

From: [Sahar Qassem](#)
To: [Budget Committee](#)
Subject: Written Submission - followup to deputation
Date: Wednesday, January 26, 2022 1:03:25 PM

Hello,

My name is Sahar Qassem. I spoke to the Budget Committee on January 25 (yesterday) between 9:30 am-12:30 pm and I wanted to submit this brief as a written component of my deputation.

Thank you,

Sahar Qassem, RD, MPH

Creating Health Plus Coordinator
Downtown West Cluster Communications Lead
Parkdale-Activity Recreation Centre
1499 Queen Street West, Toronto, M6R 1A3

CREATING HEALTH PLUS BRIEF

The Background:

Creating Health Plus (CH+) is a valuable and essential food security program that addresses nutritional deficiencies of meals served in Toronto drop-in centres. The program delivers five healthy and fresh food items - eggs, yogurt, milk, fruits and vegetables - to 30 Toronto drop-ins on a weekly basis. It is a joint program funded by the City's Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and Toronto Public Health (TPH), coordinated by Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC), and logistically supported by North York Harvest Food Bank (NYH) through FoodReach - their social enterprise. With a relatively low budget, the program has built an innovative and efficient partnership that provides excellent value, making it a worthwhile project to invest in. SSHA has been providing \$333,300 to North York Harvest's social enterprise for healthy food purchases, and TPH has provided \$55,000 to PARC for program management over the past two years.

CH+ arose from TPH dietitian's response to research that identified an alarming nutritional deficit risk in Toronto's homeless population and a wide variance in the nutritional adequacy of meals being served in Toronto's drop-ins^{1,2}. To address the nutritional gap, they identified 5 foods items, which led to the creation of CH+. The main goal of CH+ is to improve and rebuild the health of Toronto's equity-deserving populations, including homeless, food insecure and low-income communities through regular access to fresh and nutritious food with dignity. With limited or no food budgets, drop-ins are heavily reliant on donations, making CH+ one of the only reliable sources of weekly food items that offer a variety of minerals, vitamins, protein and fibre. This ensures that vulnerable populations that access drop-in meals are receiving the nutrition that is essential for their health and well-being.

The Context:

The program funds have flowed via SSHA as part of its mandate of supporting drop-ins, as food is an essential component of their services that both facilitate their capacity to support their users' food security and access to other critical services. Throughout the pandemic, drop-ins have been the front-line response to addressing the significant increase in food insecurity and poverty through their meal programs which are in alignment with the COVID-19 emergency response.

The Impact:

- CH+ has provided over 3 million lbs of high-quality, nutritious food for over 10 years to agencies serving the vulnerable as a response to hunger and food insecurity experienced by drop-in users.
- CH+ member agencies together served almost 1,718,652 meals this past year to the city's most vulnerable residents. This number has increased by approximately 218,652 meals.
- An investment in food is a strategic way to relieve some of the burdens placed on the health care system by those living in poverty. It is a long-term socio-economic investment that will build strong neighbourhoods and healthy resilient communities.
- CH+ built a network of community agencies that are working together to create systemic solutions to food insecurity. Partnerships have included: The Daily Bread Food Bank, Foodshare Toronto, North York Harvest Food Bank, Second Harvest among others, speaking strongly to the power of collaboration across sectors.
- CH+ trained 50 chefs across the city in health, nutrition and cooking skills, thereby building a growing community of practice.
- The collective purchasing power created by the quantity of food purchased for CH+ through the food procurement social enterprise, FoodReach, allows external agencies who also use FoodReach to purchase their fresh food items at significantly lower prices.

1 Tarasuk, Dachner & Li. (2005). [Homeless youth in Toronto are nutritionally vulnerable](#).

2 Antoniadou & Tarasuk. (1991). [A Survey of Food Problems Experienced by Toronto Street Youth](#).

CREATING HEALTH PLUS BRIEF

The Value:

A social return on investment report found that the program has excellent returns on investment - both social and financial through leveraging economies of scale and building more direct relationships with food producers, wholesalers and large-scale distributors, the report concludes that³:

1. For every dollar invested in drop-in meal programs, \$1.94 in value is created.
2. For every dollar invested in training alone, \$2.15 in value is created.
3. CH+ improves physical health and mental well-being of equity-deserving communities through its potential to lower disease risk and increase their capacity to manage it.
4. CH+ reduces social isolation through the use of food as a vehicle to bring people together.
5. CH+ supports the capacity of chefs working in meal programs to efficiently and innovatively create nutritious meals with a limited food supply

The Challenges:

CH+ still experiences funding challenges that impact its ability to meet its goals in a stable and reliable way. It is necessary to urgently address the following challenges to ensure the continuity of the program, which has now become **at risk**:

- **CH+ will be losing its funding of \$333,300 from the City of Toronto's SSHA in September 2022** as the department restructures, which will **put CH+ at risk of shutting down**. Drop-ins are experiencing increasing demand, exacerbated by the pandemic, with more users accessing their meal programs while dealing with inadequate and limited budgets and inconsistent donations.
- **The rising cost of food**. Because of the nature and focus of the program, inflation uniquely affects our ability to provide agencies with the same amount of food week over week. At the current budget, CH+ would see a 28.5% decrease in purchasing power this year (compared to 2019) due to inflation which will significantly impact the quantity and cultural relevance of the produce that we would be able to provide to agencies.
- **Limited capacity to increase reach to other agencies in dire need of CH+ all across Toronto**. Currently, only 30 agencies are being supported by CH+, while 8 other agencies have been on the waitlist for over 10 years. Also, many agencies within the TDIN and the City's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA) can have their essential needs met through the program. Not expanding the program, brings up issues of equity and concentration of access to healthy food.

The Recommendation/Ask:

Support a motion to **bridge the program's funding until the City's 2023 Operating Budget for a total of \$182,650** to ensure the program's survival and capacity to deliver provisions to agencies who need access to these foods in a consistent and reliable manner.

A breakdown of the **total \$182,650** amount required is as follows:

- a. To **extend the program's funding from SSHA until March 2023** (a period of 6 months), amounting to **\$166,650**
- b. **Increase funding by \$16,000** to sustain current food levels which will be diminished by significant inflation due to the pandemic. Without this increase, agencies will be receiving considerably less provisions than they currently are.

In the future, CH+ will work with the City including SSHA and Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) to expand the program to address all challenges and ensure the program is both sustained and adequately funded to support our current agencies. As well as to expand our reach to support the 18 agencies in dire need of our program and others in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.