

## **Actions to Advance Indigenous Health**

**Date:** March 12, 2026  
**To:** Board of Health  
**From:** Medical Officer of Health  
**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides the Board of Health with an update on public health actions taken to advance Indigenous health since the last comprehensive update was provided to the Board of Health in January 2024. It also outlines opportunities to strengthen and sustain this work in 2026 and beyond.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) is committed to advancing Indigenous health and wellness through culturally safe, Indigenous-informed, and community-driven public health approaches. This work supports reconciliation and responds to long-standing inequities rooted in colonization, systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma.

TPH's Indigenous Health Strategy is guided by the Ontario Public Health Standards, the City of Toronto Reconciliation Action Plan (2022–2032), the TPH Strategic Plan's priorities and Board of Health directives, alongside direct guidance from Indigenous service providers, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders.

Since January 2024, TPH has advanced key Indigenous health priorities through multiple streams of work, including Indigenous Cultural Safety implementation and learning; Indigenous mental health, wellness, and substance use response, including harm reduction; Indigenous-led vaccination and primary care partnerships; strengthening relationships and relational accountability with Indigenous partners; and advancing Indigenous health data sovereignty and governance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health reaffirm its commitment to advancing Indigenous health and reconciliation through public health governance and accountability mechanisms.
2. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report back in Q2 2027 on progress related to: (a) continued implementation of the Indigenous Cultural

Safety Action Plan; (b) Indigenous Wellness Committee deliverables, including the writing and implementation of a co-developed Indigenous Wellness Action Plan; and (c) outcomes and lessons learned from Indigenous-led partnership models, including funding, service delivery, and community governance approaches.

3. The Board of Health authorize the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements and other suitable arrangements, on terms satisfactory to the Medical Officer of Health and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with Indigenous-led organizations in 2026 for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous Funding Stream, totalling \$420,000 (\$120k for one-year cycle and \$320k for three-year cycle) and to allocate funds in alignment with the City of Toronto adopted [Indigenous Funding Framework](#).
4. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to provide an Indigenous cultural safety and governance learning session to Board of Health members and TPH senior leadership in early 2027, following the confirmation of the new Board of Health membership post-elections, to ensure new and returning members are equally equipped to uphold the Board's responsibilities to Toronto's Indigenous community and reconciliation commitments.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact associated with the adoption of the recommendations in this report beyond what is included in the 2026 Operating Budget.

Funding of \$420,000 for the Indigenous Funding Stream of the Toronto Urban Health Fund is included in the 2026 Operating Budget of TPH. The Toronto Urban Health Fund is cost-shared by the City of Toronto and the Ministry of Health.

Any future resource implications related to sustaining Indigenous-led funding models or resourcing the Indigenous Wellness Action Plan will be identified through future reporting to the Board of Health.

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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On October 21, 2024, the Board of Health authorized the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements totaling \$240,000 with Indigenous-led organizations in 2025 for the Toronto Urban Health Fund Indigenous funding stream as part of item HL17.3 - Toronto Urban Health Fund - Indigenous Funding Stream.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.HL17.3>

On May 27, 2024, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to work in collaboration with urban Indigenous community organizations 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 as part of item HL13.3 - 2024 Toronto Urban Health Fund Allocations and Review Process.

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

On January 15, 2024, as part of item HL9.3 - Actions to Advance Indigenous Health, the Board of Health 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 and to arrange an Indigenous cultural safety training session for the Board in 2024 to build the Board's capacity to respectfully advance Indigenous health and reconciliation through its public health governance mandate; and requested the Chair to call a Special Meeting of the Board of Health in 2024 for the training session referenced in Part 2 above.

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

On April 17, 2023, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to undertake an Indigenous-specific and distinctions-based approach to ensure that the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for Toronto be co-developed in true partnership with Indigenous organizations and communities to ensure that approaches and actions that support the unique needs of urban Indigenous people living in Toronto can be collectively activated as part of item HL3.1 - Developing a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for Toronto. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL3.1>

On September 27, 2021, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health in collaboration with Indigenous community partners and City of Toronto divisions, to continue the implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy's actions and operating principles using an approach that allows for transparency and accountability; and to review and advance the recommendations from the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy Implementation Assessment, including implementing an Indigenous cultural safety framework aimed at decolonizing Toronto Public Health's programs, services, policies and approach and strengthening Toronto Public Health's relationships with Indigenous partners such as the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee and Indigenous community organizations as part of item HL30.2 - Advancing the Implementation of the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy at Toronto Public Health.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2021.HL30.2>

## **COMMENTS**

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### **Background**

Toronto Public Health's (TPH) Indigenous Health Strategy supports Indigenous health and wellness through approaches grounded in Indigenous leadership, transparency, accountability, relationship-building, and relational accountability. This work is co-led by Indigenous partners, reflects Indigenous worldviews and community priorities, and reinforces the importance of respectful partnership with Indigenous-led service providers. The key areas of focus include:

- The Indigenous Wellness Committee and Action Plan;
- Approaches to funding Indigenous Public Health Initiatives;
- Indigenous Cultural Safety Action Plan implementation and monitoring;
- Mental health and substance use response, including harm reduction;
- Vaccination partnerships with Indigenous-led primary care providers;
- Strengthening relationships with Indigenous service providers;
- Advancing Indigenous health data sovereignty;
- Collaboration and shared approaches across TPH programs to ensure Indigenous health priorities are Indigenous-led; and,
- Emergency Response collaboration.

All key areas of focus align with the strategic directions that guide the Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy and aim to reduce health inequities for Indigenous Peoples, influence the social determinants of Indigenous Health, and harmonize Indigenous and mainstream health programs and services for the urban Indigenous community of Toronto.

## **Updates on Public Health Actions to Advance Indigenous Health**

### **Indigenous-Led Governance, Planning and Accountability**

#### **a) Indigenous Wellness Committee**

Following [January 2024 Board of Health direction](#), the Indigenous Wellness Committee (IWC) was established in April 2024 and continued its work throughout 2025 as a standing Indigenous-led advisory body to guide and co-develop an Indigenous Wellness Action Plan for the City of Toronto. Key highlights include:

- 13 Committee meetings convened over the past two years, supported by additional planning, relationship-building, and technical working discussions;
- Representation from 17 Indigenous-led organizations, with all 26 Indigenous-led organizations engaged and kept informed throughout the process through regular updates, meeting summaries, and validation opportunities;
- Indigenous-guided process grounded in the Miikaans Method (Vision, Knowledge, Reason, Action), led by an Indigenous facilitator and supported by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, ensuring the work is culturally anchored, relational, and strengths-based;
- Co-development of shared principles, priorities, and a common understanding of Indigenous wellness rooted in Indigenous worldviews, including mental wellness, substance use, cultural continuity, and community-defined determinants of health;
- Identification and articulation of system-level gaps, barriers, and opportunities within TPH programs, policies, and partnerships as they relate to Indigenous wellness;
- Validation of priority focus areas identified by Indigenous community leaders (Mental Health, Supportive Housing, Rapid Access Addictions Medicine, Indigenous Cultural Safety across health services, and Funding) and actions to inform TPH's role in

advancing Indigenous wellness in partnership with Indigenous service providers and communities; and,

- Committee endorsement of the overall direction and approach, with the work now entering the drafting phase of the Indigenous Wellness Action Plan.

Through this work, the IWC has established a strong foundation of trust, shared stewardship, and collective accountability, positioning TPH to advance an Indigenous-led, culturally grounded, and actionable wellness framework aligned with Board direction and reconciliation commitments.

## **b) Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF) – Indigenous Funding Stream**

In 2025, TPH advanced interim approaches to strengthen equitable Indigenous-led funding distribution through the Community Basket Model, reflective of the [City Council adopted Indigenous Funding Framework](#). This model supports self-determination, low-barrier access, and collaborative approaches. To support the continued administration of the interim Indigenous funding model, \$240,000 of the 2024-25 TUHF Indigenous stream funding was allocated to the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC). TPH has received confirmation of Indigenous service providers funded through this interim approach, and early feedback suggests this low-barrier approach has significantly improved access to funding to be spent on projects in alignment with program streams.

It is recommended that this interim funding approach continue through 2026 with the \$420,000 that is available for the Indigenous stream, while a review is underway to inform the development of a long-term, Indigenous-led funding framework that considers resourcing, governance pathways, and implementation timelines. Continued feedback gathering through 2026 from funded organizations will be utilized to determine the viability and sustainability of such a long-term commitment to this funding model.

## **c) Indigenous Health Data Governance**

TPH has continued efforts to strengthen Indigenous health data governance partnerships grounded in Indigenous-led approaches and OCAP (ownership, control, access, possession) principles. This work recognizes that health data require specialized governance approaches distinct from broader municipal data initiatives and therefore prioritizes partnerships with Indigenous organizations that work directly with population health data and community-based health information systems.

Key partnership relationships include:

- Well Living House;
- Native Men's Residence; and,
- Seventh Generation Midwives / Call Auntie Clinic.

This work includes the development of a formal collaboration agreement and a focus on strengthening Indigenous-led population health data approaches, including the exploration of culturally safe methods for client sociodemographic data collection, analysis, governance, and use. These partnerships support a deeper understanding of Indigenous wellness needs, service access, and outcomes, while ensuring that

Indigenous health data is governed in ways that uphold Indigenous data sovereignty and reflect community priorities and protocols.

## **Building Indigenous Cultural Safety and Organizational Capacity**

### **d) Indigenous Cultural Safety Training and Governance Learning for the Board of Health**

On May 5, 2025, TPH delivered Indigenous cultural safety training for Board of Health members and TPH senior leadership to strengthen governance capacity and support reconciliation commitments.

The training was facilitated by a local Indigenous academic and educator. Responses gathered from Board of Health members surveyed indicated the training had strong relevance to Board members' governance roles, increased understanding of Indigenous histories and contemporary realities, and resulted in greater confidence in applying Indigenous cultural safety principles to Board deliberations and decision-making. This aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action by strengthening the Board of Health's understanding of the history and ongoing impacts of colonial policies on Indigenous peoples. It also reinforces the Board of Health's leadership role in advancing Indigenous cultural safety through informed policy direction, oversight, and accountability.

Given that Indigenous cultural safety is not static and must respond to evolving contexts, relationships, and leadership, this learning requires ongoing renewal. As a new term of the Board of Health will begin in 2027, TPH recommends additional Indigenous cultural safety training. This training will increase knowledge and build a shared baseline of understanding among all members. As such, TPH welcomes the opportunity to facilitate additional training in the future for new or returning members of the Board.

### **e) Indigenous Cultural Safety and Learning Events for TPH Staff**

In June 2023, TPH launched its Indigenous Cultural Safety Action Plan, aimed at promoting Indigenous cultural safety in all programs, services, and policy development activities across the division. This Action Plan was developed in part by Indigenous-identified staff and seeks to address power imbalances and promote an environment free of racism and discrimination where people feel safe while accessing programs and services. Cultural safety requires ongoing education, reflection and improvement, and TPH is committed to this transformational journey.

The Action Plan is built on the principles of respect, truth, humility, engagement and reciprocity. It is designed in three phases:

- Phase 1 – Education (mandatory Indigenous cultural safety training for all staff);
- Phase 2 – Experience (experiential learning with external Indigenous organizations and audits of programs and services by TPH People Leaders); and,
- Phase 3 – Integration (building relationships and welcoming physical spaces and engaging with service providers and community members).

TPH is currently transitioning from phase 2 to phase 3, with the Indigenous Health Strategy team leading safe and successful relationship building and engagement with service providers and community members across the public health sector. In November 2025, TPH's Indigenous Health Strategy team attended the "In Good Relations Gathering" put on by the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council (IPHCC). The IPHCC has developed [an engagement strategy and guide](#) which includes steps for organizations to follow in their Indigenous engagement initiatives. TPH was identified as leaders in safe and effective engagement with the Indigenous community, as across the public health units in attendance, TPH was the only health unit that was at step five of the five-step engagement process.

In alignment with TPH's Strategic Plan 2024-2028 Priority #5 – "Nurture a Positive Workplace Culture", TPH strengthened its commitment to Indigenous cultural safety in 2025 by formalizing the mandatory requirement that all staff complete TPH's internal Indigenous Cultural Safety training modules. This step reflects our ongoing responsibility to foster a culturally safe and respectful work environment for Indigenous clients, partners, communities, and colleagues.

Throughout 2026, TPH People Services will collaborate with all TPH directorates to further encourage, support, and monitor staff completion of the Indigenous Cultural Safety training modules.

Since September 2024, TPH has hosted and supported multiple Indigenous cultural safety and learning events for National Indigenous Peoples Day and Truth and Reconciliation Day programming.

Featured speakers included Indigenous leaders and health partners such as:

- Michelle Good (Award-winning Indigenous author and lawyer);
- Dr. Niigaan Sinclair (Anishinaabe writer, professor, and activist);
- Michael Milward (Executive Director, Anishnawbe Health Toronto);
- Devon Bowyer (Director of Operations, Auduzhe); and,
- Dr. Suzanne Shoush (Indigenous Family Physician, Call Auntie Clinic).

## **Community Partnerships, Service Delivery, and Direct Support**

### **f) Indigenous Harm Reduction Circle**

Since 2022, TPH, in collaboration with Indigenous service providers and the Ontario Aboriginal AIDS/HIV Strategy (OAHAS), has supported an Indigenous-led, action-oriented Indigenous Harm Reduction Circle (formed February 2023).

In 2025, the Circle advanced culturally grounded harm reduction solutions, including the launch of the Beaded Naloxone Kit project, which was designed and created by a local Indigenous artist, as a community-led harm reduction awareness initiative in response to Supervised Consumption Services / Consumption and Treatment Service closures and ongoing systemic harms.

### **g) Community Engagement and Relational Accountability**

TPH staff continually participate in community-led gatherings, including pow-wows, wellness events, ceremonies, round dances, and Indigenous primary health care events. This engagement strengthens trust, reciprocity, partnership visibility, and relational accountability. Since beginning major initiatives in 2023, the Indigenous Health Team has made significant progress in creating trust-based relationships with Indigenous leaders and community partners through this on-the-ground show of reciprocity.

By showing up for the community in a tangible way, and having TPH present for important community gatherings, opportunities have been created for additional connection, leading to strong and enduring relationships built on commitment. This has led to improved confidence in TPH as an organization and is reflected in the many formal partnerships and informal collaborations that have been created with multiple organizations across the health and social services sector within the urban Indigenous community of Toronto.

Key service areas these partnerships are reflected in include dental and oral health, vaccine preventable diseases, sexual health, mental health and reducing harm related to substance use, child and youth health, and Indigenous data sovereignty. This thoughtful and community-centered engagement contributes meaningfully to TPH's commitment in its strategic plan to advocating to advance health equity.

#### **h) Emergency Response**

In alignment with TPH's Strategic Plan Priority #1, TPH is committed to enhancing its emergency preparedness and response infrastructure, and preparing for the effects of climate change, as well as collaborating with partners to address its impacts. In spring and summer 2025, TPH's Indigenous Health Team provided essential on-site, client-facing support for Indigenous evacuees from Northern First Nations, delivering trusted, culturally grounded care navigation and coordination. This included leading Indigenous cultural safety and care coordination across TPH on-site services, facilitating clear and consistent communication, building trust through kinship-informed approaches, and ensuring that services were delivered in ways aligned with Indigenous worldviews. This coordinated approach increased access to and uptake of both oral health and vaccine-preventable disease services through proactively coordinating appointments, accompanying families to services, and addressing barriers related to unfamiliarity with urban health systems. In addition, established and trusted relationships with local Indigenous-led organizations were leveraged to support timely access to recreational, youth, and EarlyON programming, contributing to holistic supports for children, families, and caregivers during their displacement.

#### **i) Immunization Efforts**

The Indigenous Health Team supported broader immunization efforts across the organization, working alongside public health nurses and Indigenous school liaisons to reduce the number of Indigenous students out of compliance with [Ontario's Immunization of School Pupils Act \(ISPA\)](#), while supporting Indigenous-led delivery and culturally safe access pathways.

## Next Steps

Through sustained relationship-building and active listening with Indigenous partners, TPH continues to strengthen programs and services with and for Indigenous communities. While improving Indigenous health outcomes remains an important goal, the core focus of this work is grounded in building trust, strengthening relationships with Indigenous service providers and community members, supporting ongoing staff learning, and demonstrating an enduring and evolving commitment to truth and reconciliation.

In 2026, TPH will continue strengthening and sustaining Indigenous health work through: supporting the Indigenous Wellness Committee with the writing and review of an Indigenous Wellness Plan and implementation pathways; monitoring and advancing Indigenous Cultural Safety Action Plan deliverables; strengthening Indigenous-led harm reduction and mental wellness partnerships; advancing Indigenous health data governance and Indigenous data sovereignty practices; ensuring collaboration aligned with Indigenous priorities and that are Indigenous-led; and exploring sustainable resourcing options to support Indigenous-led action plans and funding models.

## Strategic Impact

This item advances the following Strategic Plan 2024-2028 priorities and objectives:

1. Strengthen health protection, disease prevention and emergency preparedness.
- b. Enhance emergency preparedness and response infrastructure.
3. Promote the conditions to support positive mental health and reduce the harms of substance use.
  - a. Deliver public health interventions that respond to the drug toxicity epidemic.
  - c. Strengthen public health services that are trauma-informed and reduce stigma.
  - d. Deliver public health interventions that promote mental health.
4. Advocate to advance health equity.
  - 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.
5. Nurture a positive workplace culture.
  - a. Foster a culture of innovation, continuous improvement and learning.
  - c. Foster a welcoming and inclusive work environment.
  - d. Optimize collaboration across Toronto Public Health for greater impact.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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