

## **Indigenous Wellness Committee: Update**

**Date:** March 18, 2025

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Acting Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

---

In April 2023, the Medical Officer of Health provided an [update](#) to the Board of Health on developing a mental health and addictions strategy for the City of Toronto. At that time, the Board of Health recommended that the Medical Officer of Health co-develop a parallel strategy with Indigenous organizations and communities to ensure that approaches and actions support the unique needs of urban Indigenous people living in Toronto.

In response to this recommendation, Toronto Public Health staff co-hosted two Indigenous Wellness Roundtables with the Toronto Aboriginal Social Supports Council in October 2023, to determine next steps with Indigenous organizations. The main recommendation was to establish an Indigenous Wellness Committee, co-led by Toronto Public Health and Indigenous organizations.

This report provides a progress update on the work of the Indigenous Wellness Committee and includes recommendations to the Board of Health for continued communication about Toronto Public Health's Indigenous Health Strategy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

The Acting Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report back to the Board with an update on Toronto Public Health's Indigenous Health Strategy progress by Q1 2026.
2. The Board of Health request the Acting Medical Officer of Health to share this report with the City of Toronto Indigenous Affairs Office and Social Development, Finance and Administration Division to demonstrate how the work of the Indigenous Wellness Committee aligns with the City of Toronto Reconciliation Action Plan's Strategic Action #13.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

---

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

## DECISION HISTORY

---

On January 15, 2024, the Medical Officer of Health provided an update to the Board of Health on the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy that was originally launched in 2016. The update included actions to advance Indigenous health with Indigenous organizations and communities in Toronto. The Board of Health adopted HL9.3 “Actions to Advance Indigenous Health” and 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.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.HL9.3>

On April 17, 2023, the Board of Health received an update on the development of a mental health and addictions strategy for Toronto. At this meeting, the Board of Health adopted HL3.1 “Developing a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for Toronto.” The Board requested the Medical Officer of Health to undertake an Indigenous-specific and distinctions-based approach so that the Toronto Mental Health and Addictions Strategy could be co-developed in true partnership with Indigenous organizations and communities to support the unique needs of urban Indigenous people living in Toronto.

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

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 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>

## COMMENTS

---

### Background

In April 2023, the Board of Health requested that the Medical Officer of Health work with local Indigenous service providers to co-develop an Indigenous mental health, substance use, and addictions strategy. Building on this request, in October 2023 Toronto Public Health (TPH) co-hosted a two-day roundtable with the Toronto

Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) on Indigenous wellness, to which all Indigenous-led service providers in the city were invited.

Several recommendations emerged from the two-day Indigenous Wellness Roundtables, 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 TPH being transparent with Indigenous service providers about its activities to enhance Indigenous health and wellness; and a request for TPH to establish an Indigenous Wellness Committee that includes all Indigenous-led service providers in the city.

At the two-day Indigenous Wellness Roundtables, Indigenous organizations agreed that the five priority actions to be addressed by the Indigenous Wellness Committee and co-developed Indigenous Wellness Action Plan were: rapid access to addictions medicine, funding, supportive housing, Indigenous cultural safety training across health and social service providers, and mental health supports.

In April 2024, TPH staff launched the Indigenous Wellness Committee 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.

### **Key success factors of the Indigenous Wellness Committee**

**1. Regular occurrence of meetings:** The Indigenous Wellness Committee convenes monthly to ensure ongoing collaboration, engagement, and progress. These regular meetings provide a structured space for Indigenous service providers to share insights, discuss emerging challenges, and align efforts to support culturally grounded, community-led initiatives. The committee's regular engagement fosters a sense of collective responsibility, strengthens partnerships, and ensures that Indigenous perspectives remain central to planning and implementation.

**2. Importance of a Local Indigenous Facilitator:** A local Indigenous facilitator plays a critical role in ensuring the process is culturally relevant, trusted, and effective. Their deep knowledge of the community's cultural, historical, and social contexts ensures that discussions and outcomes are meaningful and grounded in Indigenous worldviews. They bring to their work a two-eyed-seeing approach, given their extensive understanding of western research methodologies. As a trusted figure, they foster open dialogue, respect Indigenous knowledge and healing practices, and help bridge the perspectives of service providers, community members, and policymakers. Their presence empowers Indigenous leadership, strengthens advocacy efforts, and creates a safe and inclusive space for addressing sensitive topics like mental health and substance use. By incorporating localized expertise, the facilitation process is better equipped to navigate systemic barriers, intergenerational trauma, and service gaps for development of sustainable, community-driven solutions.

**3. Indigenous service providers:** Currently there are 16 Indigenous service providers, including members from both TASSC and non-TASSC organizations, that actively participate in the Indigenous Wellness Committee. Together, they contribute to the co-

development of the Action Plan, with a dedicated focus on mental health and substance use. These providers are:

1. 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations
2. Aboriginal Legal Services
3. Auduzhe Mino Neswinong
4. Call Auntie Clinic
5. Eshkiniigjik Naandwechigegamig (ENAGB)
6. Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
7. Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT)
8. Native Men's Residence (NA-ME-RES),
9. Ontario Aboriginal HIV | AIDS Strategy (Oahas)
10. Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto
11. Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation
12. Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society
13. Toronto & York Region Métis Council (TYRMC)
14. Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
15. Tungasuvvingat Inuit Urban Inuit Knowledge Centre (T.I)
16. Ojibiikaan Indigenous Cultural Network

**4. Indigenous Spaces:** To date, all Indigenous Wellness Committee meetings have been held in a variety of spaces offered by Indigenous service providers. Where appropriate, meetings included Indigenous caterers for nourishment during meetings. This purposeful approach enhances a sense of belonging and connection for committee members and helps to uphold principles of cultural safety and self-determination.

**5. Indigenous Elder Presence:** Having an Indigenous Elder present at meetings is vital for providing cultural guidance, spiritual leadership, and advice rooted in traditional knowledge. Elders within the Indigenous community are respected and trusted keepers of knowledge and stories. They foster cultural safety, reinforce identity, and ensure respect for Indigenous values and protocols. They mediate conflicts, support intergenerational learning, and help integrate Indigenous language and traditional teachings into decision-making. TPH's Indigenous Health Team arranges for the presence of an Elder to share an opening and closing to ground meetings in Indigenous tradition.

**6. Indigenous Framework - Miikaans Method:** The Miikaans Method is an Indigenous cultural methodology and approach. It follows a non-linear process that prioritizes relationship-building and collaborative development so that organizations are actively engaged in co-creating the framework. This method, developed by the Indigenous Wellness Committee facilitator, integrates traditional teachings into a strategic planning wheel. The four quadrants of the planning wheel are: vision – where we are going, knowledge – what are our stories, reason – analysis, action – creating a plan with key objectives. These roughly align with the planning, data collection, data analysis and plan development of a more western approach. This method is being successfully applied to the Indigenous Wellness Committee meeting activities.

## **Committee Progress to Date**

**The “Reason” Phase:** The Committee is currently in the Reason phase of the Miikaans Method where the Vision is being critically analyzed alongside the data and insights collected during the Knowledge phase to identify key priorities and strategic focus areas. By examining the data there are patterns, gaps, and opportunities that are uncovered. Through this analysis, essential questions are raised and addressed: What is the overarching vision we aim to achieve? Where should our efforts be concentrated to create the greatest impact? Who are the critical stakeholders needed to ensure the success of this work?

**Honoring Collective Timelines:** The co-development of the Indigenous Action Plan is guided by key principles, including: respect for Indigenous knowledge and protocols; building trust and relationships; meaningful community engagement; Indigenous cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches; identifying holistic and sustainable solutions; and ensuring alignment with Indigenous community values and priorities. This process requires a deliberate and thoughtful approach. Moving too quickly risks overlooking diverse voices. TPH also recognizes that Indigenous leaders’ work on the Indigenous Wellness Committee takes time from the operations and services of their respective organizations. Thus, the process is guided by the timelines and availability of the Indigenous community.

**Alignment with TPH’s Indigenous Health Strategy Goals:** While significant progress has been made towards the co-development of an Indigenous Wellness Action Plan, there have been notable broader impacts, which align with TPH’s overall Indigenous Health Strategy goals. During the process, TPH’s Indigenous Health Team has engaged all Indigenous service providers in Toronto, leading to strengthened partnerships. This has allowed for opportunities for knowledge-sharing and collaboration on other critical public health initiatives. TPH has heard from Indigenous partners that its commitment to transparency and respect for Indigenous self-determination, as well as continued participation by the Medical Officer of Health in the Indigenous Wellness Committee, has increased the community’s confidence in TPH and its working relationship with Indigenous partners.

## **The City of Toronto’s Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities**

In April 2022, City Council adopted the City’s first Reconciliation Action Plan (2022-2032), developed over three years with guidance from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community members, organizations, Elders, Knowledge Carriers, youth, Indigenous employees, and City divisions and agencies, including TPH. Led by the City’s Indigenous Affairs Office, the plan reflects the City’s commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination.

As part of this commitment, the Indigenous Wellness Committee advances Action #13: Support Indigenous Health and Well-being by fostering a network of Indigenous service providers, traditional Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and healers.

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.

### **Next Steps**

The Indigenous Wellness Committee will continue to co-develop the Indigenous Wellness Action Plan guided by the Miikaans Method, work with Indigenous partners to develop an implementation plan for the co-developed Indigenous Wellness Action Plan and identify potential resource solutions to take the Indigenous Wellness Action Plan from development to implementation.

### **CONTACT**

---

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

### **SIGNATURE**

---

Dr. Na-Koshie Lamptey  
Acting Medical Officer of Health