

## **Toronto Urban Health Fund: Grant Program Review Findings and Next Steps**

**Date:** November 7, 2025

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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The Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF) administers \$4.2 million in funding to organizations: 1) A community grant program with a budget of \$3.3 million, and 2) Purchase of service agreements with five organizations to deliver sexual health programs and services totalling \$0.9 million.

The TUHF grant program provides grant funding to grassroots and community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver culturally appropriate, evidence-based HIV and substance use prevention programs and services to underserved groups.

On July 4, 2023, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to review the TUHF grant program and consult with stakeholders to ensure that recommendations are community- and data-informed. This report summarizes the findings from Toronto Public Health's (TPH) review of the TUHF grant program.

Implementing many of the findings from the program review will require additional consideration, planning and stakeholder consultation and require sufficient notice to impacted program stakeholders. TPH will return to the Board of Health in 2027 with proposed changes to the TUHF grant program for the 2028 funding cycle.

While TPH prepares to implement the findings from the Program Review, TPH is proposing an interim approach: 1) streamline the grants administration process for the 2026 and 2027 funding cycles, and 2) fund adaptations or extensions of currently funded one- and three-year projects that are responding to community needs and were approved by the Board of Health in 2024 and 2025. TPH will recommend adapted or extended projects for 2026 and 2027 funding to the Board of Health in Q2, 2026.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health endorse the interim approach, as outlined in this report, for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Grant Program for the 2026 and 2027 funding cycles while changes to the Toronto Urban Health Fund Grant Program are considered for the 2028 funding cycle.
2. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report to the Board of Health in 2027 with proposed changes to the Toronto Urban Health Fund Grant Program for the 2028 funding cycle.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

Any financial impacts of the interim approach on 2026 Budget to adapt or extend 2024 and 2025 approved projects for the 2026 and 2027 funding cycles will be reported back to the Board of Health in Q2 2026.

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

## DECISION HISTORY

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On June 3, 2025, the Board of Health authorized the Acting Medical Officer of Health to allocate \$645.4 thousand in 2025 for seven (7) one-year projects and \$1,679.2 thousand to fifteen (15) three-year projects to implement year three services in 2025. The Board of Health also directed the Medical Officer of Health to consider including intimate partner violence, youth vaping, and youth consumption of energy drinks as priority areas for the Toronto Urban Health Fund as part of the program review. [Agenda Item History - 2025.HL25.3](#)

On May 27, 2024, the Board of Health authorized the Medical Officer of Health to allocate \$653.4 thousand for seven (7) one-year projects. [Agenda Item History - 2024.HL13.3](#)

On May 21 and 22, 2025, City Council adopted a report from the Board of Health on purchase of service agreements awarded and executed by the Medical Officer of Health for 2025. [Agenda Item History - 2025.HL24.3](#)

On July 4, 2023, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to review the TUHF program, consult with stakeholders to ensure that recommendations are

community- and data-informed, and report back to the Board of Health with recommendations ahead of the next 3-year funding cycle.

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

On March 20, 2017, the Board of Health considered a policy update on the feasibility of restricting sales and marketing of caffeinated energy drinks to youth in Toronto.

[Agenda Item History - 2017.HL18.2](#)

## COMMENTS

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The Toronto Urban Health Fund administers \$4.2 million in funding to organizations: 1) A community grant program with a budget of \$3.3 million, and 2) Purchase of service agreements with five organizations to deliver sexual health programs and services with a total budget of \$0.9 million.

### Overview of Toronto Urban Health Fund Grant Program

The Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF) was created in 2014 through the consolidation of the City of Toronto's former AIDS and Drug Community Investment Programs, which were administered by Toronto Public Health (TPH). TUHF provides grant funding to grassroots<sup>1</sup> and community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver culturally appropriate, evidence-based HIV and substance use prevention programs and services to marginalized and hard-to-reach groups who experience disproportionate risk and face barriers to conventional public health services.

TUHF's grants are geared to one-year pilot or needs assessment projects and three-year demonstration projects with a focus on innovation and scaling effective interventions. TUHF has four funding streams which advance public health outcomes: 1) child and youth resiliency, 2) harm reduction, 3) HIV prevention through sexual transmission and 4) culturally based Indigenous practices. These funding priorities are informed by the *Ontario Public Health Standard (OPHS)* priorities of prevention and control of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, substance use prevention, and harm reduction services, as well as Toronto's local surveillance data. TUHF funded projects complement TPH's sexual health, substance use prevention and harm reduction programs and services. TUHF's funding framework is aligned with the City of Toronto's Community Grants Policy.

The application process involves two phases: an Expression of Interest for eligibility screening followed by a proposal submission by invitation, which is reviewed by a Community-member Review Panel composed of community representatives and people with lived experience. The Community Review Panel recommends projects for funding to the Medical Officer of Health, who then recommends projects for funding to the Board of Health.

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<sup>1</sup> Organization types are classified by annual revenue: Grassroots (<\$1m), Small (\$1-5m), Mid-size (\$5-10m), Large (>\$10m).

TUHF projects are required to collect and apply data for planning, evaluation, and reporting to maintain transparency and fiscal responsibility. TPH provides knowledge and skill building support to CBOs to increase their capacity to deliver successful projects and meet funding requirements.

## **Review of the Toronto Urban Health Fund Grant Program**

On July 4, 2023, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to review the TUHF program and consult with stakeholders to ensure that recommendations are community- and data-informed, in response to declining application submissions and fewer applications approved for funding in recent funding cycles. The review which occurred from 2023 to 2025 provided an opportunity to examine TUHF's funding priorities, emerging priorities as requested by the Board of Health, current funding framework, grant administration processes and program capacity.

TPH's program review methodology examined local surveillance data on HIV, drug overdoses, substance use and mental health indicators and program data. Evidence on effective community health interventions and public health granting models and practices was also explored.

TPH consulted with TUHF Review Panel community members, federal, provincial and other City grant programs, and program staff. Consultation with CBOs representing agencies which applied, did not apply, were awarded and were declined TUHF funding was also conducted. A process improvement evaluation of the grant administrative processes and a systematic program assessment were also conducted to examine efficiency, evidence, impact on public health, risks, mandate and emerging public health issues.

The purchase of service agreements for sexual health programs, were not in scope for this review. The review of the TUHF Indigenous funding stream was also not included in this report and will be reported in Q1 2026 as part of the TPH Indigenous Health Strategy update.

## **Findings from TUHF Grant Program Review**

The following key themes emerged from the program review:

- HIV disproportionately affects equity-deserving populations (e.g., newcomers, trans women, gay and bisexual men who have sex with men (gbMSM), African, Caribbean, and Black communities, Indigenous communities, and people who use drugs) who experience stigma, discrimination, and structural barriers accessing health and other services. In Toronto, HIV rates are highest in the downtown core.
- Reducing substance use harms and improving mental health continue to be public health priorities.
  - Toronto remains in the midst of a drug toxicity epidemic, with significant impacts on people who use drugs, service providers, and communities.

- As of September 2025, opioid toxicity deaths in 2024 remained 50 percent higher compared to the pre-pandemic average between 2017 and 2019.
- Toronto youth substance use (e.g. alcohol, cannabis, tobacco and vaping) trends were stable between 2019 and 2023. From 2019 to 2023, Toronto youth reported worsening mental health.<sup>2</sup>
- TUHF's funding priorities are aligned with TPH's commitment to supporting Toronto to Zero which is Toronto's plan to eliminate HIV. This plan works to prevent local transmission of HIV and ensure that all people living with HIV in Toronto receive the care they need to achieve an undetectable and untransmittable state of infection (U=U) without stigma or barriers.
- TUHF's funding priorities are also aligned with Our Health, Our City Mental Health: A Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto, and TPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.
- Sustaining effective community-based health promotion initiatives, such as projects funded by TUHF, requires:
  - Sustained, trust-based relationships between TPH, the community, and the CBOs it aims to reach; and,
  - Flexible and collaborative approaches by funders with CBOs on granting processes and program design to address community needs and health inequities.
- Existing administrative and reporting processes and requirements are perceived as disproportionately burdensome relative to the funding amount received.
- Individual CBOs contend for limited TUHF-funding.
- Capacity building supports offered by TPH staff to CBOs (e.g. proposal development, logic model creation, evaluation support, etc.) are seen as assets for small or grassroots organizations trying to deliver on their mandate while navigating complex funding landscapes.

### Assessing Intimate Partner Violence, Youth Vaping, Energy Drink Consumption as Potential Funding Priorities for TUHF

As requested by the Board of Health, TPH reviewed Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), youth vaping and energy drink consumption as possible TUHF funding priorities.

A review of evidence-informed approaches found that effectively addressing these emerging issues is best addressed through coordinated and long-term policy and public health strategies across local, provincial and federal levels. Given this, it is not recommended that the scope of TUHF be expanded at this time to address these challenges, as TUHF offers short-term grants and has limited funds.

In collaboration with local, provincial and federal partners, TPH is taking evidence-informed actions to better understand and reduce population harms from these issues:

- IPV: TPH is exploring opportunities to integrate evidence-based, coordinated IPV interventions within existing programs and services to strengthen monitoring, prevention and trauma-informed response efforts. TPH is collaborating with other City divisions to support surveillance of IPV in Toronto.

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<sup>2</sup> [Toronto PHSI Dashboard](#)

- Youth Vaping: TPH is implementing a multi-faceted strategy for the prevention and cessation of vaping among youth. Reducing harms and deaths associated with vapour products (and other regulated drugs) is one of the goals of *Our Health, Our City Mental Health: A Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto*.
- Caffeinated Energy Drink (CED) Consumption: Health Canada approves all CEDs that are manufactured, sold or marketed in Canada and outlines requirements and conditions for their formulation, labelling and marketing. Health Canada requires that CED labels state they are not recommended for children under age 14, they have high caffeine content, and that they should not be mixed with alcohol. In addition, Health Canada prohibits the advertising, marketing, or promotion of CEDs to children 12 years of younger.<sup>3</sup> In 2017, the Board of Health recommended that City agencies be made aware of Health Canada's conditions to support compliance.

## **Next Steps in Implementing Program Review Findings**

The emerging and evolving landscape for public health provides an opportunity for TPH to explore impacts on TUHF's overall program objectives and goals, and in turn, TUHF's funding priorities. Upon release of the updated OPHS, TPH will re-examine funding priorities for alignment with public health and community needs.

The TUHF program review highlighted actionable steps that TPH can implement to streamline and improve the grant application process and tools to reduce administration and reporting burden for applicants.

Implementing additional findings from the program review will require further consideration, planning and stakeholder consultation and require sufficient notice to impacted program stakeholders.

TPH is recommending returning to the Board of Health in 2027 with proposed changes to the TUHF program for implementation during the 2028 funding cycle.

## **Interim Approach**

While TPH prepares to implement the findings from the Program Review, TPH will respond to feedback from stakeholders and streamline the grants administration process for the 2026 and 2027 funding cycles to reduce application and reporting burden for funding recipients.

To promote program and funding continuity while TPH plans for changes to the TUHF program, it is recommended that the 2026 and 2027 TUHF funding cycles fund adaptations or extensions of currently funded and recently completed one- and three-year projects that are responding to community needs and were approved by the Board of Health in 2024 and 2025. TPH will return to the Board of Health in Q2, 2026 to

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<sup>3</sup> Health Canada. Category Specific Guidance for Temporary Marketing Authorization - Caffeinated Energy Drinks. 2013;1–28. Available from: [https://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt\\_formats/pdf/legislation/guide-ld/guidance-caf-drink-boiss-tma-amt-eng.pdf](https://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/pdf/legislation/guide-ld/guidance-caf-drink-boiss-tma-amt-eng.pdf)

recommend adapted or extended projects for 2026 and 2027 funding while it plans for program changes for the 2028 funding cycle.

### AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) Purchase of Service Agreement

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), an organization that receives annual funding from TUHF through a purchase of service agreement, is winding down its operations as of March 31, 2026. TUHF funds ACT to provide community-based education, health promotion resources, and outreach services to primarily gbMSM and men who use substances, to prevent and reduce risks of HIV. ACT also identifies persons living with HIV who are undiagnosed and links them to care. TPH is committed to maintaining service continuity and will work to secure another organization that can fill emerging gaps in service for communities most impacted by the winddown of ACT. In the longer-term, TPH will examine its existing sexual health program purchase of service agreements to ensure that programs and services delivered on behalf of TPH continue to meet community need and improve population health outcomes.

### **Toronto Public Health Strategic Impact**

This report advances the following priorities and objectives outlined in Toronto Public Health's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan:

- Priority 2: Promote health and well-being across the lifespan
  - Objective b: Prioritize effective interventions for children and youth to meet their changing needs
- Priority 3: Promote the conditions to support positive mental health and reduce the harms of substance use
- Priority 4: Advocate to advance health equity
  - Objective b: Collaborate with partners across multiple sectors to address local health need

### **CONTACT**

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### **SIGNATURE**

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