



## REPORT FOR ACTION

## Proposed Research Approach on Exposure to Community Violence

**Date:** July 11, 2018  
**To:** Board of Health  
**From:** Medical Officer of Health  
**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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This report is a progress update on the scoping of an approach for a research project to examine the root causes of community violence. In addition, it highlights Toronto Public Health's collaborative efforts with Social Development Finance and Administration and members of affected communities to identify effective approaches to address Community Violence in the City of Toronto.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

### FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There is no financial impact associated with this report.

### DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on February 27, 2018, the Board of Health received a letter (and report) from Chris Glover, Education Representative, Board of Health, and Trustee, Etobicoke Centre, Toronto District School Board on the health impacts of community violence. The letter made recommendations to the Medical Officer of Health on actions to address community violence through evidence based approaches. These recommendations were amended and adopted by the Board of Health:

[HL25.6 A Public Health Approach to Community Violence](http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL25.6)  
(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL25.6>)

## COMMENTS

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[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/community-violence) defines community violence as exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts (e.g., bullying, fights among gangs and other groups, shootings in public areas such as schools and communities). Although people can anticipate some types of traumatic events, community violence can happen suddenly and without warning. Consequently, youth and families who live with community violence often have heightened fears that harm could come at any time and experience the world as unsafe and terrifying.  
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/community-violence>

This report provides an update on Toronto Public Health's work in scoping a research project to examine the root causes of community violence and highlights Toronto Public Health's collaborative efforts to identify effective violence prevention strategies for the City of Toronto.

### **Proposed Research Approach:**

As directed by the Board of Health (BOH), the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) is working with several research partners, including Public Health Ontario and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences to identify root causes of community violence, the impact on the broader community, and to identify effective evidence informed interventions to prevent incidents of community violence, and mitigate negative impacts of violence at the community level. The project will examine the extent to which people who live in the City of Toronto are exposed to community violence; explore characteristics and risk factors associated with being a victim and/or perpetrator of community violence; identify the mental and physical health impacts of community violence; and identify effective evidence informed interventions that can mitigate the negative impacts of community violence and to prevent incidents of community violence. Toronto Public Health (TPH) will work with our research partners to complete the research project in mid-2019 and report back to the BOH on the findings later in 2019.

In addition to the proposed research TPH, through ongoing collaboration with the Social Development Finance & Administration (SDFA) is conducting community consultations through community forums and key informant interviews with residents, community organizations and stakeholders. These engagement efforts will provide invaluable insight and advice to City staff on potential community violence prevention strategies and interventions.

On June 23, 2018, SDFA held a second annual Community Safety Network Forum in partnership with TPH. This forum included presentations and workshops on victim/witness supports, trauma support, integrated gun and gang strategies, community impacts of violence, and best practices towards violence prevention and also provided an opportunity for ongoing community consultation on a Toronto Youth Violence Prevention plan, currently under development.

On October 20th 2018, TPH and SDFA are co-hosting a free forum for community stakeholders, to allow for ongoing community engagement and consultation on, evidence based interventions to prevent community violence, strategies to reduce the impact of exposure to community violence, and the Toronto Youth Violence Prevention plan. This forum is being organized as a pre-conference event for the Law Enforcement & Public Health 2018 conference, an international conference promoting collaborative action, in practice, research, policy development between sectors including public health and law enforcement. Violence is one of the key themes of the conference, with a focus on the impact of violent incidents on the broader community. The conference is being held on October 21st to the 24th, 2018, in Toronto.

## **City of Toronto Violence Prevention Programs and Services**

At its March 5, 2018 meeting, the BOH also requested the MOH to report on actions to address community violence through evidence informed approaches. Currently, SDFA's Community Safety and Wellbeing Unit provides programs and services to strategically respond to growing community safety and wellbeing needs. The community development approach to safety and wellbeing utilized by the unit engaged 11,501 residents and service providers in 152 prevention based initiatives in 2017 that helped to build local capacity. The Community Safety & Wellbeing unit provides the following five programs to address community violence in Toronto.

### **1. Community Crisis Response Program**

The Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) works across the City of Toronto in partnership with community members, agencies, and internal City divisions to enhance community safety.

The CCRP team supports communities in the development of safety networks that create neighborhood strategies which focus on Crisis Intervention, Crisis Prevention and Crisis Preparation. CCRP further supports communities through the development of coordinated community crisis response protocols, local safety development initiatives, events and strategies.

The CCRP provides supports to communities that have been impacted by violent and traumatic incidents to assist with recovery and healing. CCRP has conducted extensive outreach into areas impacted by violence and mobilized victim/witness support, psycho-social support, counselling, safety planning, conflict de-escalation and engagement.

In 2017, CCRP responded to 604 violent and traumatic critical incidents. From January 1 to June 30, 2018 the CCRP has responded to 325 violent and traumatic critical incidents. These incidents include shootings, shots fired, firearm incidents, stabbings, swarmings, assaults and gang and gun activity. Working with community partners and local safety committees to support communities impacted by violence are CCRP priorities for 2018. Notable trends identified by CCRP are increasing access to firearms, violation of safe space, escalation on social media and increased demands on victim support services. With current demands, CCRP is at capacity and the program is modifying prevention activities to support increased intervention. Further increases in violence will have programmatic impact and further investment will be required to support prevention work.

## **2. Community Crisis Response Fund**

The Community Crisis Response Fund is designed to provide one-time financial assistance to initiatives or activities that address a specific violent incident/crisis in a community which contributes to community capacity building and/or community healing. The fund is intended to assist communities to develop and implement their own crisis response initiatives and support mechanisms to improve community safety, wellbeing and resiliency. This fund provided funding for 34 projects in 2017. To date, ten projects have been funded in 2018 and applications are currently being received to respond to recent incidents.

## **3. Furthering Our Communities by Uniting Services Toronto (FOCUS Toronto)**

Furthering Our Community by Uniting Services (FOCUS Toronto) is an innovative community safety and wellbeing initiative co-led by the City of Toronto, United Way Toronto and Toronto Police Service. It aims to reduce crime, harm, victimization and improve community resiliency and wellbeing through local situation tables that mobilize multi-sector interventions to respond to situations of acutely elevated risk.

There are over 100 human services providers that have utilized interventions as a prevention mechanism in over 1500 situations of risk since the model launched in 2013. In 2017, FOCUS Toronto responded to 479 situations of risk and 295 situations from January 1 to June 1, 2018. Of these, 93% of clients were connected to services and the overall risk was reduced in 88% of situations. The top risk factors responded to include: mental health, housing, anti-social/negative behaviour, criminal involvement and suicide/self-harm.

## **4. Specialized Program for Inter-Divisional Enhanced Responsiveness to Vulnerability (SPIDER)**

SPIDER's mission is to reduce the recurrence of risks and promote the safe inclusion of vulnerable Torontonians by ensuring that: City of Toronto Divisions' response is coordinated; community health care, social and community services are made available; operational and system level reforms are identified and promoted to eliminate future issues.

## **5. Youth Violence Prevention**

The Community Safety & Wellbeing Unit is leading the development of a Youth Violence Prevention Plan which will be developed with City divisions, community partners and young people who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious crime and violence.

A framework has been developed that includes youth equity, employment and training, youth spaces and engagement, violence intervention and interruption and youth mental health. To date, five workgroups and an advisory committee have been created to develop recommendations and implementation strategies.

The youth violence intervention and interruption work group is looking at international best practices in community and system interventions that could be implemented in Toronto, including a lived-experience violence interrupters program, hospital based intervention models, trauma recovery models and others. Early findings indicate that providing municipal backbone support to ensure that interventions are integrated and community based organizations have the necessary investment to participate are critical

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factors for success. Toronto Public Health's research report, ongoing community consultations and leveraging existing partnerships will continue to inform recommendations and implementation strategies.

## **Investment**

The City is currently seeking financial opportunities to invest in community-led violence intervention and interruption models that advance youth violence prevention. On June 6, 2018, Public Safety Canada announced that it is working to build a safe and resilient Canada through the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS), which provides time-limited funding in the form of grants and contributions. Funding provided supports projects that contribute to preventing and reducing crime in Canada and to increasing knowledge about what works in crime prevention. The NCPS priorities for the 2018 Call for Applications are direct intervention and strengthening community readiness projects among Indigenous and vulnerable populations to prevent or reduce the impacts of the following crime issues on communities:

- Youth gangs
- Youth violence
- Youth bullying and
- Youth cyberbullying

The City and its partners are continuing to strategize on how to best leverage this and other investment opportunities to enhance community-led violence intervention and interruption and overall youth violence prevention.

## **Emergency Meeting Regarding the Increase in Gun and Gang Violence in our City**

At its June 26, 2018 meeting, City Council directed the City Manager to request an emergency meeting with the Toronto Police Service, Toronto Community Housing Corporation and appropriate staff to determine what additional resources are needed to take immediate steps to address the spike in gun and gang violence in our City and ways the Federal and Province Government can further assist to implement an expedited sustainable community policing model for our City, and to report back to the July 23, 24 and 25, 2018 meeting of City Council on the outcome of the meeting.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.MM43.23>

## **Legislation**

On March 8, 2018, Bill 175, Safer Ontario Act, 2018, received Royal Assent, enacting new provisions, as well as amending and repealing provisions, under the Police Services Act.

<https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-41/session-2/bill-175>

The Act is the outcome of the Province's Strategy for a Safer Ontario which was used to guide changes to the delivery of community safety services with a focus on the following key areas:

- Collaborative approach to community safety and well-being
- Improved interactions between police and vulnerable Ontarians

- Clarification of core police responsibilities and support for more effective community safety delivery
- Enhanced civilian police governance, accountability and oversight
- Expanded use of technology to support community safety
- Updated education and training requirements for police officers
- Sustainability of First Nations policing

The Act includes a provision requiring municipalities to develop and implement a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWBP) within two years after the legislation receives Royal Assent. An Advisory Committee with prescribed community partners must be established for the development of the Plan. City staff will prepare a status report on Bill 175, Safer Ontario Act, 2018 following the transition of leadership of the provincial government and municipal election in October 2018.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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