

# EX7.2.30



June 29, 2015

**To: Mayor John Tory, Members of the Executive Committee, and Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell**

**From: Toronto HIV/AIDS Network (THN)**

**Re: Agenda Item #EX7.2 Interim Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy**

The Toronto HIV/AIDS Network (THN) commends Mayor John Tory, Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell, Councillors and City Staff for your stated commitment to develop a comprehensive Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy and to make transformative change a reality. Leadership, resources, coordination and innovation are needed to address poverty in the City of Toronto. Without such work a significant and increasing number of people in Toronto will continue to be socially and economically marginalized, many struggling to meet the basic needs of food and shelter, unable to thrive in our city. Our City can take action and be a City that is truly liveable and inclusive for all.

THN is very concerned about the extreme poverty we see among many of the people our member organizations serve. Despite the life-saving advances in treatment for HIV, that has allowed many people with HIV to participate fully in our City, there are also many people with HIV who live in poverty due to impacts on their health, disrupting ability to work. People with HIV are from diverse communities and situations and multiple stigmas and discrimination continue to be a barrier. Some people also live with mental health problems, including substance use problems. Like too many in our city, people with HIV may be inadequately housed for their health needs and safety or become homeless. In recent years, aging with HIV has resulted in complex care issues. Much of our work responds directly to the challenges the people we serve face, not only due to health challenges, but because they live in poverty.

THN facilitates HIV/AIDS planning, collaboration and innovation to improve access to programs and services for people from diverse communities living with, affected by and at risk of HIV/AIDS. We and our members work with the broader health and social service sectors on poverty issues, for example, through participation in Commitment to Community ([www.commitment2community.org](http://www.commitment2community.org)), and the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH).

THN provided a detailed submission with action suggestions for the City's March 20 consultation deadline. Today we acknowledge and commend the hard work and discussions that have led to the **Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy**. The Strategy not only highlights the scope and depth of the problems faced by many residents of Toronto but points to a path of practical strategies that can make a positive difference, strengthen our communities and the City overall. There is much that can be done to create transformative change.

**We ask the Executive Committee:**

**To support and approve the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy June 30 and the next steps in the recommendations before you.**

**To support the Interim Strategy's approval at the July City Council meeting; and**

**To support the vital next steps to complete the Strategy's action plan, invest in and make change a reality.**

The Interim Strategy begins to address strategies for the priorities of Housing Stability, Access to Services, Food Access, Transportation, Quality Jobs and a Living Wage, and needed Institutional Change. Sustained leadership and work, innovation, and negotiation, coordination and cooperation among multiple stakeholders (public, private and not-for-profits, across different levels of government, involving multiple departments, decision-makers and administrators, and necessarily with community consultation and input from people directly affected) are required.

**THN is pleased to see issues and ideas reflected in the Strategy that we have heard in our network discussions, and from broader social and community sector conversations. We highlight a few priority issues and strategies below.**

**Housing Stability:** A home is a basic need and key to health. Being homeless, or struggling to keep housing that consumes much of one's income, impacts the health of individuals, families, and communities, and impacts the costs to health-care, City services and local economy. The opposite is also true. When people are housed, it is an opportunity to address issues such as health problems including HIV, mental health and substance use issues. Housing stability requires increased participation from and work with other levels of government but we agree with the *Housing Stability* recommendations that the City has an important role to play. For example, to leverage City of Toronto authority or leadership to ultimately increase the stock of and access to affordable housing including incentives for the development of new affordable housing, inclusionary zoning and a strategy/policy for rooming houses. Increased financial support and access to programs is needed for programs that already make a difference, such as the Housing Stabilization Fund and the Rent Bank. We also wish to highlight the essential work of City Shelter Support and Housing and Administration (SSHA) and the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) in its partnership role in the development and implementation of the *City's Housing Stability Service Planning Framework*.

**Access to Services** – The City of Toronto can promote access to services by removing financial, linguistic, and mobility barriers faced by many people with low income. We can expand participation in service development, access and community development, including by newcomers, youth, Aboriginals, ethno-racial communities, people with disabilities, people coming out of prison systems and LGBT. Staff can be enabled in furthering customer service standards through training on access, living in poverty and “collaborative communication” with community services. To “Stabilize funding for quality community-based programs” will increase access and help enable transformative change (Recommendation 6.2).

Access to services, food, and employment includes **Transportation** by making transit more affordable, through “a demand model that includes fare-g geared-to-income criteria” and “capacity”, for example with the new Presto Pass (Recommendations 8.1 and 7.2).

**Food Access** - Increase the supply of affordable healthy food available to people with low income using mechanisms/strategies within the powers of the City of Toronto including expanding community gardens, farmer's markets and mobile good food markets and easing restrictions (“red tape”) where feasible.

**Quality Jobs and a Living Wage** - Unemployment and underemployment disproportionately affect youth, newcomers and racialized and Aboriginal groups. The City of Toronto should strive

to become a model of inclusive employment practices and leverage its position as a large employer. The City can also play a crucial role in establishing funding programs that allow community agencies to develop employment and training programs that have the greatest opportunity of responding to the needs of the people they serve. The City can promote and create opportunities for people with low income to start small businesses by leveraging existing City programs and City-owned spaces/buildings. Substantive change requires advocacy for and City action to expand access to affordable child care spaces.

**Institutional Change – Transformative change requires institutional change and collective change. We wish to highlight the following:**

- Examine all decisions through the lens of equity and impact upon people living in poverty.

Decisions can have the greatest negative impact on those who can least afford it. The participatory approach needs to be ongoing, with a special focus on empowering people with lived experience of poverty/low income to participate meaningfully in all aspects of the Strategy (i.e., developing priorities and in the choice, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all components of the Strategy from their inception).

The Strategy needs to become integrated into City-wide decision-making and planning: **Poverty-Sensitive Budgeting:** Create a mechanism that encourages a decision-making environment in which the impact of budget choices on poverty is duly considered.” AND **Revamped Equity Lens:** Include poverty-specific measures in the equity lens tool and strengthen its use in day-to-day planning and decision-making as an accountability tool in the City” (Recommendations 19 and 23). Decision-making that takes into account potential impact through an equity and poverty reduction lens will strengthen the effectiveness of the Strategy to reduce poverty in Toronto.

- The Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy is an investment strategy.

The City of Toronto will ultimately save money by investing in the short and long term in programs that allow more residents the opportunities to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of the City. “**Dedicated Revenues:** Reducing poverty will require increased investments – by the City and by other governments and sectors. “The City will explore options for dedicating stable revenues to address the root causes of poverty and invest in upstream interventions that lower costly downstream expenditures.” (Recommendation 24)

- Respect for and collaboration with community agencies serving people with low income  
Community agencies serving people with low income are on the frontlines working with and responding to people living in poverty. This gives us valuable experience and insight into the dynamics of poverty—where larger societal and structural forces determine whether or not people and families are able to live in good health and with dignity, and participate in the life of the city. We are passionate about the work we do and committed to community empowerment. We are ready and engaged in helping develop and implement the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.

With thanks,

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