

Advancing the Implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy at Toronto Public Health

Date: September 3, 2021

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Due to the ongoing impacts of colonization, Indigenous Peoples in Toronto continue to experience inequities within a number of health outcomes.

This report provides a progress update on Toronto Public Health's (TPH) implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy (2016-2021). It also provides key recommendations for advancing the implementation of the strategy, specifically focused on enhancing cultural safety across TPH programs and services, strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities, and advancing Indigenous health and reconciliation through a public health policy mandate.

The recommended next steps will better position TPH to work with Indigenous Peoples in Toronto to reduce health disparities and to support strong and vibrant Indigenous communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to arrange an Indigenous cultural safety training session for the Board in 2022 to build the Board's capacity to respectfully advance Indigenous health and reconciliation through its public health policy mandate.
2. The Board of Health request the Chair to call a Special Meeting of the Board of Health in 2022 for the training session referenced in Recommendation 1 above.
3. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health, in collaboration with Indigenous community partners and City of Toronto divisions, to continue the

implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy actions and operating principles using an approach that allows for transparency and accountability.

4. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to review and advance the recommendations from the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy Implementation Assessment, including:

- a) Implementing an Indigenous Cultural Safety framework aimed at decolonizing Toronto Public Health's programs, services, policies and approach;
- b) Engaging Toronto Public Health Senior Management Team in a facilitated discussion to further define and act on the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy's Operating Principles;
- c) Exploring mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous communities' perspectives are represented at the Board of Health;
- d) Strengthening Toronto Public Health's relationships with Indigenous partners such as, the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, and Indigenous community organizations;
- e) Continuing to invest in staff development opportunities to strengthen cultural safety and Toronto Public Health's capacity to respectfully and effectively serve Indigenous Peoples in Toronto;
- f) Reviewing Toronto Public Health's hiring practices and exploring opportunities to recruit and retain Indigenous employees; and,
- g) Reviewing and revising Toronto Public Health policies and practices to support Indigenous cultural safety.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On January 23, 2017, the Board of Health received Item HL17.5 "Toronto Public Health's Implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy". The report outlined the four Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy actions that the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Circle asked Toronto Public Health to lead, as well as the role of Toronto Public Health in supporting the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy vision, mission, operating principles and remaining actions identified in the Strategy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.HL17.5>

On May 30, 2016, the Board of Health adopted Item HL12.1 "A Reclamation of Well Being: Visioning a Thriving and Healthy Urban Indigenous Community" and endorsed Toronto's first Indigenous Health Strategy (2016-2021).

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.HL12.1>

On November 30, 2015, the Board of Health received Item HL8.3 "Developing the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy". This report outlined the establishment of the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Circle and the community-led process for developing the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.HL8.3>

On December 9, 2013, the Board of Health received Item HL27.2 "Premature Death among Members of Toronto's Aboriginal Community: Walking in Their Shoes", including a presentation from Anishnawbe Health Toronto about research on premature death among Toronto's Indigenous communities.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.HL27.2>

COMMENTS

The [Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy](#) (TIHS), launched in May 2016, envisions thriving and healthy Indigenous communities in Toronto. It provides a pathway to support this outcome through the transformation of policies, practices, and resource allocation in Toronto Public Health programs and services, and the health sector more broadly.

To achieve this vision, the TIHS outlines 24 key actions: of which 20 are to be led by the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (now Ontario Health - Toronto Region) and four to be led by TPH. Toronto Public Health actions include:

1. Advocate for affordable and healthy food for Indigenous Peoples in Toronto using an Indigenous lens;
2. Support programs that address violence in Toronto's Indigenous communities;
3. Expand culturally-secure parenting support programs; and;
4. Support new and existing public health promotion programs focusing on physical activity, healthy eating, mental health promotion, healthy parenting, youth resilience and chronic disease prevention to be culturally appropriate.

In order to respectfully guide action on Indigenous health, the TIHS outlines five operating principles:

1. Health plans are developed with Indigenous Peoples as full partners;
2. Wherever Indigenous Peoples go to access programs and services, they receive culturally appropriate, safe, and proficient care, and all barriers to optimal care have been removed;
3. Care is planned to be responsive to community needs and is appropriate, efficient, effective, and high quality at both the system and interpersonal levels;
4. Dedicated resources and funding for Indigenous Health programs and services will support a coordinated and collaborative system; and,

5. Build and leverage the capacity of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous communities to care for themselves.

TIHS Implementation Assessment

In December 2018, a consulting firm with Indigenous expertise was selected to assess the mid-term progress towards implementing the four priority actions for TPH and TIHS operating principles. The assessment was conducted in consultation with the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Circle (TIHAC), Indigenous partner organizations, Indigenous community members, as well as City of Toronto ("City") staff from TPH and the Indigenous Affairs Office and was completed in summer 2019.

The consulting firm identified a number of important findings, which are outlined below.

Areas of Toronto Public Health Progress

Cultural Safety Training

Cultural safety refers to respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples inherent in the health care system. The aim is to provide an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.¹

Toronto Public Health has committed to have all staff complete Indigenous cultural competency training. At this time, the majority of the pre-pandemic TPH workforce has completed a one-day Indigenous cultural competency training. Staff who work closely with Indigenous communities in Toronto have started to complete a more intensive eight-week course on Indigenous cultural safety. These training programs aim to enhance staff capacity on how to work respectfully with Indigenous communities, and understand the history and legacy of colonization.

Culturally Safe Parenting Programs

Toronto Public Health has partnered with Indigenous-led community organizations to expand culturally safe parenting support programs. For example, as a first step, TPH provided staff trained in Indigenous cultural safety to support an Indigenous-led mobile pre- and post-natal team at Native Child and Family Services Toronto (NCFST). TPH also collaborated with the Toronto Child and Family Network's Aboriginal Advisory Committee to better align parenting programs with Indigenous worldviews, and liaised with clinical services at NCFST to provide breastfeeding, nutrition, child health and development information, as well as prenatal and parenting workshops upon request.

Toronto Public Health will also be engaged in a number of upcoming initiatives to support healthy child and family development, in partnership with the Indigenous community. This includes participating in family circles with Indigenous-led organizations, such as the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre and Tikinagan

¹ First Nations Health Authority. Cultural Safety and Humility (fnha.ca). 2021

team within NCFST's Pre- and Post- Natal program, in order for Indigenous parents to self-refer to TPH services. In addition, TPH will continue to work with Indigenous community partners to support the development and implementation of an EarlyON mobile unit specific for the community.

Culturally Safe Health Promotion

The TPH Toronto Urban Health Fund worked in partnership with Indigenous communities to establish and launch a new Indigenous Funding Stream which provides access to culturally-safe funding for Indigenous organizations to implement HIV and substance misuse prevention programming. In 2021-2022, TPH provided \$420,000 to Indigenous organizations.

Through a community-led and culturally-safe process, TPH partnered with Indigenous communities to develop the Toronto Indigenous Overdose Strategy. This strategy grounds overdose prevention, harm reduction and treatment in Indigenous worldviews that seek to reconnect Indigenous People to their culture and traditions as part of improving holistic health and well-being.

Toronto Public Health has also enhanced other health promotion programs, such as tobacco cessation, youth leadership and diabetes prevention, to be more culturally safe.

Areas for Development

The assessment report identified key areas for further development and growth. These areas represent opportunities for TPH to fully honour the Strategy's actions and operating principles:

- Advocating for Indigenous Peoples' food security;
- Supporting programs to be culturally appropriate in the areas of mental health promotion and the full range of chronic disease prevention programs;
- Advocating for meaningful Indigenous community involvement in City decision-making processes to recognize Indigenous self-determination; and,
- Ensuring a consistent understanding and implementation of the TIHAC operating principles among TPH staff and management.

Partnership and Supports for Indigenous Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, TPH has been required to shift its focus and resources from a number of public health programs and strategies. While the pandemic has slowed down work on actions under the TIHS, it also created new opportunities for supporting Indigenous-led and culturally safe responses to COVID-19.

Indigenous-led Case and Contact Management: Toronto Public Health has supported Indigenous-led case and contact management by establishing a new partnership with Auduzhe Mino Nesewinong ("Auduzhe"). Auduzhe is a COVID-19 response program, designed to provide culturally safe access to COVID-19 public health services for the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis who are living in Toronto.

Indigenous-led COVID-19 Testing Strategy: Local Indigenous community leaders identified the importance of an Indigenous-led response to the pandemic, including the provision of COVID-19 testing to Indigenous community members. As a result of these recommendations, the City entered into partnership with Native Child and Family Services to deploy a mobile COVID-19 testing unit to provide tests to Indigenous residents across the city. In addition, Auduzhe and Anishnawbe Health Toronto founded and lead their own COVID-19 testing programs, which were developed for Indigenous community members and are culturally safe.

COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy: Toronto Public Health has engaged with Indigenous-led organizations and community leaders to support further incorporation of public health insights into COVID-19 vaccination efforts. This includes supporting Indigenous-led clinic planning and implementation, community outreach, and vaccine information-sharing, in order to promote First Nations, Inuit and Métis residents' vaccine uptake.

Indigenous-led COVID-19 vaccine providers in Toronto, including Auduzhe, Anishnawbe Health Toronto, and Native Child and Family Services, are actively operating vaccine clinics for First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Toronto. There are several local Indigenous community agencies that are partnering with these providers to support planning and promotion of Indigenous-led COVID-19 vaccine clinics and information sharing to local First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

In addition, local health sector providers have supported Indigenous COVID-19 vaccination efforts, such as East Toronto Health Partners' dedicated immunization clinic for First Nations, Inuit and Métis at Michael Garron Hospital; and the Centre for Wise Practices in Indigenous Health, in partnership with the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, the University Health Network, Indigenous Health, and Shkaabe Makwa (CAMH). These organizations have developed public-facing and community-centered COVID-19 informational resources/tools tailored for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

Next Steps

In summer 2021, TPH hired a management-level Senior Policy Advisor with a speciality in Indigenous health and cultural safety to advise the Medical Officer of Health and explore how an organizational action plan will integrate Indigenous cultural safety within divisional policies, practices and programs.

In the immediate term, over 2021-2022, TPH will:

- Arrange an Indigenous cultural safety training session for the members of the Board of Health to build capacity to respectfully advance Indigenous Peoples' health outcomes and reconciliation;
- Work with Indigenous community partners in Toronto to establish community-identified priorities to support the continued implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy's actions and operating principles.

In the longer term, in 2022-2023 and beyond, as a part of the plan to support the continued implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy's actions, TPH will work towards:

- Implementing an Indigenous cultural safety framework aimed at decolonizing TPH's programs, services, policies and approach;
- Engaging TPH's senior management team in a facilitated discussion to further define and act on the TIHS operating principles;
- Continuing to invest in staff development opportunities to strengthen cultural safety and TPH's capacity to serve Indigenous Peoples in Toronto;
- Exploring mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous communities' interests are respectfully and effectively represented at the Board of Health; and
- Reviewing Toronto Public Health's hiring practices and exploring opportunities to recruit and retain more Indigenous employees.

Due to the ongoing impacts of colonization, Indigenous Peoples in Toronto continue to experience inequities in a number of health outcomes. The next steps outlined in this report will better position TPH to work with Indigenous Peoples in Toronto. Toronto Public Health is committed to improving health outcomes, reducing health disparities and supporting strong and vibrant Indigenous communities.

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SIGNATURE

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