

2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan Mid-Term Status

Date: May 17, 2021

To: Executive Committee

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The ways in which COVID-19 has impacted Torontonians is a reflection of how poverty impacts Torontonians. Inadequate and unaffordable housing prevents many residents from being able to follow physical distancing protocols. The shutdown of many necessary services and supports, many of which are operated by the City and its partners, means that the vulnerabilities that residents are experiencing due to poverty are exacerbated further. A deficit of quality jobs and livable incomes places residents in economic precarity and reliant on low-wage, precarious work, roles which have been deemed essential in many cases. To travel to these jobs, these residents are disproportionately dependent on a public transit system that is more reliant on fare revenue than other systems making transit more unaffordable. The high cost of living in Toronto also includes the high cost of food, placing many in danger of going hungry. And much of this is due to systemic barriers that are increasingly gendered, racialized and geographically concentrated that places certain communities, including Indigenous and Black residents and people with disabilities, in higher social and economic precarity than others.

This dynamic illustrates the importance of the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy in achieving its broader COVID-19 recovery and rebuild goals. This report outlines the City's progress to date in implementing the current 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan, and highlights the ways in which staff are adjusting and prioritizing next steps to advance both the objectives of poverty reduction and equitable, inclusive recovery and rebuilding. The report also makes specific recommendations to improve supports for residents during and after the current public health emergency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council receive the 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan Status Update, outlined in Attachment 1, for information.

2. City Council request the Medical Officer of Health transfer responsibility of the Toronto Food Strategy to Social Development, Finance and Administration Division and direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to report to Economic and Community Development Committee in the first quarter of 2022 on actions required to fully incorporate the City's food security objectives into the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report.

The 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan is organized into activities that can be implemented within existing resources (Category A), activities that are planned but subject to budget approval (Category B), and developmental activities for which the financial impact is unknown (Category C). Requests for any additional resources required to implement specific activities in Category B and C will be identified in future reports to City Council as required and submitted to the City's annual budgeting process to be considered alongside other City priorities.

Fair Pass is a demand driven program. As such, COVID-19 has significantly impacted expenditures. With all non-essential places ordered to close and only critical travel recommended, ridership has consistently been low among Fair Pass cardholders. This has resulted in a net under-spending in the Fair Pass Program for 2020 and so far in 2021. Ridership modelling for 2021 is currently underway and it is expected that ridership will continue to be impacted for the remainder of the year when compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. Consideration will be given to reinvesting any anticipated demand based underspending to maximize the number of residents receiving the benefit, including changes required to extend eligibility to residents in receipt of housing supports, will be made within the existing program budget, as previously directed by Council.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

Poverty Reduction Strategy

At its meeting on November 3, 2015, City Council unanimously adopted "TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy," the City of Toronto's 20-year strategic plan to address poverty, which includes 17 recommendations to address housing stability, service access, transit equity, food access, quality jobs and livable incomes and systemic change.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX9.5>)

At its meeting on March 7, 2019, City Council adopted "2019 Capital and Operating Budgets," which included the 2021 Operating Budget for the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy and requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to consider a number of recommendations in the development of the

Poverty Reduction Strategy 2.0.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX2.5>)

At its meeting on October 29, 2019, City Council adopted "Relationships with Toronto's Community-based Not-for-Profit Sector: 2018-2019 Update", which included a commitment to policies and partnerships to improve access to community space.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC8.4>)

At its meeting on November 26, 2019, City Council unanimously adopted, with amendments, "Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy - 2019-2022 Action Plan," as the City of Toronto's strategic poverty reduction priorities for this term of City Council.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX10.1>)

At its meeting on February 18, 2021, City Council adopted "2021 Capital and Operating Budgets," which included the 2019 Operating Budget for the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EX21.2>)

Food Access

At its meeting on June 16, 2008, the Board of Health approved a recommendation from the Medical Officer of Health to spearhead a Toronto Food Strategy. At its meeting of February 16, 2010, the Board of Health approved a report from the Medical Officer of Health as a basis for broad community stakeholder consultation and engagement on the Food Strategy. On June 1, 2010, the Board received an update, including the results of consultation and engagement and endorsed the actions proposed in the "Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto" report.

At its meeting on June 1, 2010, the Board of Health adopted "Toronto Food Strategy: Cultivating Food Connections" which requested all City divisions, agencies, boards and commissions to identify and implement initiatives that support a healthy and sustainable food system.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.HL31.1>)

At its meeting on December 5, 2017, City Council unanimously approved the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, which outlined 22 recommendations and 80 actions. Among these recommendations included Action 8 which provided direction to improve food access in the Black community.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX29.11>)

At its meeting on July 16, 2018, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to report back to the Board of Health in 2019 on developing measurement tools to help assess progress and evaluate areas requiring strategic community and City of Toronto supports related to sustainable food systems.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL28.4>)

At its meeting on November 26, 2019, City Council unanimously adopted "Food Systems Transformation and Toronto Food Strategy - 2019 Update" which directed staff to develop a plan to implement the goals of the 2015 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration, and the Cool Food Pledge.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.HL10.2>)

At its meeting on June 8, 2020, the Board of Health approved direction to address anti-Black racism as a public health crisis and affirmed its commitment to addressing social determinants of health, including the reprioritization of the City of Toronto's resources during the 2021 Budget process, and COVID-19 recovery planning to address health incomes impacted by anti-Black racism.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL17.9>)

At its meeting on November 25, 2020, City Council adopted the Confronting Anti-Black Racism year two update, which identified the Black Food Sovereignty Plan as part of its year three work plan priorities to build increased community capacity and resilience in Toronto's Black communities.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC17.3>)

Transportation Equity

At its meeting on December 13, 2016, City Council adopted "Fair Pass: Transit Fare Equity Program for Low-Income Torontonians." This established the Fair Pass Program providing a transit discount for eligible residents living below the Low Income Measure + 15% with specific direction on eligibility requirements

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX20.10>)

At its meeting on November 25, 2020, City Council adopted "Fair Pass Program - 2020 Update" which approved the COVID-19 service resumption strategy for the Fair Pass Program and directed staff to report back on funding options for the full implementation of the Fair Pass Program.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC17.2>)

COMMENTS

In November 2019, City Council adopted the 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan. This Action Plan is the second of five plans intended to implement the City's long-term strategy over twenty years to address immediate needs, create pathways to prosperity, and drive systemic change for residents living in poverty in Toronto.

The updates in this report are organized along the six themes of the Poverty Reduction Strategy: housing stability, service access, transportation equity, food access, quality jobs and liveable incomes and systemic change.

Poverty in Toronto

Canada's official poverty threshold, as defined by the Federal government is the Market Basket Measure. This threshold is based on the cost of a basket of goods and services that are required to meet basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living and is calculated by Statistics Canada.

For 2019 the threshold for the Toronto region (Census Metropolitan Area) was calculated to be \$49,304 for a family of four. This threshold is the third highest in the country, after Vancouver and Calgary.

Nationally, Statistics Canada reports that Canada's official poverty rate was 10.1% in 2019, down 0.9 percent. Preliminary Statistics Canada analysis from 2020 suggests that COVID-related pandemic benefits may have offset the impacts on income for many families. However, poverty in the city of Toronto is consistently more prevalent than elsewhere in the country, with a rate of poverty that is roughly 1.8 times higher than the national rate according to the 2017 Canadian Income Survey, with one in five Torontonians below Canada's official poverty line.

The disproportionate impact from COVID-19 on particular communities in Toronto also means that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office expects that poverty may have grown among communities that experience systemic social and economic exclusion. These include Indigenous, Black, racialized and other equity-denied communities, such as women and people with disabilities, many of whom are essential workers.

With Statistics Canada currently conducting the 2021 Census, a precise update on the rates of poverty in Toronto will be forthcoming as soon as Statistics Canada begins releasing data. This is currently scheduled to occur in mid-2022.

Current Implementation Status

The 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan currently contains 89 activities to be completed by the end of 2022. Currently 23 activities have been completed or reassessed (e.g. determined to be duplicative and merged with other activities) and 48 activities are in progress. 18 activities are deferred to future years, primarily due to COVID-19 related disruptions.

Overall, the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the Action Plan has been significant. Progress on almost half of all the activities in the current work plan were affected by COVID-19. Work on implementing the strategy was suspended early in 2020, when most activities were in the planning stages. At that time, the City was focussed on delivering emergency responses and mitigating the worst impacts of COVID-19 and poverty being experienced by residents. Activities that are reliant on access to physical spaces or direct contact with residents were and continue to be affected.

However, COVID-19 has also demonstrated the capacity of the system to adjust quickly and has only served to highlight how poverty reduction is critical for the City to recover and rebuild from the pandemic.

Over the remainder of this Action Plan, the Poverty Reduction Strategy will identify and prioritize activities that advance the City's Recovery and Rebuild Action Plan. This includes:

- Advancing supports and creating models of action that contribute to inclusive economic recovery
- Creating resilience in vital community infrastructure such as the development of neighbourhood food hubs
- Strengthening connections with residents who have been socially isolated by re-establishing and creating new continuous engagement structures that include systemically excluded communities in decision-making

Housing Stability

Actions related to housing are being carried out through the City of Toronto's HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan ("HousingTO Plan"), adopted by Council on December 17, 2019. The HousingTO Plan sets out 13 key strategic directions and 76 actions to guide the City's efforts over the next 10 years. These actions are primarily aimed at eliminating chronic homelessness, increasing the supply of new affordable housing and improving housing stability for households in core housing need, particularly Indigenous communities, women and female-led households, seniors and Black and racialized communities. Updates on implementation of the HousingTO Plan are scheduled to be provided in a dedicated report to the Planning and Housing Committee, as part of an annual update on the Plan.

While the HousingTO Plan was approved prior to the onset of COVID-19 in response to the challenging housing and homelessness situation facing residents across the city, the pandemic has quickly amplified these challenges. In addition, it has caused considerable added strain on the emergency shelter system largely due to requirements around physical distancing and isolation.

In April 2020, in response to the health emergency impacting the well-being of residents in the city, and the urgent need to find safe and secure accommodation for the City's homeless population, City Council requested staff to find ways to expedite the delivery of modular supportive housing. Modular housing which is pre-fabricated in a factory environment, is an efficient and cost-effective way to deliver good quality, affordable homes. When coupled with wraparound support services, these homes provide a dignified response to chronic homelessness while at the same time, reducing the cost (and use of) of emergency services such as hospitals, shelters and jails.

Between December 2020 and January 2021, the City delivered a total of 100 modular homes at 11 Macey Ave. and 321 Dovercourt Rd. These modular homes, combined with wraparound support services and 24/7 onsite staffing, are dedicated to help people exit chronic homelessness and maintain housing stability. In addition to these sites, the City currently has four modular housing projects underway which will create approximately 290 supportive homes by March 2021.

Modular housing is just one way that the City is increasing the supply of supportive housing. In February 2021, 120 new homes with support services were opened at 389 Church St. This formerly underutilized building was modernized to create permanent, self-contained units dedicated to women experiencing homelessness. The City also recently purchased two properties at 877 Yonge St. and 222 Spadina Ave. that will create an additional 334 homes with support services by the end of 2021. These homes will be prioritized for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

In total, in partnership with federal and provincial governments, and with the support of the non-profit and private sectors, the City is actively working to deliver 1,248 supportive homes over the next 12 months, including 798 net new affordable rental homes under the HousingTO Plan.

Service Access

COVID-19 has had significant operational impact on the City's service access commitments. In many cases, the delivery of City and community-based supports have had to be modified to be delivered in compliance with public health guidelines. To continue to support Torontonians during the pandemic, new programs and supports have been rapidly implemented that are helping to mitigate the impact that COVID-19 has had on disproportionately affected residents. For example:

- Children's Services is providing emergency child care services across the City to essential workers at no cost, and is currently in the third round of planning and delivery of this service.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation provided inclusive access to safe community recreation such as SwimTO, CampTO, park activation programs, and access to free leisure skating outdoors all winter. These programs address the needs of children, youth and families during the pandemic with a particular focus in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Collectively these community recreation programs provided residents access to 113,360 program hours in SwimTO, 18,564 registration received in CampTO, and a combined 1,570,815 individuals participating in in the Parks Animation and Outdoor Leisure skating, many of whom would have no other alternatives, with community recreation programming.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation provided inclusive access to safe community recreation such as SwimTO, CampTO, park activation programs, and access to free leisure skating outdoors all winter. These programs address the needs of children, youth and families during the pandemic with a particular focus in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Collectively these community recreation programs provided thousands of residents, many of whom would have no other alternatives, with community recreation programming.
- In addition to providing facilities and experiences through the CampTO program, Economic Development and Culture is providing opportunities for youth to access and engage with City-run museums while developing employment skills at no charge in a virtual setting. In 2020, 445 youth were engaged at the Scarborough Museum and other museums.
- Toronto Public Library distributed internet connectivity kits to residents via local community organizations to provide free Internet access to Torontonians in most urgent need of home internet access. Over 585 kits have been distributed to date.
- Over 400 community agencies have been engaged as part of the Community Coordination Plan to better address the issues faced by community organizations in providing emergency COVID-19 supports in real-time.
- In partnership with 211, over 14,000 residents have been referred to mental health supports, with over 116,000 mental health contact sessions between April 27, 2020 and February 26, 2021.
- The City's Application and Support Centre took part in the Virtual Caseworker Pilot Project where 103 applications for social assistance benefits, and 252 identification checks were completed. The goal of this project was to enhance client service access, experience and to reduce risk. The pilot was so successful with clients and staff that the Application and Support Centre continues to offer virtual applications and identification checks with residents daily.

Advancing Seamless Service Delivery

Despite the interruptions created by the pandemic, City staff have endeavoured to advance initiatives that improve access to services for those living in poverty, including continuing the implementation of Human Service Integration. The advancement of Human Service Integration, a key component of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, is improving the client experience for residents living in poverty by integrating and simplifying access to and delivery of the City's three main income support programs: social assistance (Ontario Works), Child Care Fee subsidies, and Rent Geared to Income and other housing benefits.

Progress has been made to advance this work. The new Application and Support Centre, operated by the Human Service Integration Office was launched in late 2019 and saw the first year of operation in 2020 in its new divisional home, Social Development, Finance and Administration. In addition to sustaining and improving the access and intake functions of services already in place at the start of the year, the Application and Support Centre has also supported the implementation of new programs, and transformation of existing processes disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic response. This includes, but is not limited to, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) with Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Welcome Policy with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and the Fair Pass Transit Discount Program with Toronto Employment and Social Services, Children's Services and Social Development, Finance and Administration. The Application and Support Centre also responded to client concerns to abrupt changes with child care subsidies and facilities with Children's Services.

Addressing Physical Space Issues

Over the course of the pandemic response, access to physical space and facilities has continuously been raised as a challenge. With the closure of many public and private spaces since the beginning of the public health emergency, the lack of affordable and suitable facilities to run vital community programs has been a major theme in working with residents and organizations.

Staff have, continuously throughout the pandemic, had to find temporary spaces to deliver community supports. For example, at the height of the first wave of the pandemic, Toronto Public Library partnered with the North York Harvest Food Bank and Daily Bread Food Bank to set up 12 pop-up food banks between March and September 2020, distributing food to more than 16,000 households, representing 46,000 individuals. Albion and Jane/Sheppard library branches continue to provide food bank services, and exploration of food programming at these locations is underway. Additionally Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities and spaces were used to provide a number of emergency social services including COVID-19 testing, flu immunization, food security, sanitation (washroom/shower access), respite (shelters) and extreme weather cooling/warming centres.

Finding space to deliver supportive and often ad-hoc programming is not a new challenge. In October 2019, City Council adopted a commitment to develop policies and partnerships to improve the community-based not-for-profit sector's access to decent, affordable facilities and spaces to provide community services and programming

(2019.EC8.4). This commitment is aligned with Poverty Reduction Strategy Action 4.2 which directs staff to “unlock underutilized spaces and assets for new and enhanced service provision.”

Given the immediacy of this challenge, the Poverty Reduction Strategy plans to initiate work to inventory available space suitable for community use and identify policy and programmatic interventions that may be required to improve access to space in order to deliver needed community supports.

Transportation Equity

The key transportation equity activity for the Poverty Reduction Strategy is implementation of the Fair Pass Transit Discount Program. Fair Pass provides eligible low-income residents between the ages of 20 and 64 with a discount on single-use rides and monthly passes on the Toronto Transit Commission. The program is designed to be implemented in three phases, progressing as the program is evaluated and as budget considerations allow.

When the program began, Toronto residents in receipt of benefits from Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program were made eligible so long as the resident was not in receipt of more than \$100 in transportation related supports.

In the current phase, low-income residents (household income at or below the Low-Income Measure plus 15%) in receipt of a childcare subsidy were added, starting in 2019. As in other areas, COVID-19 had a significant impact on the operations of the Fair Pass program, as detailed in the November 2019 report to Council (2020.EC17.2), however operations have since fully resumed. This year, in approving the 2021 Operating Budget, Council directed an extension of Fair Pass eligibility to those in receipt of housing supports. Social Development, Finance and Administration is working with Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to engage with housing providers and residents to determine the specific eligibility requirements that will be utilized to open the program to this group of residents.

Fair Pass Ridership

Between January 2019 and March 2021, over 11 million trips were taken by Fair Pass riders. Not surprisingly, ridership since the beginning of the pandemic has significantly declined. In 2020, the average number of single-use rides per month was 242,677 trips. This is approximately 65% of the average monthly single-use ridership the year before. Notably, Fair Pass ridership declines are less severe than the overall drop in Toronto Transit Commission ridership. On its best week, ridership on the Toronto Transit Commission overall during the pandemic was 35% of pre-COVID-19 ridership levels. This difference highlights the degree to which Fair Pass clients are more transit-dependent than the general population, so continued expansion of the Fair Pass Transit Discount Program is essential as we recover and rebuild.

Maximizing Impact During the Pandemic

As a demand-driven program, the drop in Fair Pass ridership during the pandemic means that the program is undersubscribed. Currently, the program is forecast to have a favourable budgetary variance for this current year, even with the expansion of eligibility to residents in receipt of housing supports. The variance is currently forecast to

be approximately \$3.1M, which based on 2019 ridership trends could support over 25,000 additional users.

Given this current program budget scenario, and the urgent need presented by the pandemic to support residents who are disproportionately reliant on public transportation, there is an opportunity to increase the number of residents who are able to access this vital transportation support. To do so, staff will continue to expand the program to low-income residents to increase the program's reach as we move towards full implementation.

Completing Implementation of Fair Pass

The final phase of Fair Pass implementation is planned to extend the discount to all adult Toronto residents with household incomes at or below the Low-Income Measure plus 15%. Currently, the most significant impediment to full implementation is the cost, which is not currently included in the City's operating budget. Full implementation is currently forecast to require an additional \$25M to \$30M, which will be considered in the context of the City's current financial situation. Staff are currently assessing various funding options, but have determined that dedicated external funding for the program is unlikely.

Future decisions on Fair Pass can also benefit from the Toronto Transit Commission's 5-Year Fare Policy, which is currently underway. At its May 12, 2021 meeting, the Toronto Transit Commission Board approved the Fare Policy Goals, which includes the adoption of Affordability and Equity as one of the key goals of any future fare policy. The final 5-Year Fare Policy will be considered by the Toronto Transit Commission Board in November 2021.

Food Access

Poverty reduction is aligned with the advancement of food security, which the United Nations defines as "having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life." In 2019, it was estimated that almost one in five Torontonians were food insecure (2019.HL10.3). Currently, the Toronto Food Strategy is the City's guiding plan to promote healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems.

Because of the economic crisis caused by COVID-19, the price of food has increased significantly, exacerbating price increases before the pandemic. A survey conducted by Statistics Canada in May 2020 revealed that the food insecurity rate among Canadians has grown from 10.5% in 2018 to 14.6% during COVID-19. Black households are 3.6% more likely to be food insecure than white households. Food banks in Toronto observed a 51% increase in food bank visits from July to August 2020 compared to the previous year. Daily Bread Food Bank reports that the surge in food bank use during COVID-19 is not expected to ease as the economy reopens. If current trends continue, it is projected there will be 1.4 million visits to food banks in Toronto in 2021, with concerns that heightened food insecurity will persist for years.

COVID-19 Emergency Food Response

In response to the food security crisis caused by COVID-19, the Emergency Operations Centre established a staff team to work with key partners at a virtual table to deliver emergency food supports. The table includes leadership from the City, Toronto Public Library, North York Harvest Food Bank, Second Harvest, Daily Bread Food Bank, Food Share Toronto, Salvation Army, Canadian Red Cross, United Way of Greater Toronto and others. To coordinate and implement these supports, food security staff resources at Toronto Public Health were seconded to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office.

Over the course of the pandemic the emergency food response team has:

- Supported food banks and emergency food providers with accessing space for physical distancing, supplies, staff, drivers and fleet services;
- Facilitated large scale meal production and food delivery for seniors and other underserved residents staying home/unable to shop, with 757,442 prepared meals distributed to 169 agencies;
- Delivered 56,233 food hampers, in partnership with the Red Cross, to residents experiencing isolation and unable to access other food supports
- Directed donations and funding to neighbourhood food access programs;
- Invested in long-term community food resilience and access to culturally appropriate food; and
- Through the TO Supports Investment Fund, \$5.1M was distributed to 38 organizations to provide community-driven and informed food security initiatives in underserved neighbourhoods and individuals across the City.

Advancing Food Security and Equity in Toronto

The experience of coordinating emergency food responses has confirmed that the City of Toronto should continue to have a role in addressing food security, mandated by the Toronto Food Charter and adopted by Council in 2001. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and food insecurity on communities illustrates the need to center equity in the City's work, including initiatives to support Black and Indigenous food sovereignty.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Toronto Public Health has suspended a number of its programs in order to devote the majority of its resources to protecting the public from COVID-19. In recognition of the importance of food security, particularly during a public health crisis, Toronto Public Health redeployed two Toronto Food Strategy staff to support Social Development, Finance and Administration in leading the food security response under the Poverty Reduction Strategy. As Toronto Public Health will continue to be focused on the COVID-19 response in the months and years ahead, it is timely to leverage the work of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and its food security commitments.

As the City transitions out of emergency food responses, this report recommends that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office formally take carriage of coordinating the implementation of the Toronto Food Strategy and develop plans to fully embed the work of advancing food security and equity into the work of poverty reduction. This work will be informed by a framework for food systems change (food lens) that was developed in collaboration with the Toronto Food Policy Council in 2019 that identifies ways in which

City operations can support food security (see Attachment 2). Implementation of the food lens may also include the identification of additional resources to sustain and enhance food security work at the City, which will be submitted for consideration as part of the City's annual budget process.

Quality Jobs and Liveable Incomes

As the City focusses on economic recovery, there will be increased attention to opportunities to strengthen connections to income supports, pathways to quality jobs, and inclusive local economic development.

Social Assistance Transformation

Over the next four years, it is anticipated that there will be substantial changes to the way in which the Province will deliver social assistance, both with Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. When fully implemented, Ontario's plan to transform social assistance will shift the functional focus for municipal delivery partners from eligibility determination and the administration of benefits and employment supports to the provision of life stabilization supports and service navigation for social assistance clients. Toronto Employment and Social Services has identified initial challenges and opportunities related to these changes in a report adopted by Council on May 5, 2021, including key principles that will inform Toronto's engagement with the Province of Ontario on the process of co-design and implementation of Ontario's Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal plan (2021.EC21.2). Staff will be reporting back to Committee and Council in 2022 on this process and additional considerations and implications on services for low income residents.

Enhancing City Hiring Practices

As one of the largest employers in Toronto, the City has an important role to play in adopting practices that can provide high quality employment to residents distant from the labour market and that serve as a model for employers to mirror. Currently the City is assessing and developing programs to increase employment opportunities for Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities. The City is also ensuring that the need for police reference checks, which often become unnecessary and inequitable barriers to employment, are limited to only those positions that work directly with children or vulnerable persons in positions of trust and authority. For additional information on the City's practices related to Police Reference Checks see Attachment 3.

The City is taking a deliberate approach to attracting and onboarding talent from Neighborhood Improvement Areas (underserved communities) and persons with disabilities. The City has established and expanded relationships with community partners and is transforming its approach to recruitment marketing to appeal to our diverse citizenry.

Understanding that BIPOC communities and persons with disabilities are over represented within the lower income population and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, the City developed a two tiered strategy to attract Indigenous and equity deserving youth for staffing roles in the City's Mass Immunization Clinics. The City partnered closely with a number of grassroots community organizations to strategically source talent from the target demographic in hopes of alleviating vaccine hesitancy while also giving back and providing meaningful employment to the hardest

hit communities. Toronto took a bold step in its broader social media marketing efforts by creating content with a distinct visual identity that would engage target audiences. These targeted efforts yielded a great response with significant user engagement online and applications to the Mass Immunization Clinics.

The City has also been conducting a series of other activities to brand itself as an employer of choice and build a pipeline for diverse talent.

In October 2020, the City hosted an employment booth at the Black Professionals in Technology Network annual networking event, engaging and networking with Black professionals in technology. This provided black professionals with an opportunity to connect directly with People & Equity Recruitment representatives and learn more about the City of Toronto, while also allowing the City to actively recruit for open tech roles.

To commemorate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities the City of Toronto developed and executed a virtual networking event for professionals with disabilities. This information session yielded a very diverse group of professionals and provided the target group with more accesses and visibility to City of Toronto and our hiring practices

The City also worked to improve opportunities for neurodiverse talent. Neurodiversity refers to individuals who experience different neurological functioning than the majority of the population. The City partnered with a community organization focused on Neurodiversity to deliver training sessions to City recruiters and hiring managers on employing neurodiverse talent.

Over the last few months People & Equity has partnered with a number of academic institutions in the Greater Toronto Area to network with students with disabilities, providing advice on disclosure, accommodation and getting job ready.

Moving forward, the City will continue to expand its engagement with equity deserving communities, provide meaningful opportunities for those groups and highlight the City as an employer of choice.

Inclusive Economic Development and Community Wealth Building

Since the adoption of the Poverty Reduction 2019-2022 Action Plan, the City has advanced work to drive inclusive economic development in Toronto. This work is more important than ever given the identified need for inclusive economic recovery post-COVID-19. Key ongoing initiatives that support this work includes the:

- Community Benefits Framework which seeks to maximize the use of City of Toronto authority to create inclusive economic development opportunities. Recently, City Council approved resources in the 2021 Operating Budget to provide dedicated support to the implementation of the program.
- Social Procurement Program which leverages the City's purchasing and procurement to pursue strategic social, economic, and workforce development goals. Recently, City Council directed a review of the program to date for continued opportunities to strengthen its impact.
- AnchorTO Network of 15 different public sector institutions committed to advancing social procurement and leveraging their purchasing power to create social and

economic opportunities for those experiencing economic disadvantage. Since joining the Network, several anchor institutions have adopted their own social procurement programs and are pursuing deliberate strategies to leverage their operations to economically benefit their local communities.

- Economic Development and Culture is currently working with City Planning and Social Development, Finance and Administration on an approach to determine principles, key directions, and actions to support future local inclusive economic development work in addition to the ongoing Jane-Finch Community Development Plan.

The guiding model that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office is utilizing to inform inclusive economic development in Toronto is the community wealth building framework. Community wealth building is a holistic strategy for strengthening local community by developing supportive social and economic infrastructure. It works by creating more equitable economic systems that support diversely-owned and community-based social enterprises. Community wealth building seeks to build economic resilience and sustainability, while empowering equity-deserving groups and reducing inequality. Projects from across the globe have used community wealth strategies to establish supporting resources such as land trusts and credit unions. They can also integrate anchor institutions which provide place-based partnerships supporting community wealth through workforce development, social procurement policies, and local impact investment.

Currently, the Poverty Reduction Office is pursuing three projects to test and implement community wealth building approaches. The first is collaborating with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit and Purchasing and Materials Management Division to lead the B3 (Black-led, Black-serving, Black-mandated) Social Procurement Project, which aims to increase the number of Black businesses on the City's diverse supplier lists and receiving contracts. This includes the development of an anchor institution vendor portal.

The second major project is the Community Wealth Building Feasibility Study in Regent Park that aims to inform the City on how to leverage the investments occurring in the neighbourhood to drive unique, equitable, and sustainable approaches to economic development in Regent Park, driven by the outcomes identified by community (Attachment 4). These, along with other initiatives, will result in a maturation of the City's knowledge and capacity to support an inclusive economic development ecosystem.

Thirdly, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office is engaging with community partners, private sector organizations and government agencies, such as the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to explore ways to embed the delivery of financial empower supports across the community wealth building ecosystem. Through a partnership with Prosper Canada, Toronto Public Library is exploring ways in which financial empowerment training can be included alongside other services that are delivered in the communities in which residents live. Finally, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office plans to convene a design group with strong community representation, to identify community-based banking solutions that could be developed by the financial services industry to provide an alternative to payday loan and other predatory loan services.

Systemic Change

As identified in the 2019-2022 Action Plan, all City of Toronto divisions and agencies can exercise levers and operate in innovative ways which promote economic inclusion, resident empowerment, and collective impact for residents experiencing poverty. By changing the ways in which the system operates, the City can ensure that decisions are made more equitably and support those living in poverty.

Modeling Continuous Engagement Practices

One of primary ways that the Poverty Reduction Strategy takes to drive systemic change is to improve the ability of residents to participate in decision making. Specifically, the Lived Experience Advisory Group, a resident advisory body consisting of residents who bring unique, intersectional identities and perspectives to the work, is the backbone of the Poverty Reduction Strategy's continuous engagement efforts. Since establishment of the Lived Experience Advisory Group, the group has served as a model for many organizations working on poverty reduction. The impact of the first cohort, which concluded its term in early 2020, is documented in an impact report that serves as a learnings document for their successors (see Attachment 5).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy intends on ensuring that the second cohort of the Lived Experience Advisory Group serves as a further model on how to conduct continuous engagement in a post-COVID-19 environment. This cohort, which recently launched this year after a year-long suspension due to COVID-19, has had to meet virtually, which under many circumstances can create inequitable barriers to participation. To mitigate against these barriers, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office has partnered with The Neighbourhood Group to develop tailored capacity building supports for this unique environment. This cohort of the Lived Experience Advisory Group is also being supplied with technology supports, including a donation of tablets facilitated by the City's Strategic Partnerships Office.

Learnings from facilitating the second cohort of the Lived Experience Advisory Group will be documented and shared with internal and external partners to improve engagement activities more widely.

Tkaronto Prosperity Plan

Resulting from historical and systemic injustices, Indigenous communities experience some of the highest rates of poverty, including in Toronto. A critical element of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, therefore, is the Tkaronto Prosperity Plan, which is currently being developed by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council with the support of a one-time grant of \$472,000 from the City. This project is intended to empower the Indigenous community to identify their priority areas of action to achieve real results and systemic change for Indigenous residents.

The resulting plan, which will be developed with significant community involvement and is anticipated to be delivered this year, will include specific resource recommendations that will be submitted to future budgets to be considered as part of the City's poverty reduction investments.

Responding to Administrative Inquiry IA24.3

On November 18, 2020, Executive Committee directed staff to identify ways to incorporate strategies to embed early detection of medical conditions, education and interventions for low-income or racialized groups, and to create or designate and furnish quiet work spaces in Toronto Community Housing buildings.

One of the ways in which the City provides early detection and medical intervention is through Community Paramedicine, delivered by Toronto Paramedic Services. This is an innovative service of the division and provides community-based primary medical care and referrals, at-home medical care to support seniors and residents experiencing vulnerabilities within the community. The City is also actively implementing and pursuing partnerships with the health care sector to better connect medical care with community-based interventions. This includes responses to complex cases, such as the Specialized Program for Inter-Divisional Enhanced Responsiveness to Vulnerability. It also includes systemic-change partnerships such as the Social Medicine Initiative with University Health Network and the United Way of Greater Toronto to explore ways to embed "social prescribing" in the care of individuals. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Office will continue to identify opportunities and address challenges related to the implementation of these programs on an ongoing basis.

Furnishing quiet work spaces in Toronto Community Housing buildings will require additional investments and is not revenue neutral, particularly from the need to undertake capital upgrades. Because of this, further assessment is required in coordination with the City's housing partners. Action on this item will be included for consideration as part of the development of the 2023-2026 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to implement the activities in the 2019-2022 Action Plan, with reporting on specific initiatives, as required. The next update on overall progress of the Poverty Reduction Strategy will accompany the 2022 staff recommended operating budget with the annual Poverty Reduction Strategy Budget Briefing Note. Beginning in mid-2022, staff will also conduct an assessment of the Action Plan overall and begin policy development of the 2023-2026 Poverty Reduction Plan for consideration early in the next term of Council.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1. Status of 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan Activities
- Attachment 2. Framework for Food Systems Change
- Attachment 3. Police Reference Checks in the Hiring Process
- Attachment 4. Regent Park Community Wealth Building Feasibility Study
- Attachment 5. Lived Experience Advisory Group Impact Report