

Spring 2024
Toronto Public Health Strategy Community Consultation
Report
Toronto North LIP

Final Report
March 2024

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Background

This report was developed by the Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership (TNLIP) as part of a collaborative effort to contribute to the 2024-2028 Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan. In early 2024, Toronto Public Health (TPH) initiated a city-wide call for public suggestions and submissions to help shape their upcoming strategic priorities. The new strategic plan will guide TPH's work over the next four years on key issues related to the physical, mental, and social determinants of health for everyone in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area.

Toronto North LIP organized a community consultation to gather and consolidate input from its members. The goal was to ensure that the voices of local communities were represented in the broader strategic planning process.

Since the consultation, TPH has released the finalized [Strategic Plan for 2024-2028](#), which reflects the collective input received from various agencies, public partners, and stakeholders across the city.

Consultation Participants

Managers and decision-makers of 20 organizations in Toronto North regions were invited to participate in the consultation or appoint a designated staff to attend in their place. The invitation was accepted by 11 participants, representing 11 different organizations. In addition to the above, 6 members anonymously participated in the online survey, totalling participation from 16 organizations for this consultation. For a full list of attendees, see Appendix 1.

Consultation Format and Questions

On March 14, 2024 from 3:00-4:00 pm, Toronto North LIP held a 1.5-hour live Q&A session conducted as a live virtual session, along with an alternative option for participants to submit their responses through an online survey. The findings of these sessions were collated and presented in this report as a formal submission to Toronto Public Health. The consultation focused on six questions addressing the strategic planning and visioning for TPH over the next four years.

Questions 1 and 2 sought to identify the most critical areas where TPH should focus its efforts to maximize its impact on population health over the next four years. Questions 3 and 4 focused on evaluating and potentially refining TPH's vision and mission statements to ensure they aligned with TPH's future goals and aspirations. Question 5 asked whether TPH's guiding

principles are still relevant or if they should be updated to better support the organization's work over the next four years. Question 6 sought input on how TPH can improve its strategies for engaging with and serving Toronto's diverse communities. All questions could be answered in writing in the online survey or through discussion in the live portion of the consultation.

The live consultation took place in a Q&A style, with the first 10 minutes being dedicated to discuss TPH's intent behind wanting public input, and outlining their strategic priorities at the time the consultation was held. Following the background summary, consultation participants were invited to discuss questions 1-6. Two facilitators facilitated and animated discussion, and participants provided their answers verbally, in chat, or through the online survey. Toronto North LIP staff recorded the answers in both writing and video recording for note-taking purposes, but the video was later erased.

Main Findings

The following report identifies and presents main themes, trends, and insights from the responses received in the survey and during the live consultation.

Question 1

What, in your opinion, should be Toronto Public Health's top priority over the next four years?

Respondents to this question outlined a number of issues that should be prioritized by Toronto Public Health over the next four years. It was with overwhelming agreement that Toronto Public Health should prioritize addressing the social determinants of health, with a focus on equity and access.

In the live consultation, there was a strong call for targeted interventions to reduce health disparities, especially among newcomers who face significant barriers to accessing medical services. There is also a need for advocacy for health public policies that tackle the following:

1. Food Security
2. Housing
3. Mental Health

There was also a call for the recognition and support for caregivers, improving service accessibility. Additionally, there's a need for better representation and accessibility of services for diverse communities, including language support beyond English and French. Addressing discrimination and barriers faced by marginalized groups, such as those living with HIV and trans

individuals, is imperative. Specific attention should also be given to populations like seniors and individuals with disabilities to ensure their healthcare needs are met effectively. By prioritizing these areas, Toronto Public Health can work towards fostering a healthier and more equitable city for all its residents.

Survey respondents echoes similar themes, stressing the importance of mental health and addiction services, combating misinformation about the healthcare system, and ensuring up-to-date vaccinations. There was also emphasis placed on addressing the social determinants of health such as food security, housing, and employment, which impact chronic diseases and overall community well-being. Additionally, there were calls for better support for newcomers and immigrants, mitigating health inequities through holistic care, expanding healthcare access for marginalized communities, and tackling issues related to the overuse of screens and video games among youth. Lastly, ensuring the availability of family physicians was also highlighted as a critical need.

Question 2

Where do you believe public health can make the most significant contribution to the population health of Toronto in the next four years?

The respondents believe that TPH's most significant contribution will come from ensuring equitable access to services and addressing social determinants of health. Prevention, awareness, and collaboration are key areas where TPH can make a meaningful impact on population health.

In the live consultation, participants highlighted that TPH can make the most significant contribution by prioritizing equitable access to healthcare services, including culturally appropriate mental wellness activities. Robust campaigns in multiple languages should be employed to combat health misinformation and stigma, particularly through early interventions. Addressing health equity issues such as long wait times and becoming a reliable agency for all residents is crucial. Targeting health determinants associated with homelessness, expanding services equitably, and improving social determinants of health like food access are essential. Additionally, enhancing responsiveness during health crises, improving communication, and simplifying information access, especially during crises, will facilitate navigating overwhelming and contradictory information efficiently.

Survey responses emphasized the focus on prevention activities and addressing social determinants of health. This includes increasing awareness of TPH's services and enhancing

collaboration with other health agencies. There should be special attention given to newcomer populations, providing them with adequate clothing, medicines, and healthcare guidance to ease their integration and reduce healthcare strain. Additionally, TPH should prioritize youth and family education through school training, front-line worker support, and parenting workshops to enhance community health knowledge. Ensuring access to nutritious and affordable food, building mental wellness, and fostering community connections are essential for overall well-being. Lastly, TPH should foster partnerships with community organizations, such as health clinics and food banks, to provide comprehensive support and address the multifaceted nature of health and well-being.

Question 3

A vision statement is an organization's aim for the future. Toronto Public Health's current vision is "A healthy city for all." Are there improvements that can be made to the vision for the next four years? What do you imagine Toronto will look like when TPH succeeds in their vision?

Respondents suggest that TPH's vision can be improved by emphasizing equity and inclusivity while enhancing community engagement. The vision should reflect a holistic approach to health and well-being, ensuring that all residents are better prepared for public health threats.

The feedback from live consultation suggests that there are opportunities for Toronto Public Health to refine its vision for the next four years. Members highlight the need to address the many existing inequities that the organization hasn't effectively tackled, indicating a potential gap between the current state and the envisioned "healthy city for all." One member emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the organization's actions align closely with its mission, suggesting a need for greater dedication to the stated goals. Another member underscores the crucial role of community engagement in realizing the organization's mission, indicating that active involvement of the community could enhance the effectiveness of vision implementation. Therefore, to enhance its vision, Toronto Public Health may need to prioritize addressing inequities, ensure alignment between its actions and mission, and actively engage the community in its initiatives.

The survey responses offered several improvements to Toronto Public Health's vision statement, emphasizing a more comprehensive approach to health. Key improvements include better management of mental health and addiction cases, increased screening for chronic diseases, and a holistic approach that considers physical, social, environmental, and mental health. Respondents envision a future where Toronto is equipped to handle public health

threats, with equitable and accessible health services for all, including neighboring cities. This future Toronto prioritizes affordable healthy food, housing access, increased minimum wage, reduced work hours, and a strong emphasis on community care and playtime.

Common themes from the responses include:

- Equity and inclusivity
- A holistic view of health
- Universal access to high-quality healthcare services
- Addressing social determinants of health (i.e., housing, education, employment, and food security).

Question 4

Toronto Public Health's current mission is "Toronto Public Health reduces health inequities and improves the health of the whole population." Are there improvements that can be made to the mission for the next four years?

The enhancement of TPH's mission to focus on equity, accessibility, and urgent public health challenges are emphasized by the respondents. In particular, there is a call for a mission that is more inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalized communities.

Respondents in the live consultation emphasized the need to clarify and emphasize equity in service provision, particularly by adding "Equitable" access for all including the uninsured. This aligns with the vision of ensuring improved access to holistic physical health, mental health, nutrition, housing, and general practitioners for all residents. Additionally, there's a call to address the urgency of the opioid crisis through tailored services including treatment and not just overdose prevention. Furthermore, the mission should prioritize achieving true universal healthcare, focusing on uninsured and vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness and addiction. This reflects a commitment to providing equitable healthcare services for all Toronto residents.

The survey respondents echoed the same sentiments. One response recommends incorporating destigmatizing campaigns for drug users, supporting the decriminalization of drug use to shift the public perception from criminality to medical need. Another response emphasizes the need to improve access to emergency health services and reduce waiting times, addressing the strain on physicians and specialists. Additionally, one respondent points out the high cost of nutritious food and suggests providing students with training on how to prepare nutritious meals. Lastly, a proposal was made to expand the mission statement to include commitments to empowerment, inclusivity, innovation, and evidence-based practices,

advocating for a holistic approach to health that encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being.

Question 5

Are there changes or new foundational principles that TPH could add to help guide the work for the next four years?

The respondents recommend that TPH adopt new foundational principles emphasizing inclusion, environmental justice, and stronger community engagement. Building robust community ties and fostering sustainable well-being should be central to TPH's future work.

Based on the responses provided by the members in the live consultation, here are potential changes or new foundational principles that could be added to Toronto Public Health's existing set:

- **Promotion of Caring and Environmental Justice:** Member 1 suggests incorporating a principle focused on promoting inclusion and fostering a caring community within Toronto. This could involve initiatives aimed at promoting empathy, compassion, and support for one another, as well as advocating for environmental justice to address health disparities related to environmental factors.
- **Community Engagement and Multilingual Support:** Member 2 highlights the importance of engaging with communities and meeting them where they are at. This could be reflected in a principle emphasizing community engagement strategies such as outreach programs and the establishment of community advisory boards. Additionally, providing multilingual support to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for diverse populations could be included as part of this principle.

These proposed additions align with the existing foundational principles of accountability, transparency, inclusion, health equity, and excellence, further enhancing Toronto Public Health's guiding framework for the next four years.

Survey respondents also offered key recommendations include fostering stronger collaborations with partner agencies to enhance community health, adopting a preventative approach that addresses the impacts of capitalism and individualism, and integrating "Compassionate Care" to emphasize empathy in healthcare. Additionally, there is a call to shift from mere engagement to building robust community ties and to focus on sustainable well-being through long-term health solutions. Another proposed adding guides for meal preparation.

Question 6

How can Toronto Public Health enhance its engagement with and better serve the diverse needs of our communities over the next four years?

To better serve Toronto's diverse communities, respondents suggest TPH focus on inclusivity, active community involvement, and collaboration with local organizations. Tailoring services to meet the unique needs of different populations will be key to effective engagement.

According to the members in the live consultation, TPH can implement several key strategies. Firstly, actively involving community members in decision-making processes will ensure that TPH's initiatives are informed by community needs and perspectives. Additionally, leveraging Community Health Ambassadors as a permanent role and addressing language barriers with appropriate messaging will help engage diverse communities more effectively. TPH should also increase its participation and collaboration in stakeholder tables to better understand community needs. Lastly, establishing a stronger complaints department will provide community members with a platform to voice concerns when their needs are not being met. By implementing these strategies, TPH can foster stronger community engagement and improve its ability to meet the diverse needs of Toronto's population.

Survey responses highlighted the importance of strengthening collaborations with various local agencies, including non-healthcare organizations, and will improve community engagement. Diversifying representation in decision-making processes by including indigenous, female, Black, POC, and LGBTQ+ individuals will ensure more inclusive and intersectional policies. Guaranteeing the availability of clinic spaces and physicians for all, increasing access to fresh produce through more small grocery stores, and providing easily accessible services will address critical needs. Additionally, implementing community advisory boards, expanding outreach programs, and fostering partnerships with local organizations will offer culturally sensitive feedback and comprehensive support to marginalized communities.

Attendance

LIP Staff:

1. Misha Hossain (TNLIP/The Neighbourhood Organization)
2. Rachelle Molto (TNLIP/JVS Toronto)

Partners:

1. Jonathan Brooke (Peel Regions EMS)
2. Leticia Esquivel (Mennonite Newlife Centre)
3. Matthew Neill (Community Share Food Bank)
4. May Massijeh (Health Access Thorncliffe Park)
5. Nkeiruka Osagie (ACT Toronto)
6. Ruthe Swern (Trauma Practice for Healthy Communities)
7. Shrid Dhungel (Ontario Caregiver Organization)
8. Fatemeh Moghimi (Learning Disabilities Association of Toronto)
9. Zarine Dordi (Working Women's Community Centre)
10. 6 Anonymous Members from Online Survey

Consultation Questions Provided to Participants

Toronto North Region Community Consultation Meeting of Spring 2024

1. What, in your opinion, should be Toronto Public Health's top priority over the next four years?
2. Where do you believe public health can make the most significant contribution to the population health of Toronto in the next four years?
3. A vision statement is an organization's aim for the future. Toronto Public Health's current vision is "A healthy city for all." Are there improvements we can make to our vision for the next four years? What do you imagine Toronto will look like when we succeed in our vision?
4. A mission statement is what an organization does to achieve its vision. Toronto Public Health's current mission is "Toronto Public Health reduces health inequities and improves the health of the whole population." Are there improvements we can make to our mission for the next four years?
5. Foundational principles are a set of values that an organization uses to help guide decision-making. Toronto Public Health's current foundational principles are:
 - Accountability and transparency
 - Community engagement
 - Inclusion
 - Health Equity
 - Excellence

Are there changes or new foundational principles that we could add to help guide our work for the next four years?

6. How can Toronto Public Health enhance its engagement with and better serve the diverse needs of our communities over the next four years?