

Update on Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures and Community Mobilization for Immunization

Date: March 16, 2021

To: Executive Committee

From: Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to Council direction, HL23.1 in November 2020, to the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, to provide a progress report to the Executive Committee in the first quarter of 2021 on the success of the TO Supports Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures program and funding levels received from other governments to supports its delivery.

Launched in late November, the targeted and enhanced equity measures focused on working with strategic partners to expand COVID-19 testing sites, intensify resident education and engagement, provide necessary wrap around supports, and advocate for those who test positive for COVID-19 and are unable to work due to mandatory isolation. Based on Public Health data, this work prioritizes equity-deserving communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 in northwest and northeast Toronto, and the Thorncliffe neighbourhood.

Between the roll out of the Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures on December 1, 2020 and March 11, 2021, 135,979 residents have been engaged and served, including: 22,353 seniors; 75,549 adults between the ages 30 and 64; 20,521 young people between the ages of 15 to 29; and 20,556 children. Among many supports, the program ensured:

- A steady increase in testing clinics: such as the 383 pop-up clinics in community centres;
- Wellness checks, peer supports, counselling and other formal and informal mental supports to 26,138 residents;
- Culturally-relevant and fresh food options, food hampers and meal delivery to 56,465 residents; and
- Emergency income support to 71 residents who are otherwise ineligible for existing federal and provincial benefits.

This report also responds to Council direction, HL24.1 in December 2020, requesting Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration work to support community groups and other stakeholders to build knowledge and support for the City's COVID-19 immunization plan. The Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan builds on the City's Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures by also leveraging community expertise and partnerships to facilitate and promote vaccine uptake across all of Toronto. The plan includes both a place-based approach to support residents in all 140 neighbourhoods of the city and a population-specific approach to reach specific communities hardest hit by the pandemic with the least structural access. For example, the work of the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity, for example, established as a targeted equity measure to support Black Torontonians, has created a 16-25% reduction in hesitancy to COVID-19 vaccination after town hall meetings throughout February and early March 2021.

The work of the Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan is a key part of the City's efforts to ensure every resident in every corner of Toronto can access a COVID-19 vaccine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services recommends that:

1. Executive Committee receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures

Working with the Mayor's Office, City staff requested the Government of Canada to provide funding for the City's Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures, starting with up to \$5M for supports in northwest and northeast Toronto and for scaling up as necessary. Staff have been implementing the original scope of work costing \$5M but have not added additional program elements. While discussions continue with the Government of Canada about the City's funding needs for targeted equity measures, no specific federal funding has been approved to date.

Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan

The Provincial Government has provided assurances that the City will be reimbursed Toronto Public Health costs associated with the City's vaccine roll out plan. The Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan is a key part of the City's COVID-19 Vaccination Program. It leverages community expertise and partnerships to facilitate and promote vaccine uptake across Toronto. A firm funding commitment from the provincial government is being sought. The table below outlines the program components of the City's \$10M vaccine roll out plan.

Program Components	2021 Allocation
Grants/Assistance to Community Partners	\$8,000,000
Staffing (10 Positions)	\$1,200,000
Public Education Campaigns and Strategy Development	\$800,000
Total	\$10,000,000

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

COVID-19 has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing, systemic health inequities related to poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination. The application of an equity lens to the COVID-19 pandemic clearly reveals that individuals and families below the poverty line as well as Indigenous, Black, racialized and newcomer communities and persons with disabilities, are particularly affected. Unequal access to the social determinants of health has created the conditions for COVID-19 to disproportionately impact communities with any and/or all of these features. These communities experience high COVID-19 positivity rates and case counts as well as higher rates of hospitalization.

The TO Supports Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures and the Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan are working to mitigate the risks and health harms caused by COVID-19 to both physical and mental health. The Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures leverage the expertise of trusted community agencies who are locally rooted in neighbourhoods with the highest case counts and lowest testing rates to better serve individuals and families. Similarly, the Community Mobilization Plan is engaging community ambassadors and community agencies to help build confidence in the vaccines among communities for whom trustworthiness on the part of vaccine providers are an immediate issue. This initiative is creating infrastructure to ensure vaccine rollout is met with willing and well informed residents keen to prevent the spread of the disease among family members and friends.

DECISION HISTORY

On December 16, 2020, City Council approved the TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan, including targeted and enhanced targeted and enhanced equity measures that the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, and partners are taking to support Torontonians disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL24.1>

On December 16, 2020, City Council requested the Provincial Government to provide resources and funding to support the community engagement plan being prepared by Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration to support Equity Measures and Immunization Mobilization

community groups and other stakeholders to build knowledge and support for the COVID-19 immunization plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL24.2>

At its meeting on November 25 and 26, 2020, City Council authorized the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to implement targeted COVID-19 Community Education and Engagement Equity Measures in vulnerable communities with high infection rates and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 through partnerships agreements with community agencies, and to seek and flow up to \$5 million in intergovernmental funding to those partners for the provision of targeted outreach, case management for residents, food access supports, mental health supports and the provision of masks for the next five months.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL23.1>

COMMENTS

Achieving Progress through Targeted and Enhanced Equity Measures

In March 2020, the City, in coordination with Toronto Public Health and community-based partners, began taking action to support vulnerable residents, families and communities under its guiding framework, TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan. As new information and new public health conditions have emerged, this work has evolved and improved. In late November, the TO Supports Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures were launched in response to Public Health data demonstrating that neighbourhoods in the northwest, northeast and Thorncliffe (East York/Don Valley) were experiencing significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection and high degrees of testing "hesitancy".

COVID-19 has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing, systemic health inequities related to poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Unequal access to the social determinants of health has created the conditions for COVID-19 to disproportionately impact Torontonians who are Indigenous, Black, racialized or newcomers, who are precariously employed or live on a low income, who may experience challenges taking time off from work when ill and who may be living in housing situations where it is more difficult to isolate from others. The targeted and enhanced equity measures prioritized equity-deserving communities disproportionately impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and the consequences of lockdown measures to contain the spread.

Social Development, Finance and Administration, Toronto Public Health, and the City's Emergency Operations Centre, begun working with strategic partners to:

- expand testing sites
- intensify education and engagement
- provide necessary wrap around support, and
- advocate for those who test positive for COVID-19 and are unable to work due to mandatory isolation.

Between the roll out of the Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures on December 1, 2020 and March 11, 2021, 135,979 residents have been engaged and served, including: 22,353 seniors; 75,549 adults between the ages 30 and 64; 20,521 young people between the ages of 15 to 29; and 20,556 children.

The following section highlights some of the key deliverables of the targeted and enhanced equity work.

A Steady Increase in Testing Clinics

The City has been working directly with the Local Health Integration Networks, Ontario Health, hospitals and community health providers to improve access to testing in these neighbourhoods. By supporting access to City facilities and resources, testing opportunities have been brought closer to where people live.

Between October 2020 and March 11, 2021, the targeted measures have secured a steady increase in testing clinics.

- 63,017 residents provided with information about COVID-19 assessment centres and pop up testing sites through community ambassadors and community partners
- 540 pop-up testing clinics have been booked in 27 unique Parks, Forestry and Recreation sites until May 31st. 113 testing dates are planned for March
- 100 community pop-up testing clinics supported by Toronto Paramedic Services, including mobile pop-up clinics in reconfigured TTC buses that is bringing testing capacity to vulnerable or isolated residents
- 48 testing clinics at 17 Toronto Community Housing buildings including mobile, onsite and door-to-door testing campaigns to ensure easy, and supportive access for vulnerable or isolated tenants
- 11,522 tests conducted in community locations through community health centre partners
- The launch of an Indigenous Testing Pilot on March 17th with Native Child and Family Services with City support.

More Informed and Engaged Residents

The City has relied on a longstanding interdependent relationship with a strong community-based not-for-profit sector to meet residents' needs to effectively respond to COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, community partners and the City working together, have demonstrated powerful creative and collaborative capacity to respond to the needs of vulnerable individuals, families and communities. In this tradition, Social Development, Finance and Administration Division commissioned 12 strategic community organizations, selected through the Community Coordination Clusters, as partners to help inform and deliver the targeted and enhanced equity measures. The community partners are geographically anchored, and trusted among Indigenous, Black, racialized and newcomer communities. The strategic community partners are listed in the table below.

COMMUNITIES	AGENCY
Black Creek/Humber Summit	Black Creek Community HC
	Delta Family Resource Centre
North Etobicoke	Rexdale Community Health Centre
York/Weston/Pelham	Unison Health and Community Services
	Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre
East York/Don Valley	Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
North Scarborough	TAIBU Community Health Centre
South Scarborough	Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities
Population Specific	Sistering
	FCJ Refugee Centre
	Black Health Alliance

In addition to the 12 ongoing strategic partners, another 239 organizations and 333 Community Ambassadors have been engaged in this work to date, dramatically expanding and deepening the reach and effectiveness of the City's Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures.

The City has also provided funding support to Indigenous organizations to provide Indigenous-specific COVID-19 testing and contract tracing.

Targeted measures to intensify community outreach, education, and engagement with residents in high case count communities, have enabled greater COVID literacy, referral and resident access to services. In target communities, a greater portion of residents are more informed and engaged.

- Redesign, translation and distribution of resources into up to 30 languages to newcomers, Indigenous and Black Community Cluster Tables, health system partners and community members
- 49,181 residents provided with information on COVID-19 through community ambassadors and community partners
- 708 residents called the isolation centre hotline
- 5,201 residents referred for case management through community partners.

More Access to Necessary Wrap Around Supports

The need to engage and support Toronto's most vulnerable residents have never been greater than during this current pandemic. Through community case managers, community ambassadors and agency staff, the targeted measures have increased the Equity Measures and Immunization Mobilization

ability of individuals and families to receive necessary wrap around supports to cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, often compounded by longstanding structural inequity.

- 56,456 residents received access to food, including culturally relevant and fresh food options, food hampers and meal delivery services through community food partnerships
- 31,991 residents supported with wellness checks, peer supports, counselling and other formal and informal mental supports, plus increased capacity for Indigenous-specific support through targeted funding
- 13,866 residents received family/household supports including prescription delivery, delivery of hygiene and personal care items, and remote learning
- 543 residents received support to isolate at the Toronto Public Health Voluntary Isolation Centre and 974 COVID-positive Torontonians isolated at the COVID-19 Recovery and Isolation Centre through Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
- 5,340 residents provided access to access federal and provincial financial supports.

More Support from Other Governments

Support for residents who test positive and are unable to work due to mandatory isolation is important for vulnerable residents. Some low income Torontonians, including newcomers, cannot financially afford to make COVID-19 related testing and self-isolation decisions because they run the risk of losing their job or their income. The City's targeted measures included advocacy to other orders of government to temporarily suspend evictions; ensure adequate paid sick days and income supports for those who need to isolate but cannot afford to do so and for workers and businesses affected by public health restrictions; and to provide emergency income assistance for those ineligible for current COVID income supports. Progress has been made in increasing support from other governments.

- Since late January 2021, 71 Torontonians who are otherwise ineligible for existing federal and provincial benefits, have now received emergency income support to date, including 52 who tested COVID-positive but all requiring isolation.
- In January 2021, the Government of Ontario announced an order to temporarily pause the enforcement of residential evictions to ensure that people are not forced to leave their homes while the provincial declaration of emergency is in effect.

The Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine

The Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity was created in December 2020 as part of the City's response to data that continued to show that the highest rates of COVID-19 cases and vaccine hesitancy were among Black Torontonians of African and Caribbean origins. The Task Force, a partnership with the TAIBU Community Health Centre, includes many of Canada's top Black scientists involved in key aspects of

vaccine development, regulation and distribution, and Black public health, to address Black community concerns and issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, testing and vaccines. The Task Force was one of the first community partnership efforts to implement the final Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measure -- measures to prepare for immunization.

The Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity launched its work with a city-wide radio town hall on 98.7 FM on January 31, 2021, and then held 5 virtual town hall meetings through February and March involving more than 1,500 people to respond to wide-ranging questions about COVID-19 and the various vaccines. Both the ethnic and mainstream media covered their efforts to dispel myths and misinformation, and the province's Anti-Racism Directorate has taken up their messaging. Pre- and post-testing conducted at the town hall meetings have registered a 16-25% reduction in hesitancy to COVID-19 vaccination after the Task Force's town hall meetings. The Task Force is now seen as a best practice and is being replicated to build vaccine confidence in other communities.

To better support front-line City workers in building vaccine confidence, 3 town halls are also taking place in the latter half of March in Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; Children Services; and Senior Services and Long Term Care.

The Task Force, will review the major concerns and issues around COVID-19 testing and levels of vaccine acceptance, and develop public health recommendations to effectively address Black community concerns in a final report to the City by the end April 2021. Since emergency supports provided through the Targeted COVID-10 Equity Measures need to happen within the context of addressing structural inequity in the longer-term, the Task Force's report and other community contributions will help inform efforts underway between the City, community and provincial partners to develop a Black Health Plan that builds on commitments in the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan

Social Development, Finance and Administration, in coordination with Toronto Public Health and Strategic Communications, is leading the development and implementation of the City's Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan. The plan takes a comprehensive place-based approach and population-specific approach to ensure that every resident in every corner of Toronto can access a COVID-19 vaccine.

The Government of Canada is responsible for obtaining the supply of COVID-19 vaccines; the Province has responsibility for distributing the vaccines and identifying priority groups established under the Province's framework; and Toronto is responsible for supporting the administration of the vaccine in accordance with provincial prioritization and scheduling frameworks as vaccines are provided by the Province.

In recognition of the important role community organizations can play in building vaccine confidence in residents, on March 10th, the City released a call for proposals for \$5.5 million in funding to Toronto's community services sector who will act as local lead agencies for vaccination efforts across Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. This campaign is

expected to play a significant role in Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the provincial vaccine process as vaccine supply increases. Through the call for proposals, the City is asking for an expression of interest from agencies with capacity and readiness to undertake vaccine engagement work. Engagement lead agencies selected through the expression of interest will work collaboratively with the City and behavioural scientists to further develop coordinated engagement plans and address gaps in reaching communities hardest hit by COVID-19 and its variants. Plans will include door-to-door community vaccine outreach, multilingual communications to targeted populations and facilitating access vaccine clinics. The call for proposals is also tied to the recruitment of 280 community ambassadors to engage residents.

The Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan is founded on the social determinants of health such as race, income and food security, housing and disability, to drive targeted equity actions for the City's COVID-19 vaccine rollout. The plan builds on the City's work with community partners to deliver the TO Supports Targeted COVID-19 Equity Measures. In addition to working to support all Toronto residents to understand and access a COVID-19 vaccine, the plan also embraces a targeted universalism approach where efforts are targeted for populations and communities most impacted by the pandemic but with the least structural access to mitigate, in order to achieve the universal goal. This approach includes enhanced supports to Toronto residents who are Indigenous, Black, South Asian, Latin American/Hispanic/Latinx; People with Disabilities; Seniors; Torontonians experiencing homelessness; and those who are Undocumented.

In addition to the Black Science Task Force, other population-specific planning and work is already underway to build vaccine confidence. For example, the City is dedicating funding of \$1M for Indigenous communities to self-determine their approach to community engagement and vaccine mobilization in their communities. The table below provides a more detailed status update.

Priority Populations	Status Update
Indigenous Communities	COVID-19 Immunization Funding Support of \$500,000 being provided to support Indigenous communities \$1M for community engagement and mobilization
Black Communities	Conversations underway with community partners on how to build on the work of the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity using other community-specific assets like barbershops
South Asian Communities	Town Halls under way helping to achieve a 20% reduction in COVID positive rates Engagement with Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) on strategy to support city-wide engagement efforts and advise community partners who will engage with South Asian populations in their Clusters Collaborating on tailored communications Resources earmarked for focused outreach

Priority Populations	Status Update
Seniors	Information sessions with senior-serving organizations underway Conversations with TTC, Uber, Toronto Ride, LHINs, and potential ask to taxi companies to support transportation needs to vaccine clinics Information sessions for staff of senior-serving organization Local Ontario Health teams are planning mobile clinics that will be assisting with vaccinating seniors who have mobility issues In the planning for vaccinating at buildings with high concentrations of seniors Exploring additional criteria (beyond age) for prioritizing which sites are vaccinated first
Latin American/ Hispanic/ Latinx	Discussions with community agencies are starting A working group is being formed
People with Disabilities	Creating Task Force on Disability including organization representatives, researchers, physicians, and community leaders Co-host town halls for people with disabilities Developing training for caregivers for people with developmental disabilities Information session for care givers of seniors and people with disability Toronto Public Health providing Vaccine Confidence webinar for caregivers for people with developmental disabilities Outreach and engagement underway. Resources earmarked for organizations to act as advisors to community partners who will engage with people with disabilities
Residents Who Are Undocumented	Coordination efforts between Toronto Public Health, the City's Newcomer Office and community partners on a strategy for ensuring undocumented Torontonians who are undocumented have access to vaccines at City-operated and partner immunization clinics
People who are Homeless	Accelerating Ambassador Training for peer workers in Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Timelines

The Community Immunization Engagement and Mobilization Plan is in its second month of activation and is on track. The chart below lays out the 3 phases of the Plan's work and the key engagement and mobilization activity in each phase.

February to March 2021	Finalize Engagement Framework Seek input from sector organizations Finalize engagement framework and call for proposals Launch call for proposals
April 2021	Secure Community Partners Finalize and approve Engagement Partner organizations from Community Clusters Provide training and co-develop engagement strategy led by behavioural scientists & communication professionals

February to March 2021	Finalize Engagement Framework Seek input from sector organizations Finalize engagement framework and call for proposals Launch call for proposals
May 2021 Onward	Implementation Engage & Mobilize & Amplify Training 140 community organizations 280 Resident Ambassadors City-wide communications campaigns

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SIGNATURE

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