenza's arrival in the community.

In addition, TPH:

- provided an effective response to a large rabies exposure incident that occurred at a flea market in Toronto
- Investigated and managed several major outbreaks (i.e.: Hepatitis B in a long term care home, Vero toxin producing E. Coli at a large community picnic, mumps among university students)
- Responded to a number of large food recalls (i.e.: chocolate bars contaminated with Salmonella, Botulism outbreak related to carrot juice)
- provided psychosocial support in communities following a traumatic event through the TPH Community Crisis Support Team
- continued to develop and implement an effective heat alert outreach program in collaboration with other agencies. This included informing operators of over 600 rooming houses, boarding homes and apartment buildings on how to develop hot weather contingency plans and how to keep tenants cool during times of extreme heat
- strengthened response to large outbreaks and emergencies including refinement of

- Incident Management System to reflect recommendations emerging from past outbreak and emergency response experience
- developed a strategy to coordinate communication with physicians including establishing a contract and protocol with a private company to be able to fax/email large groups of physicians on an emergency basis

4. Work with Others to Create Integrated Health and Social Systems that Serve Toronto's Health Needs

Creating integrated health and social systems requires partnerships at a number of levels - local, community, city-wide, provincial and national. TPH is therefore engaged in hundreds of partnerships and collaborative initiatives, to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the health needs of Toronto's population.

TPH constantly seeks strategic opportunities for partnership and effective collaboration. For example,

- TPH has been a strong partner in the Neighbourhood Action Teams and Neighbourhood Action Partnerships in Priority Neighbourhoods across the city. Staff have worked closely with a range of community organizations, other city divisions and community members to identify and implement strategies for action
- TPH actively participated in the development of the Province's new Program Standards that will replace the Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines.
- TPH staff continue to meet regularly with key officials from the five Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) that fall within the City of Toronto boundary and the assigned director leads and/or their designates collaborate on specific initiatives or issues as appropriate.
- Launched an Injury Prevention social marketing campaign to assist parents of children 5-9 years to learn to prevent potential injuries. York Region Community and Health Services Department partnered with Toronto Public Health in this campaign.
- Communicable Disease Liaison Unit staff continue to work closely with hospital infection control teams and actively collaborated with key stakeholders on development and set up of Regional Infection Control Networks.
- Participated in a number of networks and coalitions to address risk factors associated with chronic disease (i.e.: Toronto Heart health Partnership, Toronto Cancer Coalition, Toronto Partners for Student Success, Toronto Tobacco Control Area Network, Canadian Workplace Health Coalition)
- Worked in partnership with the GTA Child Health Network to report on birth outcomes in Toronto. These data serve to improve the understanding of infant health outcomes for both clinical and public health practitioners
- Participated in the GTA Food Safety Committee and provided ongoing consultation on emerging food safety issues.
- Worked with over 100 community partners through the Toronto Heart Health Partnership to provide services through funded projects across the city. In-kind contributions from these partnership total 4 times the allocation from the Ministry of Health Promotion

- Participated on the Integrated Children’s Services Team and the Best start Network to plan integrated services for children 0 to 12 years of age across the city

5. Be an Innovative and Effective Public Health Organization

TPH has a strong history of managing emerging public health issues that require effective risk assessment, surveillance, planning and public communications as well as innovative service response.

The following are some examples of TPH work in this regard:

- Developed the Red Flags Guide, a tool for preschool service providers to facilitate early identification of delays in child growth and development and launched the “Don’t Play Wait and See Campaign”, a public education campaign that encourages parents to seek professional help quickly if they identify delays in their children’s growth and development
- Implemented inSPOT Toronto - an innovative strategy that allows people to log on to a portal on the Toronto Public Health website in order to send anonymous or non-anonymous electronic cards (e-cards) to their partners to notify them of a possible exposure to an STI as well as access links to sexual health information and local resources
- Conducted an innovative social marketing campaign to address the rising rates of chlamydia in Toronto’s youth population. This included school assemblies, a dramatic youth ensemble, a video diary and messages downloaded to cell phones to engage and educate youth about the risk of chlamydia and how a simple urine test can detect infection
- Released a comprehensive report on the health status of Toronto’s children aged one to six years
- Continued to leverage resources and play a leadership role in the City of Toronto – Botswana HIV/AIDS capacity building partnership with particular emphasis on youth leadership development and sexual health education
- Developed and released the first Canadian best practice ventilation guidelines and implementation guide for TB control in homeless shelters.
- Developed a web based application that enables parents/guardians to enter their child’s immunization information directly.

6. Be the Public Health Workplace of Choice

The majority of TPH programs and services are delivered directly to the community by dedicated health professionals and support staff. Creating a workplace which attracts and supports all staff to do their best work is essential to the achievement of TPH objectives. Being the public health workplace of choice requires ensuring sufficient and appropriate supports to enable staff to manage the constant pressures of effective service delivery within a context of increasing community and administrative demands.

Some accomplishments include:

- This year (2008) represents the 125th anniversary of public health in the City of Toronto. A number of initiatives have been planned over the year to mark this anniversary. These include a large town hall meeting for all TPH staff that included displays and information sharing across all program areas
- Provided excellent field training to students and promoted TPH as a workplace of excellence
- Developed policies and procedures that support health and safety of staff in the workplace (e.g. reducing TPH staff exposure to second hand smoke when conducting home visits)
- Secured external funding to deliver an effective Leadership-Mentorship Project in collaboration with the Ontario Public Health Association. Developed a succession planning program which enables leadership capacity building for nurses in partnership with St Elizabeth Healthcare and Women's College Hospital
- Provided education and support regarding vicarious trauma both within TPH and to other City divisions
- Provided access and equity training workshops to management staff across TPH

Conclusion:

Toward a Healthy City outlines a bold vision for the role of Toronto Public Health in improving the health of the City and reducing health inequalities. This requires action on a wide range of initiatives with many partners over a period of years. The past year has seen significant progress on the directions laid out in the Strategic Plan.

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