

Toronto Urban Health Fund - Indigenous Funding Stream

Date: October 8, 2024

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF) provides funding opportunities for not-for-profit community-based organizations in Toronto to address HIV prevention and substance use through one-year and three-year projects. The TUHF includes a dedicated Indigenous funding stream for Indigenous-led initiatives, launched in 2019. In May 2024, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to evaluate and reset the TUHF Indigenous funding stream, in keeping with Toronto Public Health commitments to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

This report provides an update and makes recommendations for an interim process for the 2025 one-year cycle of the TUHF Indigenous funding stream. In doing so, unallocated 2024 and 2025 TUHF Indigenous funding stream funds will be able to reach the Indigenous community in the short-term, while Toronto Public Health continues its direction to evaluate and reset the funding stream. This interim approach considers feedback received from Indigenous service providers regarding barriers to applying for TUHF funds in the current parameters of the TUHF Indigenous funding stream. Toronto Public Health is in the early stages of initiating this work, which will be done in collaboration with Indigenous service providers, with the aim to launch before the end of 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health authorize the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements totalling \$240,000 with Indigenous-led organizations in 2025 for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous funding stream.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding of \$240 thousand to enter into agreements with Indigenous-led organizations in 2025 for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous funding stream will be included in the base of Toronto Public Health's 2025 Operating Budget Submission.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with this program to be considered along with other priorities in future budget processes.

DECISION HISTORY

In May 2024, the Board of Health adopted item HL13.3, 2024 Toronto Urban Health Fund Allocations and Review Process. In doing so, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to evaluate and reset the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous funding stream using an Indigenous-led approach to redesign, in keeping with principles of Indigenous-self determination and the City of Toronto's commitments to Truth and Reconciliation.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.HL13.3>

In July 2023, the Board of Health adopted item HL5.3, 2023 Toronto Urban Health Fund Allocations and Review Process. In doing so, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to review of the Toronto Urban Health Fund program.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL5.3>

In April 2022, City Council adopted the City of Toronto: Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2032 which sets out a 10-year strategy that is a guide for advancing truth, justice and reconciliation with Indigenous People in the city of Toronto.

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

In July 2019, the Board of Health adopted item HL8.3, Toronto Urban Health Fund Funding Priorities and Objectives for the Years 2020 to 2026, and directed the Medical Officer of Health to include \$420,000 for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous funding stream in Toronto Public Health's 2020 Operating Budget Submission.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.HL8.3>

COMMENTS

Background: Toronto's Indigenous Health Strategy

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 (now Ontario Health).

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

- Health plans are developed with Indigenous peoples as full partners.
- 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.
- Care is planned to be responsive to community needs and is appropriate, efficient, effective, and high quality at both systems and interpersonal levels.
- Dedicated resources and funding for Indigenous health programs and services will support a coordinated and collaborative system.
- Toronto Public Health and all partners in the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy acknowledge the importance of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous communities caring for themselves.

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 [2SLGBTQQIA+ 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 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, and in all activities with Indigenous service providers, Toronto Public Health is prioritizing Indigenous self-determination.

Background: Toronto Urban Health Fund

The TUHF is a long-standing program administered by Toronto Public Health with a mandate to build individual and community capacity to address the dual public health challenges of HIV transmission and substance use. Toronto City Council established the AIDS and Drug Community Investment Programs in the early 1990s to support community-based interventions to address the AIDS crisis and the rise in substance use-related deaths among youth.

In 2014, the programs were consolidated into the TUHF program and has since been managed by Toronto Public Health, using cost-shared funding between the provincial Ministry of Health and the City of Toronto, in alignment with the Ontario Public Health Standards. The program continues to provide one-year and three-year project funding to not-for-profit organizations that deliver culturally, socially, and linguistically relevant interventions to communities at risk, with an annual budget of \$4.2 million.

In July 2019, as directed by the Board of Health, the TUHF Indigenous funding stream was established to recognize Indigenous worldviews and approaches to addressing HIV and substance use. As a dedicated funding stream, it aimed to address the unique health barriers and inequities faced by Indigenous communities in accessing funding. The Indigenous funding stream complements the existing three TUHF funding streams: Child and Youth Resiliency, Harm Reduction, and Sexual Transmission of HIV. As a part of this direction, \$420,000 of the annual TUHF budget was dedicated to this new funding stream, including opportunities for both one and three-year projects.

Interim Approach for 2024/2025 One-Year Grant Disbursement

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the implementation of the TUHF Indigenous stream. There were limited opportunities to build and sustain relationships with Indigenous communities. As well, staff availability to support evaluation and quality improvement to the TUHF program was constrained by the pandemic response.

Emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic provided staff the opportunity to connect with Indigenous service providers and receive their input on TUHF. Indigenous service providers raised concerns that the program and application process does not adequately reflect the public health needs of urban Indigenous communities in Toronto. Staff also received feedback that service providers experienced barriers in the current application and reporting processes, and therefore opted not to apply for TUHF funding. As reported to the Board of Health in May 2024, TUHF did not receive any applications for the 2024 one-year Indigenous funding stream. This input has informed an interim approach for the 2025 one-year grant disbursement.

For the 2025 one-year funding cycle of TUHF, Toronto Public Health recommends an interim, revised application process for the Indigenous funding stream. After accounting for allocated funds associated with projects completing their second and third year of their three-year projects, unallocated funds totalling \$240,000 for the 2024 and 2025 funding cycles remained. The proposed budget for the recommended revised, interim approach for 2025 will be \$240,000.

TPH plans to launch this revised, interim disbursement process by the end of 2024. Under the existing authority of the Medical Officer of Health to issue TUHF funds, eligible applications will focus on areas such as HIV transmission, substance use, vaccine-preventable diseases, and sexual health initiatives, aiming to better meet the unique needs of Indigenous communities in Toronto.

In addition, TPH is conducting a process review aimed at reducing administrative barriers in the overall TUHF application process with the intention to increase applications by more Indigenous and other service providers. Findings from the TUHF process review will be reported separately as part of the overall review of the TUHF.

Toronto Public Health Strategic Impact

This report advances the work of the [City of Toronto Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2032](#), Strategic Action 13 that commits Toronto Public Health to supporting indigenous health and well-being.

This report also advances the work of the [Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan 2024-2028](#) with a focus on the following priorities and objectives:

Priority 2: Promote health and well-being across the lifespan, including meeting the objectives of reducing the burden of chronic and infectious diseases across the lifespan and prioritizing effective interventions for children and youth.

Priority 3: Promote the conditions to support positive mental health and reduce the harms of substance use, including meeting the objectives of delivering public health interventions that respond to the drug toxicity epidemic and delivering public health interventions that promote mental health.

Priority 4: Advocate to advance health equity, including meeting the objectives of collaborating with partners across multiple sectors to address local health needs.

Future State

In the long-term, Toronto Public Health will use the lessons learned from this interim approach to continue to improve the TUHF Indigenous funding stream. Toronto Public Health is in the early stages of initiating this work, which will be done in collaboration with Indigenous service providers.

CONTACT

Dr. Na-Koshie Lamptey, Deputy Medical Officer of Health, Decision Support, Surveillance, and Immunization, 416-338-8402, Na-Koshie.Lamptey@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Medical Officer of Health