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**Dr. Eileen de Villa**  
Medical Officer of Health

Public Health  
277 Victoria Street  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1W2

Tel: 416-338-7600  
toronto.ca/health

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## **Incentives Guidance for Shelter Settings**

### **Purpose:**

- Provide guidance to service providers on the use of incentives in shelter settings.

### **Background:**

- Incentives are monetary or non-monetary items (e.g., food vouchers, cash, gift cards, socks) provided to individuals alongside other programming such as compensation or recognition of time to acknowledge efforts made to attend a program.
- Incentives may increase the uptake of public health programs or interventions such as testing and vaccination.
- For many, the incentive for interventions like testing and vaccination is the ability to re-enter the workforce or continue to access a livelihood; for those without the same opportunities, providing an equivalent makes the path to testing and vaccination more clear.
- Peers and clients have reported that incentive programs are valuable and provide necessary and welcomed support.

### **Incentive Programs in the City of Toronto:**

- Incentive programs exist in the City of Toronto.
- The City of Toronto supports Shelter Support and Housing (SSHA) and Social Development, Finance, and Administration (SDFA) to enable economically disadvantaged individuals to participate in testing, isolation, and vaccination programs – enabling access to these programs reduces barriers and provides additional opportunities for health.
- Other partners may run additional incentive programs of their own and these have other benefits and can further fill gaps and enable individuals to receive essential services like testing and vaccination.

### **How to Access Incentive Programs:**

- SSHA is offering incentives for people experiencing homelessness to receive vaccine.
- For testing, \$5 gift cards will be issued and can be ordered up to the amount of site capacity.

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- For vaccination, a \$60 program exists; \$25 is provided with a first dose and \$25 with a second dose, or a total of \$50 with a complete series, with the other \$10 available to operators to provide additional on-site things like snacks and drinks.
- For further information, service providers can contact [sshacovidvaccine@toronto.ca](mailto:sshacovidvaccine@toronto.ca)
- The program can be accessed by shelter operators on behalf of clients using the [Incentive Order Form](#).
- SDFA offers support and funds through the [Vaccine Engagement Teams Grant](#) to support resident ambassadors to provide vaccine education and engagement through a peer to peer model. This program has been well received and provides an additional avenue for individuals to share their experiences and earn income while supporting informed health decisions about vaccinations. It is exemplary of a community health strategy utilizing the non-profit sector partnership to support grassroots level engagement.

#### **Evidence to Support Use of Incentives:**

- There is reasonable evidence to support the use of incentives in general to change individual behavior.
- More specifically, incentive programs are well-established interventions for a variety of infectious diseases such as HIV, TB, and STIs, particularly for economically disadvantaged populations.
- Based on a brief scan of the literature, incentives appear to be an effective way to increase testing rates for infectious diseases. Two studies that used lottery incentives found that cash or gift cards/vouchers were more effective at increasing screening rates compared to lotteries.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Reviews reported that larger incentive amounts (\$10-60) were more effective than smaller incentive amounts (\$5) at increasing the number of patients returning to collect TB and HIV results.<sup>2,5</sup>
- Providing funds to peers or recruiters has also been reported as an effective means of bringing additional people into programming.<sup>5</sup> Paid positions on a per capita (\$10-25) or hourly basis with paid training (up to \$100) were reported to be effective for this role.<sup>5</sup>
- Overall, providing people with incentives matched to their need and circumstance appears to lend credibility and effectiveness to programs.<sup>3,5</sup>

#### **Key Messages:**

- Incentive programs are available to service providers to increase program uptake and reduce barriers for individuals for testing and vaccination.
- Incentive programs are supported by scientific evidence and are not coercive for individuals.
- Clients and providers will best know what works and does not work for their needs.

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