



TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan

Date: November 30, 2020

To: Board of Health

From: Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In March 2020, the City of Toronto, in coordination with Toronto Public Health, Toronto Public Library and hundreds of community-based partners, launched an unprecedented emergency response to meet the needs of Torontonians who have been disproportionately impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and by the sudden, serious consequences of the first pandemic "lockdown". The City's Emergency Operations Centre and nearly every City division, agency and corporation has contributed to this massive effort to support Toronto's most vulnerable residents during a time of crisis.

Many of the services, programs and systems mobilized for this effort - ranging from emergency food delivery to mental health supports to free 24/7 child care - are wholly new lines of operation and partnership for the City of Toronto and were designed, developed and then delivered into the community within mere days or weeks of the emergency declaration. These innovations have revealed the City's powerful creative and collaborative capacity. They have also demonstrated the value of maintaining and investing in a deep, interdependent relationship with a strong, activist community-based not-for-profit sector. The sector has continuously delivered front-line services and supports during the pandemic, championed the needs of highly vulnerable communities and held the City accountable to resolve emerging critical issues. Without the work of the community sector over the past 10 months, many Torontonians would be in a much more challenging situation than is currently faced.

The guiding framework to organize this multi-dimensional emergency response was rolled out in March 2020, through Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, under the title: *TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan*. *TO Supports* prioritizes ten action areas related to the social determinants of health and contains twenty-five separate actions to stop virus spread and deliver immediate emergency support to the neighbourhoods and populations that have been hardest hit by COVID-19. Since March, this Plan has been constantly evolving, adapting and intensifying in light of new information and data, new partnerships, new resurgence plans and new pandemic conditions.

Attachment 1 to this report summarizes the City's implementation of *TO Supports* from March to November 2020. It includes key advice collected from community-based partners, current status indicators, and the City's work on the intergovernmental front to leverage the funding and legislative tools required to solve urgent problems facing equity-seeking groups during the pandemic. It also highlights plans for new, targeted and enhanced COVID-19 equity measures that were recently launched in conjunction with the announcement of Toronto's second pandemic "lockdown".

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services recommends that:

1. City Council and the Board of Health approve TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan and the twenty-five equity actions and targeted and enhanced equity measures that the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, and partners are taking to support Torontonians disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, as outlined in Attachment 1 to this report.
2. City Council and the Board of Health approve the inclusion of equity indicators in the Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Monitoring Dashboard in order to facilitate public reporting on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 infection on certain population groups based on the social determinants of health such as income, racialization, and neighbourhood and to drive equity-focused policy and program actions.
3. City Council and the Board of Health recognize that a comprehensive approach to reducing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous, Black, and racialized Torontonians, including newcomers, must be central to the COVID-19 emergency response, to COVID-19 immunization planning, and to Toronto's recovery and rebuild efforts.
4. City Council request the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, working with the Medical Officer of Health and Toronto's COVID-19 Incident Commander and in consultation with community stakeholders, to intensify, adapt, or revise the COVID-19 Equity Action Plan as necessary to respond effectively to urgent COVID-19 health disparities as identified by the Medical Officer of Health on the basis of the Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Monitoring Dashboard equity indicators, COVID-19 data from Indigenous-led health organizations, or other COVID-19 evidence and information emerging from the community sector.
5. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, working with the Medical Officer of Health and the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, and community sector partners, to assess the level of need and optimal services to support families (e.g., adults with dependent children or other dependents) who need to self-isolate due to COVID-19 infection.
6. City Council request the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada to establish dedicated not-for-profit sector stabilization and bridging funds to ensure the immediate and long-term resilience of the not-for-profit sector which is critical for

inclusive economic and community recovery, including a \$680 million Provincial fund, as advocated for by the Ontario Nonprofit Network, and a new \$500-\$700 million Federal Community Services COVID-19 Relief Fund, as advocated for by national human and community service federations.

7. City Council urge the Province of Ontario to immediately extend, for at least the next six months, eligibility for the Ontario Works Emergency Assistance benefit to include all working age adults who have tested positive for COVID-19 or reside in a household where someone has tested positive and have been advised by an employer, medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, public health official, or other government official to self-isolate and who do not otherwise qualify for either Ontario Works or Federal benefits.

8. City Council forward TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan to the Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ontario Minister of Health, the Ontario Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, the Ontario Minister of Long-Term Care, the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ontario Solicitor General, the Federal Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and the Federal Minister of Health.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On November 25, 2020, City Council approved motions to call on the Federal and Provincial Governments to take several actions to mitigate COVID-19 social and health inequities, as follows: (a) to provide financial resources to support increased community outreach in high transmission neighbourhoods to support access to COVID-19 testing, the promotion of voluntary self-isolation facilities, and access to health and social services; (b) to immediately accelerate, expand and make completely accessible and transparent all financial supports directed toward populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 such as women, racialized individuals, low-income individuals and those living with disabilities; (c) to ensure that the financial burden of the COVID-19 pandemic is shared equitably across Canadian society; (d) to provide adequate paid sick days and income supports for those who need to isolate but cannot afford to do and for workers and businesses affected by public health restrictions; (e) to reinstate the moratorium on residential and commercial evictions; (f) to assess the impact of the pandemic on mental health and well-being to inform the need for additional supports or programs; and (g) to ensure flu vaccine promotion and distribution is targeted to those higher risk such as racialized and low-income populations.

At the same meeting, City Council authorized the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services: (a) to implement targeted COVID-19 Community Education and

Engagement Equity Measures in vulnerable communities with high infection rates and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including entering into agreements to provide funding up to \$5 million to community agencies to deliver programming; (b) to apply for and receive funding for these measures from other governments; (c) to make necessary adjustments to the 2020 Operating Budget and in the 2021 Budget submission for Social Development, Finance and Administration (net \$0) for these measures; and (d) to report to Executive Committee in the first quarter of 2021 on program success and money received from the other governments. Further, Council adopted a motion to request the Government of Canada to provide up to \$5 million in funding for these measures.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL23.1>

On October 27, 28 and 30, 2020 City Council requested the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, to build on COVID-19 resurgence plans and the findings from the data and consultation with groups that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 to prepare a Toronto COVID-19 Response Equity Action Plan that consolidates existing advice, strategies, and initiatives and includes for each recommendation or action the status, timeline, lead division or agency, and requests of other governments, and to report back with an update to the Board of Health in 2020.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL22.1>

On October 19, 2020, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to review and action the full set of recommendations summarized in the report COVID-19 and the Social Determinants of Health: Community Consultation Report (Attachment 1), as appropriate, including: consulting with city divisions and agencies to collaborate with community partners in order to plan and implement the short-term actions listed in Attachment 1, including: 1. Creating more accessible public health information; 2. Building community agency support; 3. Increasing community testing and health access; 4. Advocating for income supports and eviction protection; 5. Supporting effective isolation; 6. Overdose prevention and harm reduction; and 7. Supporting people experiencing homelessness.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=18761>

On September 30, October 1 and 2, 2020, City Council adopted a motion to request the Province of Ontario to immediately re-instate the moratorium on eviction of tenants.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.PH16.8>

On September 21, 2020, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to work with the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, and the General Manager, Toronto Employment and Social Services, to explore how to implement strategies such as those identified in the report (September 3, 2020) from the Medical Officer of Health, to address the social determinants of health for the City of Toronto's most vulnerable populations who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=18761>

On July 2, 2020, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to consult with groups that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, identify the detailed impacts being experienced by these groups, and recommend actions for the City of Toronto and its governmental partners to reduce these impacts.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/decisionBodyProfile.do?function=doPrepare&meetingId=18761#Meeting-2020.HL18>

COMMENTS

Since July 2, 2020, the Board of Health has been updated regularly on health disparities associated with COVID-19, first through presentations of area-level and later, individual-level, race-based and income-based data on reported COVID-19 infection and hospitalizations. The Board of Health has also heard from communities most impacted by COVID-19 and the community-based agencies that serve them, to better understand the effects of the pandemic on Torontonians and strategies for intervening.

The City has been taking urgent action on multiple fronts to support vulnerable Torontonians during the pandemic, in strong collaboration with Toronto Public Health and community sector partners. Up to now, however, the Board of Health has not received a consolidated status update on the City's activities to address priority issues identified by the data and in the community.

Launch of TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan:

In March 2020, the City of Toronto, in coordination with Toronto Public Health, Toronto Public Library and hundreds of community-based partners, launched an unprecedented emergency response to meet the needs of vulnerable populations that were dramatically and disproportionately impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and by the sudden, serious consequences of the first COVID-19 pandemic "lockdown."

The guiding framework to organize this cross-corporate, multi-partner response was rolled out by Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, under the title: *TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan*. The objectives of this Plan are to stop virus spread and deliver immediate emergency support to the neighbourhoods and populations that have been hardest hit by COVID-19. Since March, this Plan has been constantly evolving, adapting and intensifying in light of new information and data, new partnerships, new resurgence plans and new pandemic conditions.

Attachment 1 to this report provides details on the City's implementation of *TO Supports* from March to November 2020. It includes key advice collected from community-based partners, current status indicators and the City's work on intergovernmental fronts to leverage the necessary funding and legislative tools to solve urgent problems facing equity-seeking groups during the pandemic.

TO Supports prioritizes ten action areas related to the social determinants of health and twenty-five separate actions, as follows:

ACTION AREA: HEALTH COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

1. Communicate sociodemographic data in non-stigmatizing ways.

2. Implement an accessible, multilingual COVID-19 public education campaign for communities most impacted by COVID-19.
3. Expand community outreach with community sector partners, faith groups, landlords and local businesses.

ACTION AREA: COMMUNITY HEALTH ACCESS

4. Expand COVID-19 testing and flu shot clinics in communities most impacted by COVID-19.
5. Operate Canada's first voluntary COVID-19 isolation centre.
6. Improve low-barrier access to harm reduction and overdose prevention.

ACTION AREA: SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

7. Direct emergency funding to community partners serving vulnerable residents during the pandemic.
8. Direct emergency donations to community partners serving vulnerable residents during the pandemic.
9. Provide dedicated Infection Prevention and Control supports to community partners serving vulnerable residents during the pandemic.
10. Enable networked leadership and local collective action among community partners serving vulnerable residents during the pandemic.

ACTION AREA: SHELTER AND HOUSING SUPPORT

11. Ensure the shelter system continues to meet COVID-19 public health measures.
12. Meet emerging needs of shelter clients, people living in encampments and those facing housing precarity during the pandemic.
13. Implement the COVID-19 Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy.
14. Implement the Housing and Homelessness Recovery Response Plan to create additional permanent housing opportunities.

ACTION AREA: INCOME SUPPORT

15. Ensure income supports are delivered uninterrupted during the pandemic.
16. Advocate for emergency benefits and eviction prevention during the pandemic.

ACTION AREA; FOOD SECURITY

17. Respond to urgent food insecurity due to service disruptions, isolation and loss of income during the pandemic.

ACTION AREA: CARE FOR SENIORS

18. Prevent and manage outbreaks and provide highest quality care to seniors living in City-operated long-term care homes.
19. Support vulnerable seniors in the community and isolating during the pandemic.

ACTION AREA: DIGITAL ACCESS

20. Increase access to affordable internet and devices to keep people connected during the pandemic.
21. Help residents to access free, high-quality online programming and activities.

ACTION AREA: MENTAL HEALTH AND FAMILY SAFETY

22. Support Torontonians experiencing stress, anxiety and isolation during the pandemic.
23. Respond to the heightened risk of family violence during the pandemic.

ACTION AREA: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

24. Deliver safe high quality child care during the pandemic, with additional supports for child care operators in communities most impacted by COVID-19.
25. Make child care policies flexible for families affected by COVID-19.

Innovations and Impacts:

Many of the services, programs and systems mobilized for the COVID-19 equity response represent dramatic service transformations or wholly new lines of operation and partnerships for City of Toronto. Many were designed, developed and then delivered into the community within mere days or weeks of the emergency declaration. These innovations, detailed in Attachment 1 to this report, have included:

- 40 new shelter locations opened to create physical distancing in the shelter system and provide spaces for more than 1,000 people to move indoor from encampments;
- 2,500 people successfully connected to permanent housing from shelters, through a combination of housing allowances and rent-geared-to-income units (a 50% increase compared to the same time last year);
- Supplying personal protective equipment to community-based shelter and homelessness services operators;
- Free, 24/7 Emergency Child Care Centres for essential workers from March-June
- Opening Canada's first COVID-19 voluntary isolation centre;
- 9,400 new applications for Ontario Works assistance processed and 51,800 Ontario Works clients supported to receive the COVID-related Emergency Benefit;
- Streamlining the income supports application process, enabling financial benefits to be issued at first contact;
- \$10.2 Million in emergency funding secured for the community sector serving vulnerable residents during the pandemic, particularly Black-mandated agencies and Indigenous-led agencies.
- Free WiFi enabled in shelters, long-term care homes and in six large apartment buildings in low income neighbourhoods (25 in total to be completed);
- 100s of free high-quality online activities and programs for residents of all ages to "stay at home/play at home/learn at home" during lockdown;
- 16,000 households/46,000 individuals served at emergency food banks in 12 Toronto Public Library locations;
- 33,000 food hampers and 500,000 prepared meals prepared and delivered;
- 60,000 student families provided with grocery gift cards;
- 79,630 mental health contact sessions completed (free, telephone-based, culturally grounded counselling coordinated through TO Supports Mental Health Support Strategy).

Targeted and Enhanced COVID-19 Equity Measures

Public Health data demonstrate that neighbourhoods in the northwest and northeast are experiencing significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection compared to other places.

Despite the high prevalence of COVID-19 in these neighbourhoods, there may also be a high degree of testing "hesitancy" among residents in these neighbourhoods. The "choice" an individual makes to obtain a COVID-19 test or, if they do test positive, to follow public health directives to self-isolate is informed by a variety of factors, including whether they have access to public health information and access to a testing site; whether they have the ability to isolate at home; and the impact of not working or earning an income, even for a few days or weeks.

In recognition of these challenges that disproportionately impact residents from equity-seeking groups, the City is immediately launching a targeted and enhanced set of COVID-19 equity measures in neighbourhoods that have been hardest hit by COVID-19. This work is being conducted in partnership with not-for-profit agencies that are highly trusted in their home communities, and will build on the broader equity work implemented under TO Supports. These measures will also be implemented with a view to addressing barriers faced by people with disabilities and to support a Black COVID-19 health equity plan in coordination with Black-mandated community agencies and to support an Indigenous-led COVID-19 health equity plan.

Targeted and enhanced COVID-19 equity measures include:

- *Measures to Expand Testing Sites:*

Steps to increasing COVID-19 testing will include: increasing the number of provincial testing sites using City facilities, using buses for mobile testing, providing more transportation to testing sites and extending testing site hours. Implementation of these measures require collaboration between the City and provincial agencies (e.g. Ontario Health/LHINs).

- *Measures to Enhance Community Outreach and Engagement:*

These steps will include: targeting outreach, case management and providing support to residents who face multiple barriers (i.e. food support, income services, provision of masks, etc.), and providing relevant public education to residents and employers. These measures will be supported by targeted public education and communications through the COVID-19 Public Education Working Group as well as through targeted outreach to key employers. In future, they can be mobilized to support the City's mass COVID-19 immunization strategy in key neighbourhoods and with key vulnerable populations.

Strong community partners, trusted by residents, are critical to ensuring that these measures are implemented effectively. Eleven community-based agencies have been identified to carry out this work, nine of which are geographically anchored in the neighbourhoods. All are known, trusted service providers that work specifically with: Black, Indigenous and/or racialized residents and/or youth. A team of outreach workers and case managers will provide supports including:

- Enhanced food access through coordinated drop-off points with local food security agencies and broker food delivery to residents and families;
- Increased access to culturally responsive mental health supports
- Extensive distribution and dissemination of masks (goal: 1M masks); and
- Supports to help families with self-isolation (may include a dependent child/elder stream; and an in-home care component).

- *Measures to Add Capacity on Busy TTC Routes*

The TTC continues to implement important measures to reduce crowding for customers on busy bus routes. Resources are being reallocated from lower ridership routes in less busy periods, such as routes that serve primarily downtown-centered office travel patterns (for example, the 140-series Downtown Express routes) to busier routes with higher ridership demand such as the 35 Jane and 54 Lawrence East.

To reduce crowding for customers, starting on November 23, 2020, the TTC restored express bus service on busy corridors, like on Jane Street and Lawrence Avenue East.

- *Measures to Reduce the Risk of Eviction/Loss of Income due to Voluntary COVID-19 Isolation:*

Some low income Torontonians, including newcomers, cannot financially afford to make COVID-19 related testing and self-isolation decisions because they run the risk of losing their job or their income. The most direct way to resolve this challenge is to temporarily adjust and/or review provincial public policies governing: eviction for (short-term) non-payment of rent; job and income protection for anyone required to be absent from work due to COVID-19; and access to emergency financial assistance benefits for all working age adults.

- *Evictions:* Between March and July 2020 the Provincial government effectively directed that eviction orders be suspended. During these months, low income Torontonians did not need to fear eviction if they were unable to pay rent. The temporary suspension of evictions, coupled with other measures introduced by the Government of Ontario, helped thousands of low income residents in Toronto remain safe, housed, clothed, fed and able to comply with public health directives last spring and summer. This critical tool is needed now, too, during the current C-19 resurgence to help save lives and livelihoods, in Toronto and other municipalities. Therefore, in late September, City Council adopted a motion to request the Province of Ontario to immediately re-instate the moratorium on eviction of tenants.
- *Job Protection and Paid Sick Leave:* During the pandemic, is especially important for all working age adults to have the basic financial means to put public health first and be able to stay home when they are sick. Therefore, at its November 2020 meeting, City Council adopted a motion to request the Province of Ontario to provide adequate paid sick days and income supports for those who need to isolate but cannot afford to do so and for workers and businesses affected by public health restrictions.
- *Emergency Income Assistance:* At present, certain Toronto residents who are ineligible for federal income supports like Employment Insurance or the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, are also ineligible for the income support program of last resort in an emergency - the Ontario Works Emergency Assistance benefit. It is therefore recommended that the City request the Province of Ontario to extend, for at least the next six months, eligibility for the Ontario Works Emergency Assistance benefit for to include all working age adult residents, who have tested positive for COVID-19 or reside in household where someone has tested positive and have been advised to self-isolate and who do not otherwise

qualify for either Ontario Works or Federal benefits.

Intergovernmental Requests and Actions for COVID-19 Health Equity

The City has actively advocated for intergovernmental cooperation and response to the impact of COVID-19 on equity-seeking groups and vulnerable populations. Recent related intergovernmental requests and actions are reflected in Attachment 1.

Conclusion:

COVID-19 has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing, systemic health inequities related to poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Unequal access to the social determinants of health has created the conditions for COVID-19 to disproportionately impact Torontonians who are: Indigenous, Black or racialized, who are living with disabilities, who are precariously employed or live on a low income, who may experience challenges taking time off from work when ill and who may be living in housing situations where it is more difficult to isolate from others.

Vulnerable Torontonians have also been hardest hit by the unintended consequences of public health measures to flatten the curve, including service disruptions and lockdown. Throughout the pandemic, many have faced acute challenges related to hunger, loss of sanitation facilities, lack of Internet connectivity and barriers to essential social and health services. Many newcomers, including temporary foreign workers, refugees, refugee claimants, and undocumented Torontonians are facing extreme challenges and uncertainty during the pandemic, particularly those without social networks in this country, who do not speak or read English, and who may not be eligible for financial supports or health care coverage.

To support Torontonians who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and to stop the virus spread, the City is taking urgent action on multiple fronts, in strong collaboration with community partners. Our plan is constantly evolving and intensifying in light of new information, new partnerships, and new pandemic conditions. Progress reports will be submitted on a regular basis to document impacts, gaps and emerging priorities and to serve as an accountability tool with community until the pandemic is resolved and pathways to an equitable recovery in Toronto are in place.

CONTACT

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health, 416-338-7820, eileen.devilla@toronto.ca

Denise Andrea Campbell, Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 416-392-5207, deniseandrea.campbell@toronto.ca

Tom Azouz, General Manager, Toronto Employment and Social Services, 416-392-8952, tom.azouz@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Giuliana Carbone
Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan