



Toronto Police Services Board

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Toronto Health Status Report/T.O Health Check

Remarks to the Toronto Board of Health by Chair Andy Pringle

September 23, 2019

Good morning,

On behalf of the Toronto Police Services Board, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today as part of your discussion of the Toronto Health Status Report, or the T.O. Health Check.

My remarks today will focus on the importance of aligning different service providers to tackle issues that we end up seeing the downstream effects of in policing, while they are still upstream. *The Way Forward*, the roadmap for the modernization of the Toronto Police Service (January 2017), is founded on the concept of collaboration, using resources in the most effective way, ensuring responsibilities are given to the most appropriate stakeholders, and working together – always – to achieve results that best meet the expectations of all members of our communities.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the Toronto Police Service, and our Board, collaborating with Toronto Public Health and other stakeholders so that we can more effectively deal with the challenges we are all facing, including individuals experiencing mental health and addictions issues, and challenges specific to the Indigenous community, among many, many others.

We understand that in many of these areas, the problems are complex and multi-faceted. There is no simple or quick fix solution. There are resource shortages, systemic barriers, and long-standing cultural and social stereotypes and assumptions, all of which make overcoming these challenges all the more difficult.

But it is not always about doing better with more. It is about being more innovative, more collaborative, and more creative. It is about building new and stronger strategic partnerships to more effectively utilize what we have, in smarter and more resourceful ways. It is about joining forces at the start of our problem-solving process, rather than at the end, making partnership a regularized and critical component of all that we do.

Under the legislation that governs policing in this province crime **prevention** is a core responsibility of the Service and the Board and the provision of “adequate and effective policing” explicitly references this. We need to take this priority seriously and address the root of issues, recognizing that we are in an environment where resources are scarcer, and issues are becoming more complex, while populations are growing, and aging.

Recent changes to Ontario’s policing legislation also clearly support – in fact, mandates – a collaborative approach, requiring all municipalities, including the City of Toronto, to have a community safety and well-being plan. The advisory committee created to develop this plan must consist of a variety of stakeholders, including representatives from the local health integration network, individuals from organizations providing services to improve the physical or mental health of individuals, educational services, community or social services, and, in particular to children and youth, Council representatives, Police Services Board representatives, and the Chief or Police.

The role of this important advisory committee includes identifying risk factors in the municipality including, systemic discrimination and other social factors that contribute to crime, victimization, addiction, drug overdose and suicide and any other risk factors, prioritizing risk factors, identifying strategies to reduce the prioritized risk factors, and setting out measurable outcomes that the strategies are intended to produce. This is an innovative and progressive approach to crime prevention in our communities and our Board very much looking forward to participating in this forum, along with Toronto Public Health.

The Service’s dynamic, community-centred Neighbourhood Officer program is an outstanding illustration of how collaboration can prevent the upstream issues from ending up as downstream challenges. In this innovative program, officers are meaningfully embedded within communities, focused on truly connecting with the public. They know the people who live there and the resources that are available – including resources provided by Toronto Public Health – and can best leverage them in the most effective way possible. They work collaboratively to mobilize community members to deal with issues **before** they become crises. This excellent program also includes building and strengthening key partnerships with public health, social service providers, among other stakeholders in the community.

Exploring more ways to work together has also taken other forms. In February 2019, the Board approved the establishment of a new Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Panel, or MHAAP. The purpose of MHAAP is to review, provide advice and make recommendations to the Board on an ongoing basis, at a minimum, related to

monitoring and evaluating the implementation of a new, forthcoming organizational mental health and addictions Strategy, and other matters related to policy involving mental health and addictions issues. MHAAP will bring recommendations forward to the Board on a regular basis. MHAAP includes members of the Board, members of the Service and members of the community.

I want to turn to a particular crisis that requires the strategic collaboration of all of us – and, in particular, police and public health. As your report notes, “the number of opioid poisonings has increased dramatically over the past five years.” In policing, we have most certainly seen the effects of this dramatic increase.

Indeed, at the same meeting at which MHAAP was established, the Board considered a report regarding the jury verdict and recommendations arising from the inquest into the death of Bradley Chapman, a homeless man who died of an opioid overdose in 2015. Recognizing the need to confront the opioid crisis collaboratively, and within the context of our broader approach to mental health and addictions the Board approved a Motion to invite Dr. de Villa to be a member of MHAAP, as well as to invite her to present a quarterly public report to the Board on relevant public health issues, including the opioid overdose crisis. Further, the Board directed the Chief to work with Dr. de Villa to identify a Toronto Police Service representative to sit on relevant Toronto Public Health committees, report to the Board on an annual basis on the representatives’ participation on these committees; and explore sharing information relevant to the opioid overdose crisis, subject to operational constraints.

The Service and the Board are confronting the opioid crisis in other ways too. Since last July, the Service has started to deploy the life-saving medication naloxone to uniformed police officers in the downtown core where overdose calls for service are highest, with plans to phase in more with time. The use of naloxone by officers has directly saved the lives of a number of individuals in an overdose situation. This is an excellent demonstration of how the Service is adapting its response to the challenges it is facing in the community, in partnership with other stakeholders and informed by the knowledge Toronto Public Health has amassed and analyzed.

One of the greatest demonstrations of the power of partnerships is the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team or MCIT program. This is a highly effective, collaborative partnership between participating Toronto area hospitals and the Service. The program pairs a mental health nurse and a specially trained police officer to respond to situations involving individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. I am pleased to say that coverage is now available throughout the City of Toronto and the number of teams and hospitals involved is growing all the time.

A notable section in your report references the number of Indigenous people living in Toronto, stating that there are many more Indigenous people living in Toronto than previously reported. As the report notes, “according to the 2016 Census, there were 23,065 people living in Toronto who identified as Aboriginal. More recent research

shows that the actual Aboriginal population that year was between 34,000 and 69,000.” This is a significant discrepancy. We know that in policing and other areas, a context of historical and systemic discrimination, addiction, mental health, homelessness, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system issues more broadly have impacted the lives of Indigenous people living in Toronto and in other communities. We know that certain populations suffer more, and this is, unfortunately, one of them.

As a police service and a Board, we are taking concrete steps to try to deal with these various and substantial challenges, including focused recruitment efforts to members of this community, sustained and meaningful outreach initiatives and explicit reference that acknowledges the unique position of our Indigenous community. The Terms of Reference for the Board’s *Independent Civilian Review into Missing Person Investigations* specifically includes reference to the Indigenous community.

The Board’s Anti-Racism Advisory Panel, or ARAP, established in April 2018, has also expressly included a consideration of the Indigenous community within the policing context.

These are but some of the many ways in which the Board and the Service are working collaboratively with the community to deal with the complex social issues that are facing us all. Importantly, it is also demonstrates progress by the Board and Service working in close partnership with Toronto Public Health, led by Dr. de Villa, on some of the most significant challenges facing our city today.

I want to say a special thank you to Dr. de Villa for her leadership and close engagement with me as Chair of the Board, and with our organization. Although my time as Chair is coming to an end next week, I know that the foundation that has been laid for strategic partnership will benefit Toronto’s communities for a long time to come.

Once again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I believe and hope it renews our joint commitment to working together to deal with them in the most efficient, compassionate and effective way, to best benefit the members of all of Toronto’s communities.

Thank you.