



## Harm Reduction Update

Item 8

September 14, 2021

Tenant Services Committee

**Report:** TSC:2021-62

**To:** Tenant Services Committee (“TSC”)

**From:** Director, Strategic Planning & Stakeholder Relations and  
General Manager, Seniors Housing Unit

**Date:** August 23, 2021

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to provide the TSC with an update on the implementation of TCHC’s Harm Reduction Policy.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the TSC receive this report for information.

### **BACKGROUND:**

#### **Reporting History:**

In June 2018, City Council directed Toronto Community Housing (“TCHC”) to undertake actions in support of the Toronto Overdose Action Plan. Following Council’s decision, TCHC assembled an inter-divisional team and on the December 6, 2018 report to the Board of Directors

(TCHC:2018-48), Management identified a number of ways in which TCHC could build on existing business practices, and expand activities to support harm reduction, including developing a corporate-wide harm reduction policy.

The Harm Reduction Policy was adopted by the Board on January 4, 2021 (TCHC:2021-12). As of May 2021, Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Relations organized an internal Working Group to support the planning and implementation of the policy. The Working Group includes representatives from Toronto Public Health and The Works.

#### **UPDATES:**

Toronto Community Housing is committed to working with service delivery partners to deliver harm reduction programs and services to its tenants. Through the Working Group, it is evident that every community at TCHC is unique and requires a community driven approach to harm reduction. The policy has provided guidance to staff, and allowed staff guidance on how to establish partnerships with Local Harm Reduction Agencies for program delivery of harm reduction services.

While it is vital for the Harm Reduction Program to be community driven, it is equally important to ensure there is a centralized function within TCHC to support staff in this work. The Harm Reduction Implementation Strategy lays out this approach in further detail, see **Attachment 1**, and below is an overview of progress on the initiatives related to the Harm Reduction Program.

#### Harm Reduction Programming

TCHC roles in Harm Reduction is to facilitate support for tenants. Successful harm reduction programming requires a community driven approach that reflects the unique needs of each community. To support and empower staff, a staff Toolkit is being developed (see **Attachment 2**) that will provide a step by step approach to creating these supports.

The Harm Reduction Toolkit for Staff is being developed in collaboration with The Works, staff across TCHC who have successfully implemented and supported harm reduction program delivery, and in close communication with Human Resources. The Toolkit emphasizes the importance of leveraging the expertise of Local Harm Reduction Agencies and including tenants with lived experience of substance use in the development of plans and programs.

In light of the intensity of the overdose crisis and urgency of providing effective strategies of care and safety in our communities, the TCHC Harm

Reduction Working Group has taken a targeted approach to implementation. Leveraging existing publicly available data combined with qualitative data from TCHC staff, the following geographic areas were selected:

- Church-Yonge Corridor
- Moss Park
- Annex
- South Parkdale
- North St. James Town
- Weston
- Downsview-Roding-CFB
- Clairlea-Birchmount
- Regent Park
- Woburn
- Scarborough Village
- Mount Pleasant West
- West Hill
- Birchcliffe-Cliffside
- Oakridge

TCHC is working closely with Toronto Public Health to validate this with current insights.

### Staff Training

As the Harm Reduction Policy required, all TCHC positions with a first aid training requirement under Toronto Community Housing's First Aid Program were required to complete additional training components that provides guidance on the steps for responding to an overdose with and without naloxone.

As of August 2021, 300 building staff have completed this updated training, and there are two training sessions scheduled each month to accommodate changes and hiring in operations due to Covid-19. In addition, all CSU officers and 10 CSA staff carry naloxone spray and have received naloxone training. First aid training for CSU officers was updated in 2020 to reflect the Policy, but naloxone training has been mandatory for all CSU officers since 2018. Currently, all incoming CSU officers receive the updated training when they join the organization and will keep apprised on best practices when they recertify their training.

As part of implementation, to support the key communities identified TCHC will work in collaboration with local harm reduction agencies including Toronto Public Health, to deliver foundational training in harm reduction, including guidance to help staff understand TCHC's Harm Reduction Policy. Delivery of this training will begin in 2021, with intent to expand the availability of harm reduction training to all staff at TCHC. All TCHC staff will have access to optional harm reduction training through partnerships with Toronto Public Health and other Local Harm Reduction Agencies. The goal of making harm reduction training universally available is to empower staff to support tenants in a manner consistent with harm reduction best practices.

### Sharps Disposal

Toronto Community Housing is committed to the safe disposal of sharps being part of waste disposal and collection processes, which includes needles, syringes, injectors (i.e. insulin delivery device) and pre-filled pens, as household hazardous waste.

At the time of writing, a Request for Proposals (RFQ) has been developed for 12 communities to have sharp disposals and will be released as soon as September 2021. A 2021 budget of \$25,000 was established for sharp disposal, operational expansion in 2022 is under consideration and may impact costs if approved.

### Naloxone:

Toronto Community Housing is working to make naloxone nasal spray more easily available in Toronto Community Housing communities. TCHC is in consultation with Toronto Public Health to identify appropriate supply and distribution options.

Currently all CSU officers have access to naloxone.

### **NEXT STEPS:**

The Working Group will continue to support the planning and implement TCHC's Harm Reduction Policy, while acting quickly to support communities with high needs with the support of Toronto Public Health and The Works.

**IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS:**

The implementation of the Harm Reduction Program will address the direction given by City Council in 2018, help the City address safety needs of vulnerable populations, and prevent deaths. To ensure continued success, TCHC will need to maintain best practices and work to scale successful initiatives as set out in the Harm Reduction Implementation Strategy.

**SIGNATURE:**

*“Lindsay Viets”*

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Lindsay Viets  
Director, Strategic Planning & Stakeholder Relations

**ATTACHMENT:**

1. Harm Reduction Implementation Strategy
2. DRAFT Harm Reduction Toolkit

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## Harm Reduction Implementation Strategy

TCHC acknowledges that significant numbers of our tenants experience challenges associated with substance use. Harm reduction is an evidence based, effective approach to supporting tenants who use substances, as well as promoting safe and healthy communities for all of our tenants. Discrimination against tenants who use drugs and lack of effective strategies puts everyone at risk in our communities.

In January 2021, the Board of Directors adopted the TCHC Harm Reduction Policy. In light of the intensity of the overdose crisis in Toronto, the urgency of providing effective strategies of care and safety in our communities has become a top priority. TCHC Harm Reduction Working Group (Working Group) was created to develop a harm reduction implementation strategy in order to ensure that the TCHC Harm Reduction Policy was accompanied by action. The Working Group has representation from across the organization, but for the Harm Reduction Program to be a success, it must be driven by both executive and front-line leadership.

Below are key action items which will enable TCHC to set up a successful harm reduction approach that is both community driven and supported centrally. These action items are informed based upon feedback/input from tenants, harm reduction agencies and the Working Group.



1. Have a centralized function within TCHC to compliment the community driven approach of the TCHC Harm Reduction Toolkit:
  - a. Lead the Harm Reduction Implementation Strategy
  - b. Proactively create relationships with local harm reduction agencies in Toronto
  - c. Provide resources and support to staff using the TCHC Harm Reduction Toolkit as they implement harm reduction programs
  - d. Supporting the piloting of sharps disposal in key communities
  - e. Be the central contact and point person for local harm reduction agencies and Toronto Public Health

- f. Convene the Tenant and Agency Harm Reduction Advisory Group and arrange for supports to ensure full participation
  - g. Create and convene the TCHC Harm Reduction Programming Working Group to generate best practices in harm reduction programming within TCHC
  - h. Monitor and evaluate the Implementation Strategy
  - i. Develop networks with other harm reduction leaders in the housing sector across Ontario and Canada
  - j. Report to the Board on the ongoing process of the Harm Reduction Program and scale of existing supports
2. Provide an “Introduction to Harm Reduction” training to staff in key communities that require immediate harm reduction supports and scale to make this training available to all staff. Training will be provided with the support of external harm reduction agency, such as The Works. The harm reduction training will include elements of the following:
  - a. Overview of harm reduction (introduction to harm reduction)
  - b. Why is harm reduction an effective strategy for creating healthy and safe communities at TCHC
  - c. Optional training at the end that makes overdose prevention and response, and the use of naloxone accessible for all staff.
3. Create a Tenant and Harm Reduction Agency Advisory Group who can monitor progress and help guide harm reduction work in TCHC communities. At least half of the Advisory group will include Tenants who identify as using drugs, and Tenants who identify as allies. Tenants who participate will bring invaluable insights to the implementation of this work and will need to be provided with supports to ensure they are able to participate fully (e.g. stipend to cover expenses such as internet speed required to attend virtual meetings during Covid).
4. Create a TCHC Harm Reduction Programming Working Group to generate best practices within TCHC. Membership will consist of staff who are working towards and have successfully implemented harm reduction programming, and efforts will be made to have balanced representation from each region.
5. Enable and support the scale of harm reduction programs in TCHC communities. These programs will be responsive to local needs and have a harm reduction response driven by frontline leadership. The centralized function will provide communities with key resources and supports, including:
  - a. Create the TCHC Harm Reduction Toolkit, which will include:
    - a. TCHC Harm Reduction Policy

- b. Best practices on harm reduction
    - c. TCHC harm reduction partner map
    - d. Evaluation template
    - e. Q&A for staff
    - f. Sample Use of Space Agreement for harm reduction programming
    - g. Information on naloxone and sharp disposals
  - b. Supporting staff in developing program partnerships with local harm reduction agencies
6. Ensure that local harm reduction agencies can easily partner and access TCHC to provide harm reduction supports in TCHC communities. The centralized function, will facilitate this by:
- a. Being a central point of contact for all inquiries/requests
  - b. Introducing agencies to the TCHC Harm Reduction Policy
  - c. Connecting harm reduction agencies with the staff leading harm reduction initiatives at various TCHC communities
  - d. Providing a clear path for harm reduction agencies to partner with TCHC and supporting them in the development of a partnership with TCHC
  - e. Invite harm reduction agencies to participate in the TCHC Tenant Harm Reduction Advisory Group
7. Create a strategy to scale sharps disposal in our communities. The centralized function, will facilitate this by:
- a. Consulting with the Advisory Board on effective strategies for sharps disposal
  - b. Piloting sharps disposal in key communities
  - c. Reviewing pilot projects, identifying best practices, as well as, scaling and rolling out effective strategies across the organization



## DRAFT Harm Reduction Toolkit for TCHC Staff

This toolkit is meant to help enable staff to set up harm reduction programming in their community based on TCHC's best practices and existing supports. TCHC acknowledges that harm reduction is a best practice and evidence-based approach to mitigating the harms associated with drug use in our communities. TCHC roles in Harm Reduction is to facilitate support for tenants.

### **Toolkit materials:**

- Guide: How to Set Up a Harm Reduction Program
- Supporting Materials, currently in development:
  - o [TCHC Harm Reduction Policy](#)
  - o [Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Harm Reduction Programs](#)
  - o TCHC harm reduction partner map
  - o Evaluation template
  - o Q&A for Staff
  - o Sample Use of Space Agreement for Harm Reduction Programming
  - o Information on naloxone and sharp disposals

This initiative supports TCHC's Strategic Priorities 2020-2021, including Goal 3 which sets out to "Empower and support frontline leadership and employees in resolving issues and challenges locally in support of tenant needs". It also supports TCHC's Mandate under the updated Shareholder Direction to "facilitate services to Tenants through other organizations beyond the basic residential landlord obligations".

# Guide: How to Set Up a Harm Reduction Program

1. Meet with the local TCHC staff who will be involved/affected, including your direct report. In preparation for this meeting, review the 'Harm Reduction Policy', discuss key goals, and identify the main harm reduction partner agencies in the area (use the TCHC harm reduction partner map as a resource.)
  - a. Recommended Staff to include per community: superintendents, CSCs and management
2. Reach out to the local harm reduction agencies in your area. Host a meeting with harm reduction partners and key TCHC staff. Explore needs, opportunities and ideas for programming.

For support, consultation or agency introduction, you can also reach out to Toronto Public Health, The Works [theworks@toronto.ca](mailto:theworks@toronto.ca). Local health units are mandated to expand harm reduction services in the region and Toronto Public Health is well positioned to support TCHC community needs.

3. Work with harm reduction partner agencies to reach out to tenants who use drugs in the community and get their input on the needs and ideas for programming. It is important that individuals with lived experience be part of the process, and this can be through one to one conversations, or through a more formal meeting.
4. Review the [Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Harm Reduction Programs](#), and reach out to TCHC staff that have implemented harm reduction programs to get their feedback/input/ideas.

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5. Finalize an action plan and program outline with TCHC staff and harm reduction partners.
6. Sign a use of space agreement with the harm reduction partners, a draft is provided in the Toolkit.
7. Create a flyer and/or host a meeting to let tenants know about the new harm reduction programming and addressed potential concerns. Harm reduction is about community safety, as well as supporting individuals who use drugs. It is recommended that you have representatives from local harm reduction agencies attend this meeting and field questions from tenants directly.
8. Join the TCHC Harm Reduction Programming Working Group. This working group meets monthly to share ideas and troubleshoot together.
9. Work with harm reduction partners to review and evaluate the harm reduction program after 1 year.
10. Utilize the evaluation results to create changes to the program in order to suit tenant and community needs.