

Implementation Panel for Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto

Date: March 11, 2024

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In November 2023, the Board of Health endorsed *Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto*. Our Health, Our City (OHOC) presents a city-wide, comprehensive, population-level approach to help address both mental health and substance use related issues in Toronto. It offers recommendations for all levels of government, City divisions, community partners, and health and social organizations across Toronto.

A key guiding principle in the development of OHOC and its implementation is the meaningful inclusion of people with lived and living experience. The participation of people who use drugs and people with lived/living experience of mental health challenges and illnesses, as well as frontline service providers who work with these communities, is integral to the success of OHOC.

In support of OHOC, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to establish an implementation panel and to report back to the Board of Health in the first quarter of 2024 with recommendations on the panel terms of reference and membership selection criteria.

This report outlines a process for establishing and convening the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel that will ensure inclusion of people with lived and living experience and frontline service providers in guiding the implementation of the OHOC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health approve the Terms of Reference (Attachment 1) for the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel.
2. The Board of Health appoint a Board of Health Director to be the Chair of the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel for the remainder of the 2022-2026 Toronto City Council term, and until a successor is appointed.
3. The Board of Health direct the Medical Officer of Health to initiate a process to recruit candidates for the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel in consultation with the Chair of the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel, and to report back to the Board of Health in the third quarter of 2024 with the recommended candidates for appointment.
4. The Board of Health conclude the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel and replace it with the Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Any financial impacts resulting from the adoption of this report can be accommodated within approved operating or capital budgets.

DECISION HISTORY

On November 27, 2023, the Board of Health endorsed *Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto*.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL8.1>

On November 27, 2023, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to establish an implementation panel for *Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto*, and report back to the Board of Health in the first quarter of 2024 with recommendations on the panel terms of reference and membership selection criteria.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL8.1>

On November 27, 2023, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to report to the Board of Health with annual progress reports on the implementation of *Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto*.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL8.1>

On April 17, 2023, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to continue to support the work of the Drug Strategy Implementation Panel while the new comprehensive strategies are developed.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL3.1>

COMMENTS

[Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto](#) (OHOC) responds to the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing mental health and substance use issues in Toronto. It offers recommendations to be implemented over five years (2023-2028) to support the health of the entire Toronto population.

The recommended actions in OHOC are divided into the following seven strategic goals. For the full list of recommended actions, please see the final report.

1. Promote mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan.
 - a. Prevent and reduce harms and deaths related to substance use across the lifespan.
 - b. Reduce drug toxicity deaths caused by the unregulated drug supply and support those affected by the drug toxicity crisis.
2. Reduce harms and deaths associated with regulated drugs including alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products.
3. Expand access to the full continuum of high-quality, evidence-based and client-centred services to address mental health and/or substance use issues, including prevention, harm reduction and treatment supports.
4. Advance community safety and wellbeing for everyone.
5. Improve access to housing and other social determinants of health.
6. Support mentally healthy workplaces and optimize the mental health of workers.
7. Proactively identify and respond to emerging mental health and substance use issues.

OHOC Year One Priorities

The following are the OHOC implementation priorities for year one. The City of Toronto has already requested support from provincial and federal governments to help action these items:

1. Advocate for ongoing and sustainable funding for shelter services and increase funding for supportive housing to help individuals experiencing homelessness. Create more affordable housing, including supportive housing for people with complex mental health and/or substance use related needs.
2. Work with community partners and the provincial government to implement low-barrier crisis stabilization spaces for people with mental health and/or substance use related issues that operate 24 hours per day, seven days per week across the city as part of a full continuum of evidence-based services, treatment and wrap around supports.

3. Collaborate with first responders and hospitals to implement a coordination protocol that enhances the seamless transfer of individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance use crises to the most appropriate services.

4. Expand Toronto Community Crisis Service to be city-wide, as Toronto's fourth emergency service.

Implementation of the OHOC Strategy

A key guiding principle in the development of OHOC and its implementation is the meaningful inclusion of people with lived and living experience. The participation of people who use drugs and people with lived/living experience of mental health challenges and illnesses, as well as frontline service providers who work with these communities, is integral to the success of OHOC.

The successful implementation of OHOC will also rely on significant and ongoing collaboration across City Divisions, government partners, civil society, community stakeholders, as well as the implementation of other City strategies and actions taken by a range of health and social service providers.

As such, two advisory tables have been recommended to oversee the implementation of OHOC — (1) the Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy Interdivisional Table and (2) the OHOC Implementation Panel.

As directed by the Board of Health in April 2023, the Medical Officer of Health and the City Manager have convened and co-chair a Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy Interdivisional Table with leadership represented from relevant City Divisions, Commissions, Agencies, and Corporations. This table meets quarterly to ensure progress and accountability on recommendations relevant to specific City Divisions, and to ensure alignment across City Divisions.

Recommended Our Health, Our City Implementation Panel

To have meaningful inclusion of people who use drugs and people with lived/living experience of mental health challenges and illnesses, as well as frontline service providers who work with these communities to support the implementation of OHOC, the following composition for the OHOC Implementation Panel is recommended. A proposed terms of reference can be found in Attachment 1.

Mandate

It is recommended that the mandate of the OHOC Implementation Panel be to provide advice to help implement the recommendations outlined in the OHOC strategy.

OHOC Implementation Panel Chair

It is recommended that the Board of Health appoint a Director of the Board of Health to serve as the OHOC Implementation Panel Chair (the "Chair"). Leadership from a Board

of Health director will support the breadth and magnitude of implementing the OHOC strategy while also fostering accountability, community engagement, and intersectoral partnerships.

Membership

It is recommended that the OHOC Implementation Panel be comprised of the Chair, 12 members that will be appointed by the Board of Health, and 6 members from relevant Boards and City of Toronto Divisions.

Appointed members will sit on the panel for a 2.5-year term (i.e., half of the implementation cycle for OHOC), and until a successor is appointed. It is recommended that vacancies be filled at the Chair's discretion.

Public members of the OHOC Implementation Panel:

- 6 people with lived and living experience of substance use and/or mental health challenges and/or illnesses, including at least 1 youth representative.
- 6 representatives from the substance use and/or mental health sectors, including community agency leadership, health care providers, and researchers.

The above also includes those from, and those working with, priority communities facing mental health and substance use inequities as outlined in OHOC, including people experiencing homelessness, seniors, African, Caribbean and Black communities, women, youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Other recommended members of the OHOC Implementation Panel:

It is also recommended that the OHOC Implementation Panel include individuals invited by the Medical Officer of Health from the following Boards and City of Toronto Divisions, Commissions, Agencies and Corporations:

- 6 representatives from: Social Development, Finance and Administration, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Toronto Employment and Social Services, Toronto District School Board, and Toronto Police Service.

Toronto Public Health may bring additional membership recommendations to the Board of Health for consideration and nomination to meet the evolving implementation needs of the panel.

Recruitment process for membership

It is recommended that TPH run a recruitment process for membership to the OHOC Implementation panel during the second quarter of 2024.

TPH will invite the public and stakeholders to apply for consideration. TPH will also extend an invitation to previous members of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel to apply.

TPH staff will provide an initial review of the applications to develop a list of potential candidates. Candidates will be considered whose lived experiences and expertise align with fulfilling the vision, mission, principles, and goals of OHOC. This will include evaluating whether applicants' reported skills, networks, and experience (lived and/or professional) can help support the work of the OHOC Implementation Panel and if the applicants have relevant experience that they can leverage to support equity, diversity, and inclusion on the Panel.

It is recommended that an assessment team comprised of the OHOC Implementation Panel Chair, the Medical Officer of Health, and a member of the Board of Health be struck to review candidates and select nominees for appointment. Nominated candidates will be brought to the Board of Health for consideration and appointment in the third quarter of 2024.

Indigenous Engagement

The City of Toronto is committed to decolonization, reconciliation, and collaborating with Indigenous partners to prevent substance use related harms and promote mental health. [In January 2024](#), the Board of Health requested 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. As such, the development of Indigenous-specific mental health and substance use related recommendations for Toronto is currently underway with an engagement process that operates independently from the OHOC Implementation Panel described above.

Reporting and decision-making

It is recommended that the OHOC Implementation Panel report to the Board of Health annually, with additional reporting as necessary.

It is recommended that OHOC Implementation panel not be a consensus-based table. All advice from the panel will be shared with the Board of Health.

Next Steps

Conclusion of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel

The mandate of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel was to provide oversight and strategic advice to the implementation of recommendations in the Toronto Drug Strategy and the Toronto Overdose Action Plan (2017 and 2019 update). This mandate has now been incorporated into the Our Health, Our City strategy.

It is recommended that the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel be concluded and replaced with the OHOC Implementation Panel outlined in this report.

Timeline to Initiating the OHOC Implementation Panel

The Medical Officer of Health has been directed to report back to the Board of Health on the progress of *OHOC in the* fourth quarter of 2024. *This report recommends that* the Board of Health direct the Medical Officer of Health to initiate the process outlined above to recruit potential members of the OHOC Implementation Panel for Board of Health consideration in the third quarter of 2024. The goal is to have the OHOC Implementation panel established in time to support the annual OHOC Progress Report expected at the Board of Health by the end of 2024.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Terms of Reference