



October 19, 2015

To: City of Toronto Executive Committee - Mayor John Tory (Chair), Councillors Paul Ainslie, Ana Bailão, Michelle Berardinetti, Gary Crawford, Frank Di Giorgio, Mary-Margaret McMahon, Denzil Minnan-Wong, Cesar Palacio, James Pasternak, Jaye Robinson, David Shiner and Michael Thompson.

From: Toronto HIV/AIDS Network (THN)

Re: Agenda Item #EX9.5 - TO Prosperity - Poverty Reduction Strategy

The Toronto HIV/AIDS Network (THN) commends Mayor John Tory, Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell, Councillors and City Staff, for your efforts to develop a Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. Communities have responded to the process with their participation and contributions of time, experience and ideas. THN is very concerned about the extreme poverty we see among many of the people our member organizations serve. Many individuals and families struggle to meet the basic needs of food and shelter, unable to thrive in our city. Much of the day to day work of our members responds directly to the challenges the people they serve face, not only due to health challenges, but because they live in poverty.

With support of the Executive Committee and at Council, change is possible. Our City can take action and be a city that is truly liveable and inclusive for all.

We ask the Executive Committee:

- **To adopt the proposed Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.**

And, going forward

- **To support the vital next steps to implement the Strategy's Action plan, to invest in and make change a reality by making Poverty Reduction a priority in the City's 2016 Budget.**

Transformative change requires institutional change. The Strategy's Action 17.1 "Embed mechanisms that assess the impact of budget choices on poverty reduction in City Council's decision-making processes. (Annual Work Plan 2017)" is crucial to bringing change and we commend the inclusion of this Action.

However, while developing such mechanisms can take time, we believe basic mechanisms could be activated through the 2016 Budget process. As each Committee discusses budget issues, questions can be asked about the impact of proposals upon people living in poverty. Council can ask about the impact upon Poverty Reduction, in the systemic way Council asks for information on the economic/financial impact on decisions it is asked to make.

We ask that initial, basic mechanisms and questions are put in place to review all proposed decisions in the 2016 Budget process through the lens of equity and impact upon people living in poverty.

Engagement: We emphasize the Strategy’s commitment to engagement of residents, people with lived experience, City staff and partners in the Strategy and Action Plan.

We support a participatory approach that is ongoing, with a special focus on inclusion of diverse communities and empowering people with lived experience of poverty/low income to participate meaningfully in all aspects of the Strategy. Sustained leadership and work, innovation, and negotiation, coordination and cooperation among multiple stakeholders (public, private and not-for-profits, across different levels of government, involving multiple departments, decision-makers and administrators, and necessarily with community consultation and input from people directly affected) are required.

Measuring Progress: We support the 15.2 Action to “Develop monitoring and measuring processes and tools to inform the implementation and evaluation of this Strategy.”

- Transparency and engagement will be important. Are changes happening? Are we making a difference? Note: While we believe that some changes and Actions can be done “within existing resources”, it will be important to become aware of unintended negative impacts upon communities and its services. It needs to be clear we are not strengthening the impact of the Strategy in one area while undermining it in another.

Investment is fundamental to transformative change:

- The City of Toronto will ultimately save money by investing in the short and long term in programs that allow more residents the opportunities to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of the City. Reducing poverty will require increased investments – by the City and by other governments and sectors.
- The Strategy’s Action Plan begins to address strategies for the priorities of Housing Stability, Access to Services, Food Access, Transportation, Quality Jobs and a Living Wage, and needed Institutional Change. Implementation and real transformative change will require determined support and commitment from members of Council.
- Stabilizing and strengthening community based services - Respect for and collaboration with community agencies serving people with low income as partners in change. Community agencies serving people with low income are on the frontlines working with and responding to people living in poverty. This gives us valuable experience and insight into the dynamics of poverty—where larger societal and structural forces determine whether or not people and families are able to live in good health and with dignity, and participate in the life of the city.

We and other community networks are passionate about the work we do and committed to community empowerment. We are ready and engaged in helping bring about change through the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.

With thanks,

Murray Jose-Boerbridge, Executive Director, Toronto People With AIDS Foundation and
Keith Hambly, Executive Director, Fife House, Co-Chairs, Toronto HIV/AIDS Network (THN)

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