

City of Toronto Downtown Community Outreach Response & Engagement (CORE) Program

July 7, 2025

Board of Health

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Kelly Skinner, Chief Superintendent, Toronto Police Service



A Health-Led Response to Complex Needs

- The Yonge-Dundas (Sankofa Square) area is experiencing complex challenges related to the drug toxicity epidemic and chronic homelessness
- People who use substances and are experiencing homelessness or are street involved often struggle building connections to health services
- In response, Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Police Service launched the Downtown Community Outreach Response and Engagement (CORE) Program as a one-year pilot in December 2024
- This joint initiative:
 - Delivers proactive street-based, health-led outreach to individuals not connected to services and/or who face barriers to existing services
 - Promotes community safety through early, proactive engagement and prevention
 - Enables Public Health Nurses to safely reach individuals

Case Study: Victoria IMPACT Program

Since 2007, Island Health's Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team of health care professionals has included police officers to engage individuals with serious mental illness.

The program demonstrates how integrated, health-led crisis teams can reduce police-only interactions, improve safety, and improve outcomes for people with complex needs.

UVic Study Findings, 2017–2024

- Reduced criminal-related police interactions, including for racialized clients
- Fewer "emotionally disturbed person calls" and less disruptive public behaviour
- Increased mental health-related responses (e.g., wellness checks)
- Greater safety for staff, enabling outreach to higher-risk clients
- Lower risk of criminalizing mental health behaviours

Downtown CORE Program Development

Program Design Development

- Engagement with health and social service providers, local businesses and community members
- Engagement with other Canadian municipalities implementing similar multidisciplinary outreach models (e.g., London, Windsor, Victoria, Hamilton)

Strategic Alignment

- *Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy*
- *SafeTO: Toronto's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan*
- *Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan*
- *Toronto Police Service Goals*

Ongoing Engagement

- Regular coordination with local service providers and outreach teams
- Collaboration with the Downtown Yonge BIA to inform program implementation and engagement with local businesses

Downtown CORE Program Details

CORE: Community Outreach Response and Engagement

- A collaboration between Toronto Public Health and Toronto Police Service
- Voluntary, trauma-informed, and relationship-based
- Proactive engagement based on observed need, not accessible through 911 or 211
- Operational daily from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Team Structure

- Public Health Nurses, Nurse Practitioner, and Police Constables
- A Nurse Practitioner, TPH Manager, and TPS Supervisors

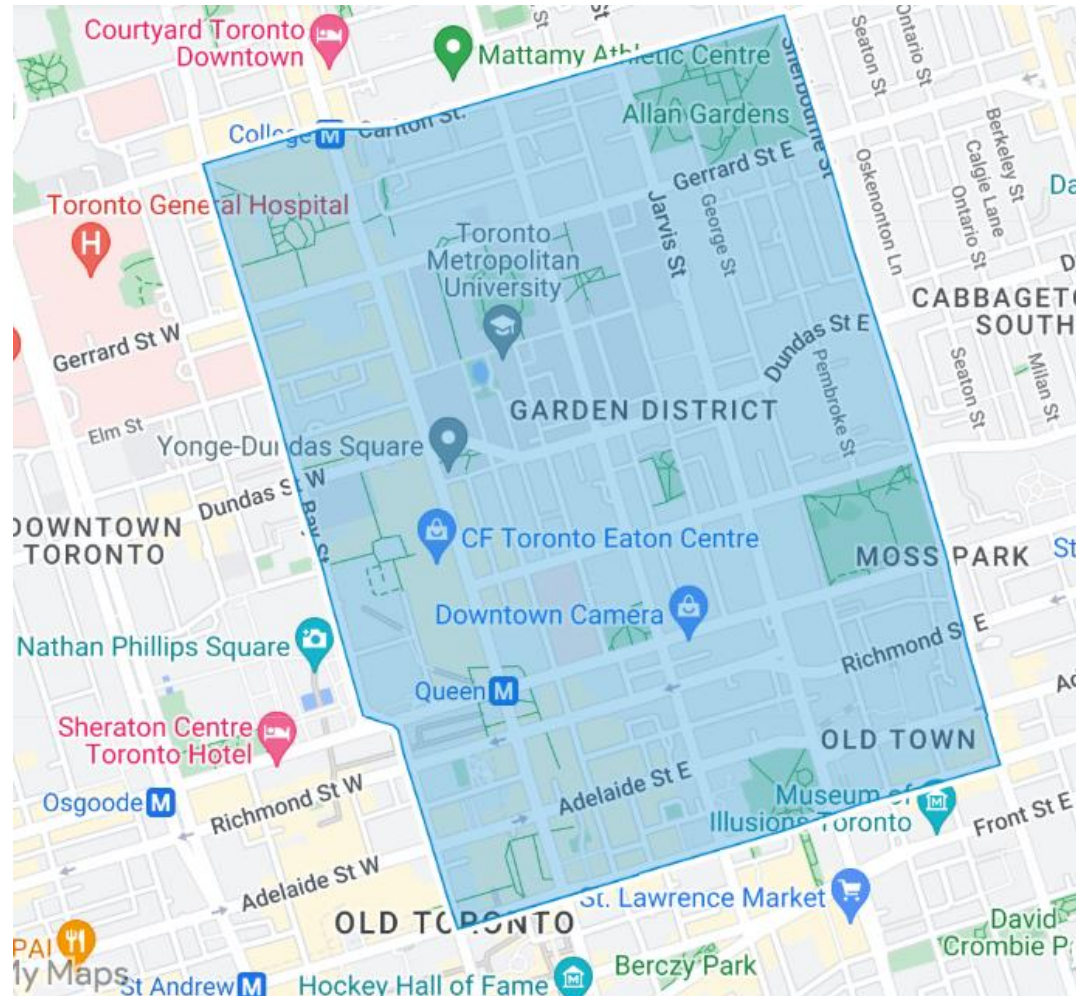
Oversight

- An advisory committee co-chaired by TPH and TPS, and includes City divisions and external agencies



Program Boundaries

- North to College/Carlton St.
- West to Bay St.
- South to King St.
- East to Sherbourne St.



How Downtown CORE Works

Street-based outreach to:

- Proactively connect with individuals experiencing homelessness
- Address public safety through non-enforcement engagement

Key Services:

- Wellness checks, health education, and distribution of supplies
- Short-term case management
- Referrals to housing, primary care, treatment, and other services



Service Metrics and Impact



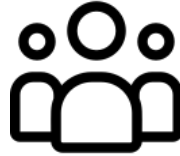
3,563

Client engagements



29

Responses to
clients in distress



240

Client initiated
engagements



142

Case files opened



75

Business
engagements



437

Articles of warm
clothing distributed



1,486

Food items
provided



671

Harm reduction
supplies distributed



243

Primary care
services provided



745

Psychosocial
supports provided

*Data for December 17, 2024 to June 1, 2025

Client Testimonials

“I was skeptical about this program, but after meeting you and seeing the effort you put into helping me, I want to say thank you”

“My daughter takes time to trust people, but she has spoken great things about you, I was looking forward to meeting you”

“I’m so glad I talked to you. Ever since I did I am sober. I have not used drugs again and I don't want to move back. I want to organise my life again, get my IDs, get a job and go back to school.”

Client expressed gratitude for the team's prompt response and care. She was visibly emotional, with tears in her eyes, and said to her friend, “I have heroes who saved my life”

Program Evaluation and Next Steps

- TPH and TPS are engaged in independent evaluations of the pilot
- An internal TPH evaluation is underway to understand:
 - Impact on meeting clients' health and psychosocial needs
 - Whether the program delivered on its intended goals
 - Enablers and barriers to service delivery and client care
- Toronto Public Health will report back to the Board of Health in Q1, 2026 with findings and seek direction on the future of the program