

OVERVIEW OF CITY OF TORONTO DIVISIONS' ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

A review of City of Toronto divisions' activities and experiences was conducted to understand the current state of socio-demographic data collection and disaggregated data use at the City:

- Forty-two (42) City divisions were surveyed on their data collection and use in the Equity, Diversity and Human Rights Divisional Achievements Survey (2017-18). Forty (40) divisions responded to these questions.
- Consultations were held with staff during 2018-20 to collect additional information, learn about divisional experiences and update survey data.
- Divisional documents were reviewed.

The survey and consultation results showed that many City initiatives and activities are underway across several divisions to collect socio-demographic data and use disaggregated data. These activities and experiences are summarized below. While this summary includes most significant socio-demographic data collection and disaggregated data use in City divisions, it is possible that some additional divisional activities are not reflected here.

Collection and Use of Socio-demographic Data by City Divisions

The survey and consultation work identified 20 of 44 City divisions that reported collecting socio-demographic data from service users and residents through their programs and services, client surveys and public consultations. Currently, most City programs that collect socio-demographic data only collect a limited set, and this data may be limited in scope and quality. Those divisions that collect a larger set of socio-demographics are not doing so across all divisional programs or initiatives. City programs do not usually collect socio-demographic data in ways that are consistent with other City programs. Generally, this data is collected in a format that meets the needs and eligibility requirements of a specific program, and in some cases meets provincial or federal standards of that particular sector. Service data that is collected and broken down by socio-demographic groups is not consistently used to address service inequities, shared among City staff or reported publicly. The establishment of a Data for Equity Unit within the People and Equity Division will provide needed support to help ensure that socio-demographic data collection and use across City divisions is consistent, appropriate, sensitive and reflective of best practices.

The socio-demographic data most commonly collected by City programs are place of residence, age and sex or gender. Income information is typically collected only when it is required for program eligibility, with a few exceptions. The least commonly collected data are race or ethnicity, immigration status¹, sexual orientation and religion. Table 1 shows which socio-demographic data are collected by each of the 20 identified divisions. The divisions that were not identified as collecting socio-demographic data included those providing infrastructure, development, corporate and financial services, and would not be expected to collect this data due to the nature of their work. Some divisions collect socio-demographic data routinely as part of service user records, while others only collect this data through one-time surveys, program evaluations or public consultations. Those who do collect extensive socio-demographics in service user records may only do so in one or a few of their programs. Table 1 provides some additional context about how each of the 20 identified divisions collects and uses socio-demographic data.

¹ Information about immigration status and citizenship is only collected by the City of Toronto when required for program eligibility or in anonymous surveys, as outlined in the City's [Access T.O.](#) guidelines.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Data Collection and Use by City Divisions

20 of 44 Divisions identified as collecting socio-demographic data through service user records, surveys and/or public consultations²

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
311 Toronto	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Income Family/Household Type ³ Born in Canada Education level Housing situation Years lived in Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A location for each 311 service request is recorded. This data is made available on the City's Open Data portal. • To measure recent 311 callers' satisfaction with the service • To ensure a sample that is representative of Toronto's population and to weight survey responses accordingly in a survey measuring awareness and usage of Toronto 311 and its services
Children's Services	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Income Family/Household Type Indigenous Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records 	To determine eligibility for families applying for fee subsidies for childcare, before and after school care, and other programs such as Every Child Belongs

² Data summarized in this table was collected through a survey in 2018-19 and follow up consultations in 2018-20. While this process identified most of the significant activities across City divisions, it is possible that some additional divisional activities are not reflected or have since changed. It is important to note that the socio-demographics listed for each division may only be collected for a specific program or project, and this collection may happen routinely, periodically or in one-time initiatives.

³ Family/Household Type refers to the composition or membership of a family or household.

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
City Clerk's Office	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Disability Indigenous Identity Race/Ethnicity Sexual Orientation Marital status Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of program records • Data collected through surveys of service users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Public Appointments Secretariat collects voluntary socio-demographic data on applicants for City boards, committees and tribunals to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand who is applying and the needs and gaps in participation of equity-seeking groups – Report publicly on the diversity of applicants and appointees – Inform outreach to specific communities and evaluate outreach strategies – Support decision-making about appointments • Indigenous identity data is used to issue First Nations Tax Rebates • Address or postal code is collected and used to administer various services including elections, archives and information requests. Additional socio-demographics are used by Registry Services to register deaths and marriages and to issue burial and marriage licenses.
City Planning	Postal Code (first three digits) Age Gender Indigenous Identity Racialized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected through public surveys of residents on a project-by-project basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform plans for land use in the city • To randomly select (by way of a civic lottery) a group of residents for the former Toronto Planning Review Panel that were representative of Toronto's socio-demographics to advise on planning projects

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Corporate Real Estate Management	Address or Postal Code Income Family/Household type Education level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected in public surveys 	To inform marketing and strategic planning activities for St. Lawrence Market
Economic Development and Culture	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Income Disability Indigenous Identity Race Language Born in Canada Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data to be collected as part of program and service user records, such as applications and reports Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with one or more pilots, Economic Development and Culture will collect these data points in order to identify differences and/or inequities in access, experiences and outcomes for socio-demographic groups. Socio-demographic data will be collected for programs, advisory bodies, partner boards, and business principals. Data will be leveraged to help inform strategic planning and operations for outcomes to benefit all of Toronto's residents, including Indigenous and equity-seeking communities, and residents of underserved areas.

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Employment and Social Services	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Family/Household Type Disability Indigenous Identity Race Ethnicity Language Born in Canada Immigration Education level Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	Programs including Ontario Works and various employment programs collect socio-demographic data about their service users to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine eligibility for programs and services • Understand which populations are accessing services • Understand client satisfaction, experiences and possible barriers to accessing services for different populations
Environment and Energy	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Income Family/Household Type Indigenous identity Racialized Language Education level Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal data collected through online user profiles on City websites: Live Green Perks and Climate Action website (soon to be launched) • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand which populations are accessing programs and services • For future service planning and resource allocation • To understand who is participating in public consultation and engagement activities

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Housing Secretariat	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of birth Income Family/Household Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine eligibility for Laneway Suite Programs • To inform programs and policies
Indigenous Affairs Office	Age or Date of Birth Gender Indigenous identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In community engagements • Through public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents in the general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the demographics of community engagement participants and the proportion of Indigenous participants and Indigenous entrepreneurs specifically • To understand the needs of different socio-demographic groups in consultations with Indigenous entrepreneurs
Municipal Licensing and Standards	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Disability Race Language Education level Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in anonymous studies, surveys and public consultations with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine eligibility for licensing • To inform service provision, such as delivery of services in various languages • For policy and program analysis and development, such as the Accessibility Strategy

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Parks, Forestry and Recreation	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income (if applying for the Welcome Policy subsidy) Disability Indigenous Identity Race Ethnicity Born in Canada Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subset of socio-demographic data collected when clients create a profile for the recreation program registration and facilities booking system as part of service user records (age, gender* and address only) • Subset of equity data collected through surveys of service users • Subset of equity data collected in public surveys, focus group discussions, observational studies, public consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) <p>*Male and Female are the only classifications available in the current version of the software (software replacement process underway)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine eligibility for programs and services with prerequisites, such as age, gender and subsidies • To understand who is accessing services and if facilities are meeting those needs • To fund new projects and programs • To evaluate programs and services to determine if they are meeting the needs of residents • As part of public consultation, policy development, and planning initiatives • Existing Census data is used to conduct area-based equity analysis. For example, to estimate the socio-demographic characteristics of program participants, the socio-demographic profile of the area where participants live is used as a proxy. This is the division's primary approach to understanding equity in provision of services and is commonly used in other fields such as health.

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
People and Equity	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Disability Indigenous Identity Race Immigration Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data routinely collected as part of service user records 	<p>Through job application process, socio-demographic data are collected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understand the diversity of candidates Assist the City in ensuring our recruitment systems and programs are equitable and accessible
Policy, Planning, Finance and Administration	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Sex Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents and stakeholders (general public) 	<p>The Public Consultations Unit uses socio-demographic information to understand who is participating in public consultation activities and work towards targeting and diversifying attendees.</p>
Purchasing and Material Management	Gender Disability Indigenous Identity Racialized Sexual Orientation Veteran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected through third-party supplier certification organizations, such as the Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council (CAMSC) which verifies and certifies companies that are owned by Indigenous and racialized people 	<p>The Social Procurement Program collects socio-demographic data through third-party supplier certification organizations to ensure that the City is purchasing goods and services from diverse suppliers.</p>

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Seniors Services and Long-Term Care	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Family/Household Type Disability Indigenous Identity Race Ethnicity Language Born in Canada Immigration Sexual Orientation Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine service needs of long-term care residents and other service users • To determine who is accessing adult day programs, homemaker services and other programs • To improve programs and services • Service planning and resource allocation for long-term care homes
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Family/Household Type Disability Indigenous Identity Race Language Born in Canada Immigration Sexual Orientation Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand which populations are experiencing homelessness and whether certain populations are overrepresented in the homeless population • To understand who is accessing programs and services • To determine eligibility for programs and benefits • To evaluate and improve programs and services • To inform service planning and resource allocation

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Social Development, Finance and Administration	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Family/Household Type Disability Indigenous Identity Race Ethnicity Language Born in Canada Immigration Sexual Orientation Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data routinely collected as part of service user records • Data collected through surveys of service users • Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the populations being served by organizations applying for grants. This information is used to allocate funding resources to communities and populations in need. • To understand who is accessing some youth development programs and evaluate the impact of these programs on different groups of youth • To understand who is represented in community consultations, engagement and advisory committees to inform and guide equity strategies. This helps to ensure that equity strategies are informed by diverse perspectives and lived experiences of inequities.
Solid Waste Management Services	Address or Postal Code Neighbourhood Age or Date of Birth Gender Income Disability Education level Employment status Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected in public surveys, public opinion polling, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public), stakeholders and equity-seeking groups 	To solicit feedback on waste programs and initiatives from the public and stakeholders

City of Toronto Division	Socio-demographic Data Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Collected	How Socio-demographic Data is Used
Toronto Paramedic Services	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Sex Disability Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data routinely collected as part of service user records Data collected through surveys of service users Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Services collects socio-demographics for hospitals to understand who is using their services and for service delivery The Community Paramedicine programs uses socio-demographics for service planning and resource allocation for new clinics and first aid training. They also use this data for evaluating programs and measuring their equity goals.
Toronto Public Health	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender and Sex Income Family/Household Type Disability Indigenous Identity Race Ethnicity Language Born in Canada Sexual Orientation Religion Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select data routinely collected as part of service user records Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	<p>Personal health information is collected under the Personal Health Information Protection Act for individual health records. The socio-demographic data is used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine eligibility for programs and services Understand what populations are using programs and services Service plan and allocate resources for future health clinics and programs Understand needs and gaps in programs and services Evaluate and measure programs in response to health and service inequities
Transportation Services	Address or Postal Code Age or Date of Birth Gender Income Family/Household Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected in public surveys, consultations and/or needs assessments with residents (general public) 	For planning transportation infrastructure such as bike lanes, crosswalks and other road safety necessities

Use of Existing Data by City Divisions

The survey and consultations identified 22 of 44 City divisions that reported using existing population-level data, such as the Census, surveys and administrative data sets from sources external to the City of Toronto, or City of Toronto program and service data⁴ to inform program planning and resource allocation. City staff and the public can access many of these data sets through existing City websites and online tools which are outlined in the Data for Equity Guidelines (Attachment 7). Table 2 outlines which types of existing data are used by each of the 22 identified divisions and how it is used.

Table 2: Use of Existing Data by City Divisions

22 of 44 Divisions identified as using existing data⁵

City of Toronto Division	Main Existing Data Sources Used (existing population-level and service data)					How Existing Data has been Used			
	Census	Tax filer	Other population-level data sets	Survey data	City of Toronto program and service data	To understand different socio-demographic groups' program and service needs	For service planning and resource allocation	To understand needs, gaps and improvement areas	To measure success in achieving equitable service access and impact
311 Toronto			✓	✓		✓		✓	
Children's Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
City Clerk's Office	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
City Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

⁴ City of Toronto program and service data may also be referred to as "administrative data".

⁵ Data summarized in this table was collected through a survey in 2018-19 and follow up consultations in 2018-20. While this process identified most of the significant activities across City divisions, it is possible that some additional divisional activities are not reflected or have since changed.

City of Toronto Division	Main Existing Data Sources Used (existing population-level and service data)					How Existing Data has been Used			
	Census	Tax filer	Other population-level data sets	Survey data	City of Toronto program and service data	To understand different socio-demographic groups' program and service needs	For service planning and resource allocation	To understand needs, gaps and improvement areas	To measure success in achieving equitable service access and impact
Economic Development and Culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employment and Social Services	✓		✓					✓	
Environment and Energy	✓			✓	✓				✓
Housing Secretariat	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipal Licensing and Standards	✓					✓			
Office of Emergency Management	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Parks, Forestry and Recreation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
People and Equity	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Policy, Planning, Finance and Administration	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓

City of Toronto Division	Main Existing Data Sources Used (existing population-level and service data)					How Existing Data has been Used			
	Census	Tax filer	Other population-level data sets	Survey data	City of Toronto program and service data	To understand different socio-demographic groups' program and service needs	For service planning and resource allocation	To understand needs, gaps and improvement areas	To measure success in achieving equitable service access and impact
Seniors Services and Long-Term Care	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social Development, Finance and Administration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Solid Waste Management Services	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Strategic Communications	✓			✓		✓	✓		
Technology Services	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Toronto Paramedic Services					✓	✓	✓	✓	
Toronto Public Health	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transportation Services	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Experiences in City of Toronto Services

Consultations and engagement with staff revealed that several City divisions have experience collecting socio-demographic data and using disaggregated data to advance equitable access and outcomes in their work. For example:

- Children's Services leads the Raising the Village data sharing and data visualization website. It provides interactive data, maps and dashboards on population-level child and family well-being data that can be disaggregated and used to assess inequities and inform local planning. It has been used by City services and community organizations to understand and address socio-economic inequities for children and families in service planning.
- City Planning created 16 [TOcore Avatars](#) to help guide the development of the new [Downtown Plan](#), a 25-year vision for the future of the city centre. The TOcore Avatars are a set of fictional people who represent a different mix of socio-demographic characteristics, interests and relationships in Toronto's downtown core. Socio-demographic data from the Census, Environics Analytics market research and City information on vulnerable populations was used to group people into demographic "segments". The TOcore Avatars highlight how race, gender, age and income are important factors in how a person experiences the city, and how the intersection of these factors matters to Torontonians' identities, priorities and service and public space needs. The Avatars were used in the Downtown Plan planning process to: 1) help City staff better understand and consider the diversity of Toronto residents in planning; 2) encourage residents to share their experiences as part of the [TOcore: Downtown Stories](#) public consultation process; 3) inform plans and policy priorities that reflect the diversity and many experiences of downtown; and 4) communicate with the public about which policies are being advanced and how particular policies are expected to impact different groups in how they live, work, learn and play. The TOcore Avatars have since been adapted by City Planning to support public engagement to inform land use planning in the Don Mills and Eglinton Avenue East area and several public consultations on affordable housing development.
- The Public Appointments Secretariat in the City Clerk's Office collects voluntary age, gender, Indigenous identity, race, disability and LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and Two-Spirit) identity data from all applicants to City boards, committees and tribunals. Data is used to assess and report publicly on the diversity of applicants and appointees, inform outreach to specific communities and to support decision-making about appointments.

- Economic Development and Culture (EDC) determined that a set of 10 socio-demographic data points will be included in EDC surveys to support its efforts in advancing equity and inclusion. The aim is to collect and use disaggregated data to identify inequities to be addressed and inform planning and operations to ensure EDC programs benefit all of Toronto's residents. The survey questions will be voluntary, and will be piloted in EDC within one year; data elements include age, gender, race, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation and other socio-demographics.
- Shelter, Support and Housing Administration conducts the Street Needs Assessment (SNA), a point-in-time count and survey of more than 2,000 people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The survey collects extensive socio-demographic data and the results provide information about the scope, profile, and needs of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto to guide service planning and policy and program development.
- As part of the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020, Social Development, Finance and Administration identified 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) that face the most inequitable outcomes in Toronto. The NIAs were developed using an equity index that includes needs across five domain areas: 1) Economic Opportunities; 2) Participation in Decision-Making; 3) Social Development; 4) Health Status; and 5) Physical Surroundings. Examples of specific population-level indicators within these domains included unemployment, voter turn-out, high school graduation rates, health outcomes and walkability scores. The NIAs are used by local community agencies and City divisions for policy decisions, program planning and resource allocation.
- Solid Waste Management Services conducted public and stakeholder consultations to develop the Single-Use & Takeaway Item Reduction Strategy (the Reduction Strategy). Solid Waste received feedback from over 40,000 respondents, collaborating with many City divisions and external stakeholders to engage with a wide and diverse audience including numerous equity-seeking groups, business operators, community organizations, and local residents. Socio-demographic data was collected through public opinion polling, making it possible to compare the perspectives of different socio-demographic groups, such as comparing levels of support for specific strategies between low income and high income residents.

- Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) collects data about clients' socio-demographics, social and economic barriers and needs and has used this data to evaluate, improve and develop programs. Front-line TESS staff participated in an Innovative Case Management Design Jam where they analyzed data on client barriers and applied their experience working with clients to design innovative pilot programs that were delivered in 2019 for specific populations and barriers. TESS collected extensive socio-demographic data when evaluating its Investing in Families program to understand differences in health, income and employability outcomes by socio-demographic group.
- Toronto Public Health (TPH) routinely reports on population-level health data by socio-demographic characteristics and small areas within Toronto through its Population Health Status Indicator Dashboard. Population-level data from the health care system, birth and death records and health surveys are reported by age, sex, income, racial group, education level, country of birth, and other socio-demographics where possible. TPH uses this information in strategic and program-level planning.
- Transportation Service's Cycling Network Plan engaged Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) through their Planning Tables to gain insight into important destinations and access points in each neighbourhood. Using an equity lens, Transportation staff also gathered input on barriers to cycling in each neighbourhood, and documented location-specific concerns for follow-up.

Toronto Public Health's Socio-demographic Data Collection Project

In 2010, Toronto Public Health participated alongside three downtown Toronto hospitals in the We Ask Because We Care research project. TPH pilot tested socio-demographic data collection in a program providing prenatal nutrition support to at-risk pregnant women and succeeded in achieving a 99% response rate. In 2013, TPH leadership decided to begin collecting socio-demographic data across TPH programs in alignment with Measuring Health Equity's eight standardized socio-demographic questions, which collected data on clients' preferred language, if born in Canada, time of arrival for immigrants, race/ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, income, housing type and age. In 2016, data collection took place in four TPH programs focused on diabetes, youth engagement, sexual health and parenting, and lasted from four to twelve months. The completion rate of socio-demographic data varied from two to 78%.

After 2016, TPH put the collection of comprehensive standardized socio-demographic data on hold due to information technology and privacy challenges, as well as a lack of staff resources to support implementation and data analysis. It was determined that expanded client socio-demographic data could not be incorporated into a new TPH program data system due to resource constraints and privacy concerns about storing expanded socio-demographic data alongside program data. These challenges resulted in anonymous socio-demographic client data that was stored separately from program data and which could not be used to analyze service access or outcomes. The project had limited centralized staff resources to support programs with implementation and in 2017, this support was phased out, resulting in programs being responsible for their own coordination, data collection, analysis and storage. To date, no TPH programs have continued to collect data on the eight standardized Measuring Health Equity socio-demographic questions, in part due to a lack of staff resources within programs to support this data collection, analysis and use.

This experience illustrates how technology systems and necessary privacy safeguards can pose significant challenges to collecting and using socio-demographic and disaggregated data. It also demonstrates that this work is complex, takes considerable time, and requires substantial ongoing resources and support to implement successfully and sustain.

Toronto Public Health's COVID-19 Case and Contact Management System

In mid-May 2020, Toronto Public Health began to ask questions about race, Indigenous identity, income and household size from people with a confirmed or probable diagnosis of COVID-19 as part of their case follow-up and data collection process. This decision responded to a high level of demand from research, policy, health and community leaders for analysis of COVID-19 outcomes by race and other socio-demographics.

Ideally, all of the core questions from the Data for Equity Strategy would have been added to the case interview, but the desire to collect additional data needed to be balanced with the need to complete investigations in a timely manner. The four priority questions were selected based on a review of emerging evidence from other jurisdictions and the influence of the proposed socio-demographic characteristics on other health outcomes.

Implementation was done under significant time and resource constraints due to the substantial COVID-19 related demands on the organization and its staff. Different parts of implementation including staff training, operations, question development and data analysis were assigned to different staff members but due to limited staff resources, it was not possible to assign a lead staff person to coordinate and follow through on all aspects of the implementation.

Some of the staff that were involved in planning and executing the data collection and training were redeployed from other areas of the organization and did not have the expertise that would have been welcome in an ideal situation. In addition, the questions were added to the COVID-19 case interview during a large expansion of the investigation team, which meant that data collection training was being delivered to new and inexperienced investigators. Some of the staff had never conducted interviews or collected data before, let alone in a health equity context, and this led to some challenges in how to apply the concepts and questions. The case interviews were already very long and challenging processes, and the investigators were adapting to new roles during the pandemic. In addition, the questions had not previously been piloted in a verbal interview due to time limitations and some modifications needed to be made to adapt to that context.

For the initial roll-out, substantial support was required from staff developing the Data for Equity Strategy and Guidelines to assist with data collection questions, information and scripts for staff, training materials and planning for the use of the data.

As of mid-August 2020, about 25% of people identified as having COVID-19 since the socio-demographic questions had been added were not asked the questions, leading to a high percent of missing data. The percent who selected that they prefer not to answer was also high for some questions. Six percent (6%) of COVID-19 cases selected that they prefer not to provide their racial group. For the income question, 33% of cases either selected that they prefer not to answer (18%) or did not know (15%) their household income. Combined with those not being asked the income question (26%), as of mid-August about 40% of COVID-19 cases identified after the questions were added had income data that could be analyzed.

Reasons socio-demographic data were not collected from all clients include onboarding of new case and contact management staff, difficulty communicating with some clients, difficulty establishing a relationship with some clients in order to ask these questions, and people who were very ill not being able to talk for long periods of time. Ongoing staff training and support could help increase the response rate and quality of the data, but without a lead staff person to maintain staff engagement in asking the questions and understanding the data, this is difficult to achieve.

Findings from this data have shown that COVID-19 rates are higher for people living in lower income households and racialized groups. For COVID-19 cases in Toronto with valid socio-demographic data up to August 16 2020, half (50%)

were among people living in lower income households⁶, compared to 30% of the Toronto population who lived in lower income households in 2016. This data also showed that 83% of COVID-19 cases and 71% of COVID-19 hospitalizations were among people who identified with a racialized group⁷, compared to 52% of the Toronto population who identify as racialized. Specifically, people who identify as Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian, Black, Latin American, South Asian or Indo-Caribbean, and Southeast Asian are over-represented in Toronto's COVID-19 cases⁸

There is a high level of public interest in this data and a need to ensure that it is reported in ways that are sensitive and supportive of affected communities rather than stigmatizing. TPH has been engaging with affected communities to gain insights into why certain communities are at higher risk (for example types of employment, transportation, and crowded housing), what responses are needed, and how best to interpret and report this data without stigmatizing communities. This data has been used to identify neighbourhoods with high concentrations of cases and risk, to recommend locations for mobile and pop-up testing sites in higher-risk areas, and to suggest priority schools needing smaller class sizes to decrease risk.

The TPH COVID-19 case data is a timely example of mobilizing to collect additional socio-demographic data, analyzing the data to identify inequities, and applying these findings to rapidly respond to these inequities. This experience demonstrates the importance of having guidelines, training and education materials and other resources available, along with centralized staff who can support implementation. It highlights the importance of community engagement in the planning, implementation, analysis and use of data. It also illustrates some important limitations in how disaggregated data can be used. Limitations to the socio-demographic data for COVID-19 cases include substantial missing or unusable

⁶ This analysis excludes people who were not asked about their income (26%), those who selected that they prefer not to answer (18%) and those who reported they didn't know their household income (15%). 'Lower income' was roughly calculated using income ranges and household size.

⁷ This analysis excludes people who were not asked about their race (23%) and those who selected that they prefer not to answer (6%).

⁸ Toronto Public Health. 2020. COVID-19: [Status of Cases in Toronto – Ethno-Racial Group, Income & COVID-19 Infection](#).

income and race data, limited housing data, and inconsistent or incomplete occupation data⁹. Equity-related findings must be interpreted with caution due to the sizeable number of COVID-19 cases with missing socio-demographic data. Data quality challenges and small data numbers also limit the analysis that can be done to understand how factors like income, housing and occupation interact, which would provide a better understanding of who is at risk. Finally, even if data quality were improved and it was possible to do additional analysis of intersecting factors, these analyses can only produce broad generalizations. The data only provide part of the story. It is still necessary to engage with communities to understand why some communities are at higher risk and what response is needed.

Challenges and Needs in Collecting and Using Socio-demographic and Disaggregated Data

The survey and consultations with City divisions identified existing challenges and the need for support in collecting and using socio-demographic and disaggregated data. Consultations with City staff identified that some City divisions have substantial resources and capacity to appropriately collect, store, analyze and use socio-demographic and disaggregated data, while others do not. Staff identified a need for central City-wide supports to help divisions collect socio-demographic data and use disaggregated data to promote equity within their divisions and across the City.

Thirty-one (31) of 40 City divisions who responded to the Equity, Diversity and Human Rights Divisional Achievements Survey (2017-18) identified barriers preventing them from collecting socio-demographic data to a further extent and thirty-one (31) reported barriers to using pre-existing data sources. The most common barriers cited were a lack of staff and/or financial resources, concerns about privacy, challenges with information technology and concerns about the sensitivity of socio-demographic data.

⁹ Some data on contacts living in the cases' households and case occupation were already being collected as part of COVID-19 case and contact management before the addition of race, Indigenous identity and income.