

## **Toronto Population Health Status Indicators: A tool to advance health equity**

**Date:** June 19, 2025

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Acting Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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Toronto Public Health is responsible for [assessing and reporting on the health status of the city's population](#) as mandated under the Ontario Public Health Standards. This information can be used by Toronto Public Health, other City of Toronto divisions, health care partners, social service agencies, and other public and private sector organizations to identify targeted interventions to improve health outcomes for residents. In 2024, Toronto Public Health released its [Strategic Plan 2024-2028](#), which included a priority to "*Advocate to advance health equity*".

This report provides an update on the [Population Health Status Indicators \(PHSI\) dashboard](#), which is an initiative to provide population health information to advance health equity. Identification of health inequities requires characterization of patterns and trends in disaggregated population-level data. The PHSI dashboard was originally launched in 2019 and was refreshed and updated in 2024. The dashboard currently includes over 100 indicators across seven public health topics. Trends are shown over time, by geography and by available socio-demographic characteristics that can include age, sex, ethno-racial identity, and income groupings. These indicators can help Toronto Public Health and partners identify, monitor and respond to health and social inequities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Acting Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to continue to engage in knowledge translation activities with City divisions, health care partners, social service agencies and others who would benefit from the information on the Population Health Status Indicators dashboard, including future data refreshes.

2. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to explore a community data governance framework for Toronto Public Health, in alignment with the City of Toronto's Data for Equity Strategy.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its July 8, 2024 meeting, the Board of Health adopted Toronto Public Health's Strategic Plan 2024-2028 which included a priority to "Advocate to advance health equity".

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.HL14.1>

At its February 21, 2023 meeting, the Board of Health adopted Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile, which provided an overview of Toronto's demographics, and updated insights into available public health indicators affecting Torontonians:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL2.3>".

## **COMMENTS**

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### **Introduction**

Toronto Public Health is responsible for assessing and reporting on the health status of the city's population. This information can be used by Toronto Public Health, other divisions in the City of Toronto, health care partners, social service agencies, and other public and private sector organizations to identify impactful interventions to improve health outcomes for residents. Collecting and using population health and surveillance data are requirements under the Ministry of Health's [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability \(OPHS\)](#), to ensure that local public health programs and services reflect current and evolving population health needs.

Toronto Public Health provides population health information in various internal and public summaries, reports and interactive dashboards. A large scale public facing report that provided a look at the overall health of the population, just as the City was emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, was the [Population Health Profile](#). This was presented to the Board of Health in 2023 and provided an overview of Toronto's demographics, and updated insights into available public health indicators affecting Torontonians. This report did not include health information by sub-Toronto geography. Subsequently, Toronto Public Health prioritized analysis of population health data by geography and socio-demographic variables where available, in a refreshed Population

Health Status Indicators (PHSI) dashboard. This tool provides publicly available stratified data to facilitate inclusive program planning and policymaking to advance health equity.

## **Development of PHSI**

In 2019, in collaboration with a long-standing partner, the [Ontario Community Health Profiles Partnership](#), Toronto Public Health moved to reporting health indicators in a dashboard format with the intent to regularly refresh data. This work was paused during the COVID-19 response.

Building on the indicator review completed in 2019, Toronto Public Health program leads and other divisional staff were consulted about the key indicators to include in the refreshed dashboard. An extensive list of indicators was reviewed against defined criteria that included: whether an indicator is used in Toronto Public Health programming; is of public health interest; has data available at a sub-Toronto geographic level; includes stratifications by demographics such as race; whether the data are already reported publicly on a partner website; and the recency of data.

Selected health indicators are presented in a similar format, using consistent analytical methods and geographic boundaries. Additionally, all data presented on the dashboard are downloadable to a spreadsheet, consistent with the [City's Open Data policy](#).

From March to August 2024, Toronto Public Health consulted with several organizations representing and serving equity-seeking groups, academic/policy/research health equity leaders, and City of Toronto staff. These consultations were used to inform how the socio-demographic data, particularly ethno-racial and immigration data, are displayed in a non-stigmatizing and useful way in the dashboard.

Community partners expressed interest in engaging on future PHSI knowledge translation activities. They also identified the need to strengthen accountability, transparency and responsiveness to diverse community needs. This is in alignment with the community data governance work currently led by the City of Toronto's Data for Equity Strategy.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, data on different health topics were updated sequentially. Meetings and presentations were provided to Toronto Public Health program teams, other City staff and community groups. By February 2025, the PHSI dashboard was completely refreshed to include over 100 indicators across seven public health topic areas.

Toronto Public Health will continue to refresh data on the PHSI dashboard as new data sources become available. Additional topic areas and new indicators will be added, as these become available.

## How PHSI can be used

PHSI indicators are shown over time, by geography and by socio-demographic characteristics. They can help identify, monitor and respond to health and social inequities. Providing stratified data allows for city staff, communities and agencies to identify inequities and barriers to health, and tailor plans for programs and services to improve health equity.

For example, PHSI data can be used by a community agency applying for a grant as they would have access to data that compares their client population to other local populations. Indicators can also inform City staff considering actions necessary for targeted programming. Within Toronto Public Health, PHSIs have been used in annual service planning to improve the reach of programs and target programming for neighbourhoods and equity-deserving communities.

## Sources of PHSI Data

Data are from health administration databases and population-level surveys that are available to Toronto Public Health. While health administration databases do not yet collect data on demographic variables such as race and immigration, they often support more granular geographic analyses. In contrast, data from population-level surveys represent subsamples of the population and are often not reportable at a neighbourhood level. They do, however, collect additional socio-demographic information such as race. In both instances, there is a time lag between data collection and when Toronto Public Health can access the data for analysis.

## Promotion of PHSI

Promotion of the PHSI dashboard has been guided by a comprehensive communication plan. To date, communication has included messaging within Toronto Public Health, to the Board of Health, to other City divisions and to community and health partners via listserves, electronic mailing lists and through numerous social media posts.

Of note, in 2024, PHSI ranked in the top 15 visited City websites and moved into the top 10 in March 2025. Toronto Public Health plans to continue offering tailored trainings and consultations throughout 2025. As the PHSI dashboard continues to be refreshed, updates will be communicated to the public and stakeholders and strengthened through collaborations with internal and external partners on knowledge translation activities.

## Toronto Public Health Strategic Impact

In 2024, Toronto Public Health released its [Strategic Plan 2024-2028, which included](#) to "*Advocate to advance health equity*" as a key priority. This report provides an update on actions and advances the three objectives under this priority:

- a. Assess and report on health inequities and population health needs.
- b. Collaborate with partners across multiple sectors to address local health needs.
- c. Share evidence, advocate and collaborate to influence actions that impact population health.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Acting Medical Officer of Health