



The Toronto Board of Health
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Via email to boh@toronto.ca

September 23, 2019

Dear Board of Health Members:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Toronto Region Board of Trade with respect to the 2019 *TO Health Check* (Item HL 9.1) which is on your agenda for today. Unfortunately, due to a family issue, I am unable to depute as intended, and so I am forwarding my notes below for your consideration. While we normally refer to ourselves as “the Board” or “the Board of Trade” in correspondence, please also bear with me as I refer to TRBOT in this case to avoid confusion with the Board of Health below.

TRBOT has received a number of requests in recent months to comment on the role of public health in a successful city, and we are grateful for the opportunity to comment here. While TRBOT’s policy agenda and breadth has been expanding rapidly since 2015 to reflect the changing needs of our economy and business community, I will candidly note that public health has not normally been a focus for the Board’s policy team or member committees. Previously, we have offered general support for campaigns like Civic Action’s own focus on mental health initiatives, and we have referenced health and other goals in the *TO Health Check* in initiatives targeted at socioeconomic problems and related public programs. For example, note TRBOT’s report on inequality in Toronto called *Closing the Prosperity Gap*:

Solutions for a More Liveable City Region written in partnership with the United Way (2014), and our more recent report on proposed improvements to employee training and workforce development programs in *Help Wanted*, written in partnership with the United Way and Metcalfe Foundation (2019).

While TRBOT has not traditionally sustained campaigns on these issues beyond those reports in the past, the 2019 *TO Health Check* is of particular interest to TRBOT for two reasons, over and above our shared interest in a healthy Toronto, and we will endeavor to keep a closer eye on the progress of the *Health Check* indicators with these points in mind.

The first point of interest is the Board of Health's willingness to track success based on a measurable, outcomes-based approach to policy and service delivery. Under the leadership of Vice-President Marcy Burchfield (previously Executive Director of the Neptis Foundation). TRBOT is currently building a second policy unit, called the 'Economic Blueprint Institute,' to build a highly-detailed database of the Toronto Region's economic and demographic geography to drive better public policy recommendations. The MOH's continued focus on reporting sourced, objective metrics and outcomes may offer an opportunity for the Institute, insofar as we are searching for every available opportunity to incorporate new indicators and new data into our own effort to more comprehensively map and track the City of Toronto and city-region's progress. Our own Policy Team is also considering adopting a range of outcomes-based benchmarks to assess progress toward TRBOT's public policy goals more neutrally, and the *Health Check* has already been a useful model in these discussions.

The second -- and far more important -- point of interest is the Health Check's notes on a specific issues where the business community is, or should be, already engaged. These include:

- i. **Affordable housing.** As Board of Health members may know, TRBOT is already campaigning for more affordable housing for all income classes, and working hard to ensure that all aspects of the crisis are acknowledged and acted upon. For example, note our recent work in partnership with the *Toronto Star* to highlight the impact of

the housing crisis on the displacement of several middle- and lower-middle income employee groups critical to city life. The *Health Check*'s details tracking the risks with respect to the *quality* of housing as well as access to housing and rents should inform our work as this campaign develops. Our strong support for the Mayor Tory and Deputy Mayor Bailao's Housing Now initiative is also worth noting here, insofar as the sites chosen represent better deployment of City of Toronto lands for public purposes, and the decision to use mixed housing to finance affordable housing construction frees up City resources to support more deeply affordable projects elsewhere.

- ii. **The Opioid Crisis.** While TRBOT policy staff and our colleagues are all aware of the urgency of addressing this growing threat to public and private health, the *Health Check*'s statistical reports on opioid usage (19% among adults, 3% unprescribed, 308 deaths in 2017, and on and on) are staggering even to those who are broadly familiar with the issue from everyday headlines. More than ever, these figures confirm that this problem deserves new thinking and city-wide attention.
- iii. **Progress.** While some of the trends and statistics confirmed in the *Health Check* are bleak, it is helpful to note that others also confirm the success of various targeted and intelligent interventions over years past. It may be critical to flag these to Council, Queen's Park and the general public to serve as positive examples for other initiatives. For example, the long term reduction in drunk driving incidence reported by the *Health Check* is the result of many years of combined delivery of social, legislative, workplace and enforcement initiatives. This progress can and should help to inform offer a path forward for the prevention of deaths due to other unsafe driving habits, given the Health Check's report that one in three drivers is self-reporting their own distracted driving, and we are likely to follow up with on this front with potential workplace safety initiatives in mind.

Looking ahead to the 2020 Fiscal Year, we know that much attention will be paid in coming budget debates to the need to balance protection of city services against inevitable restraints from provincial transfers. There will also, as always, be considerable competition *within* City

Hall for budget resources. We will be considering the range of public health challenges faced by the City of Toronto alongside these pressures in our own budget recommendations to the City and the Province this year, but the *Health Check* is also an opportunity for us to identify, wherever possible, options for business, the non-profit community and the public service to work together as partners to expand capacity beyond various commitments by governments in any particular year. The three issues I raised above are obvious candidate areas to do so in future.

With this in mind, I want to thank the Medical Officer of Health and other city officials for reaching out and drawing our attention to the timing of the *TO Health Check's* release. We will also be taking steps to draw the attention of all our members to the *Health Check*, both from the standpoint of the issues I raised above, and to ensure that they are better prepared for demographic trends and projections that call for increased accessibility, greater diversity in workforce strategies and renewed attention to the challenges and implications of youth unemployment and underemployment in Toronto.

Yours Sincerely,

[Signed in original]

Brian F. Kelcey
Vice-President, Policy and Public Affairs
Toronto Region Board of Trade