

## **Actions to Advance Indigenous Health**

**Date:** December 29, 2023

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

---

In May 2016, the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Circle (TIHAC) released the [Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy](#), which included recommendations for multiple sectors and partners, including Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network. The Strategy envisioned thriving and healthy Indigenous peoples and communities in Toronto and the transformation of programs and services in the healthcare system and within Toronto Public Health. The launch of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy influenced how Toronto Public Health works with Indigenous service providers and the Indigenous community across a range of public health programs.

Over the last several years, there have been numerous calls on federal, provincial, and municipal governments to address the historic trauma and impacts of colonization, such as the residential school system. This includes the use of legislation and government policy to oppress Indigenous cultures, languages, familial structures, and health outcomes. Various reports such as the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), its [2SLGBTQQA+ Sub-Working Group](#), and the voices of Indigenous service providers and community members have raised many recommendations to improve the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

In April 2022, City Council adopted the City of Toronto's (the City) first [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) focused on five themes over ten years: Restoring truth, righting relations and sharing power, addressing justice, making financial reparations, and activating the City of Toronto's commitment to truth and reconciliation. Toronto Public Health has made specific commitments to advancing truth and reconciliation under the plan.

This report provides an update on actions Toronto Public Health is taking in relationships with Indigenous service providers and includes recommendations on opportunities to further advance health outcomes for Indigenous populations.

Toronto Public Health is committed to addressing Indigenous population health inequities and strengthening its programs and services to meet the health needs of the

Indigenous population. Toronto Public Health's commitment will build on City strategies and incorporate recommendations from Indigenous service providers and community members.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report back to the Board of Health in 2024 on the establishment of an Indigenous Wellness Committee and co-developed action plan, and recommendations on options to resource the action plan, as requested by Indigenous service providers.
2. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to arrange an Indigenous cultural safety training session for the Board in 2024 to build the Board's capacity to respectfully advance Indigenous health and reconciliation through its public health governance mandate.
3. The Board of Health request the Chair to call a Special Meeting of the Board of Health in 2024 for the training session referenced in Recommendation 2 above.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

---

There is no financial impact associated with the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

---

On April 6 and 7, 2022, City Council adopted EX31.1 "Actions to Advance Truth and Justice for Indigenous People in the City of Toronto: Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2032," which included Actions for Justice to Support Indigenous Health and Well-being and requested the City Manager to direct the Director, Indigenous Affairs Office to consult with Division Heads on the implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX31.1>

On September 27, 2021, the Board of Health adopted HL30.2 "Advancing the Implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy at Toronto Public Health," which requested that the Medical Officer of Health develop an Indigenous cultural safety framework for Toronto Public Health, continue strengthening relationships with Indigenous service providers and City of Toronto Divisions, and continue the ongoing implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2021.HL30.2>

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 (TIHAC) 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>

## COMMENTS

---

### Background

In May 2016, the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Circle (TIHAC) released Toronto's first [Indigenous Health Strategy](#) with recommendations for Toronto Public Health and Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network. Attachment 1 lists TIHAC members.

The Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy included five operating principles, which continue to inform how Toronto Public Health engages and works with Indigenous service providers:

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 systems and interpersonal levels.
4. Dedicated resources and funding for Indigenous health programs and services will support a coordinated and collaborative system.
5. Toronto Public Health and all partners in the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy acknowledge the importance of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous communities caring for themselves.

Within the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy, the TIHAC requested Toronto Public Health to lead the implementation of four specific actions:

1. Advocate for affordable, healthy food for Indigenous people in Toronto using an Indigenous lens.
2. Support programs that address violence in Toronto's Indigenous community.
3. Expand culturally secure parenting support programs.
4. Support new and existing public health promotion programs to be culturally appropriate.

In September 2021, Toronto Public Health reported to the Board of Health on progress made to date. The report can be reviewed [here](#).

Based on direction from the Board of Health in September 2021, Toronto Public Health started developing an Indigenous cultural safety framework for staff, identifying opportunities to recruit and retain Indigenous staff, exploring mechanisms to ensure Indigenous communities' interests are effectively and respectfully represented at the Board of Health, and organizing Indigenous cultural safety training for the Board of Health. The Board of Health participated in Indigenous Cultural Safety training in February 2022.

### Reconciliation Action Plan

In April 2022, City Council adopted the City's first [Reconciliation Action Plan](#). The plan was led by the Indigenous Affairs Office and developed over three years with input from First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members, organizations, Elders, Knowledge Carriers, youth, Indigenous employees, and City Divisions and Agencies, including Toronto Public Health. Toronto Public Health committed to:

1. Continuing to implement the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy and strengthening relationships with Indigenous partners.
2. Developing and implementing an Indigenous cultural safety action plan for Toronto Public Health.
3. Developing an Indigenous-led healing pathway for harm reduction, substance use, recovery, and treatment.
4. Working with City Divisions and other levels of government to promote and advance the social determinants of health.

Recommendations from the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy that relate to affordable and healthy food for Indigenous peoples and responding to violence impacting Toronto's Indigenous community are being addressed through commitments made under the City's Reconciliation Action Plan. Specifically, Social Development, Finance & Administration, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, and Economic Development and Culture will be leading a variety of initiatives to increase access to land and space for food programming. The Indigenous Affairs Office and other City Divisions are developing an implementation plan to guide the city's response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including the impacts of violence.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery: 2023 – 2024 Indigenous Health Priorities**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the health and social service system, creating and deepening health inequities for the Indigenous population and new challenges for Indigenous service providers.

In summer 2022, Toronto Public Health and Ontario Health Toronto staff reached out to the original members of the TIHAC to determine if there was an interest in reconvening this group to evaluate progress on the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy and co-

develop implementation activities. At that time, many of the members of the TIHAC had retired or moved to new positions. The remaining TIHAC members confirmed that their priorities had significantly shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging issues and they had no immediate interest in reconvening. Since then, Toronto Public Health has connected directly with Indigenous service providers on emerging priorities, as identified by Indigenous service providers.

Through these consultations, the following Indigenous Health priorities for 2023 and 2024 emerged:

- Launching an Indigenous cultural safety action plan for Toronto Public Health
- Renewing engagements with Indigenous service providers on culturally safe parenting and programming for children and youth
- Promoting COVID-19 and flu vaccination in the urban Indigenous community and working with Indigenous service providers to implement vaccine clinics
- Responding to issues related to substance use and mental health
- Working with Indigenous service providers to understand Indigenous population health data in Toronto
- Identifying actions to recruit and retain Indigenous staff.

## **New Opportunities for 2024**

### *Indigenous Wellness Table*

In April 2023, the Board of Health requested that the Medical Officer of Health work with Indigenous service providers to co-develop an Indigenous mental health, substance use, and addictions strategy. Building on this request, Toronto Public Health worked with the Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Council (TASSC) to co-host a two-day roundtable on Indigenous wellness in October 2023, to which all Indigenous-led service providers in the city were invited.

Several recommendations emerged from the two-day roundtable, including the need for Indigenous people to lead, develop, and deliver their own health and social services, aligned with principles of Indigenous self-determination, the importance of Toronto Public Health being transparent about its activities with Indigenous service providers to enhance Indigenous health and wellness, and a request for Toronto Public Health to establish an Indigenous Wellness Committee that includes all Indigenous-led service providers in the city.

Toronto Public Health is working towards establishing the Indigenous Wellness Committee in early 2024 with the goal of co-developing an action plan to advance Indigenous wellness, with a particular focus on substance use prevention and promoting mental health and wellness. Based on discussions and input from Indigenous service providers on the importance of transparency and the significance of establishing an Indigenous Wellness Committee, the Medical Officer of Health recommends reporting back to the Board of Health in 2024 on activities related to the Indigenous Wellness Table. The report back would include information on the co-development of an action plan, and recommendations on options to resource the plan.

## *Promoting Indigenous Cultural Safety*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action included a recommendation for federal, provincial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Indigenous peoples. The Board of Health is responsible for ensuring public health programs and services are delivered according to provincial standards and in response to local needs. Given the governing role of the Board of Health and building on the commitment that Toronto Public Health has made to Indigenous cultural safety and the City's Reconciliation Action Plan, the Medical Officer of Health recommends that Board of Health members participate in an Indigenous cultural safety training session, organized by Toronto Public Health staff.

## **Evaluating Outcomes and Promoting Indigenous Cultural Safety**

Through building relationships with and listening to external Indigenous partners, Toronto Public Health is working to expand and strengthen our programs and services with and for Indigenous communities. While the ultimate goal of these public health interventions is to advance the health status of the Indigenous population, the core focus of Toronto Public Health is on building relationships and trust with Indigenous service providers and community members, continuing to promote staff learning and education on Indigenous cultural safety, and demonstrating an ongoing and evolving commitment to truth and reconciliation.

## **CONTACT**

---

Na-Koshie Lamptey, Deputy Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health,  
416-338-8402, [Na-Koshie.Lamptey@toronto.ca](mailto:Na-Koshie.Lamptey@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

---

Dr. Eileen de Villa  
Medical Officer of Health

## **ATTACHMENTS**

---

Attachment 1: Membership of the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Council (2016)  
Attachment 2: Examples of Toronto Public Health Activities with Indigenous Service Providers

## **Attachment 1: Membership of the Toronto Indigenous Health Advisory Council (2016)**

- Sara Wolfe, Seventh Generation Midwives of Toronto
- Sarah Midanik, Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- Kenn Richard, Native Child and Family Services
- Larry Frost, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
- Joe Hester, Anishnawbe Health Toronto
- Dr. Janet Smylie, Well Living House

### Elder Council

- Dianne Longboat
- Cindy White
- Amy Desjarlians

### Youth Council

- Akeesha Footman
- Myles Jacko
- Sam Kloestra
- Devin Trother
- Kaitlyn Adams-Lewis
- Danielle Robinson
- Conner Pion
- Cedar Landon