Just Recovery Action Committee Priorities & Shared Vision

The Just Recovery Action Committee includes representatives from each of the City/United Way Community Coordination Plan (CCP) cluster tables that have been coordinating services and pandemic responses in Toronto.

Statement on anti-oppression and equity

As a group, and as individuals, we commit to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and systemic barriers, particularly those based on, but not limited to, indigeneity, race, ethnicity, language, age, ability, sex, sexual or gender identity, sexual orientation, family status, income, immigration or refugee status, nationality, place of birth, generational status, political affiliation, and religion.

We acknowledge that power, resources, and access are distributed inequitably in our City and we commit to addressing these imbalances through our work and the ways we work with one another. This includes a commitment to social justice for all, reconciliation, Land Back, anti-racism — addressing anti-Black racism, in particular — gender justice, and disability justice. We further recognize that particular communities continue to be marginalized by many forms of oppression and discrimination.

Collective approach to shared work

In reimagining a just and equitable recovery from the pandemic, the group has agreed on the following list of principles and approaches to guide their collective work. The work must be:

- Accessible
- Collaborative
- Inclusive
- Creative
- Sustainable
- Reflective of the lived experience of our organizations and members
- Grounded in good theory and substantiated with evidence-based data from the community sector
- Culturally competent

Urgent Priorities and emerging issues for cluster agencies:
(Identified by the committee as of August 11, 2022)
Toronto's Community sector and frontline service agencies have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to respond to new and emerging challenges as clients seek their support and help. They have identified the following key priorities:

- **Food security**
- **Housing and homelessness**
- **Emergency shelter**
- **Community safety and community-based alternatives to policing**
- **Harm reduction and the opioid epidemic**
- **Community sector funding**
- **Employment and income**
- **Mental health**
- **Cost of living**
- **Climate change**
- **Mistrust and Polarization** +
- **Anti-Black racism**
- **Access to space and spatial justice**
- **Vaccine engagement**
- **Grassroots support**

The Just Recovery Action Committee continues to discuss these issue areas and are working to identify short-term and long-term solutions. The committee will work collaboratively with other cluster agencies, partners, and coalitions to address structural issues beyond service delivery to bring system change. They consider their work thus far to be a work in progress; it is expected that other priorities and shared values will be added, reviewed, and re-written over time.

Please contact Melissa Wong at mwong@socialplanningtoronto.org for more information.

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Urgent Priorities and emerging issues for cluster agencies:
(Identified by the committee as of August 11, 2022)
Toronto's Community sector and frontline service agencies have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to respond to new and emerging challenges as clients seek their support and help.

What are the key issues and how are they impacting our organizations and the communities we serve?

Food security: The community services sector has had to respond to a never-before-seen demand for food banks and meal programs. Agencies that have never before offered food security programs have had to respond during the pandemic, and demand continues to increase with food bank usage across the city facing historically high rates. Many agencies do not have the facilities, infrastructure, funding, or staff to respond and are struggling with the pressure to serve their communities.

Housing and homelessness: Affordable housing stock continues to disappear as low and middle-income tenants grapple with above-guideline rent increases, renovictions, demovictions, and other loss of affordable rental housing. Negligent landlords are not being held to account to maintain their properties, leaving many tenants with no choice but to live in substandard conditions. New affordable housing is not keeping up with the demand and loss of existing affordable housing. Affordable housing needs to be defined as 30% of income, factoring basic utilities with rent; set-aside units in new development should be made permanently affordable.

Emergency shelter: Toronto's shelter system is overflowing and people are being turned away each night because there are not enough beds. A failing shelter system is also resulting in people choosing to live in encampments in city parks, where they are over-policed and discriminated against for the city's failure to provide adequate shelter. The devastating impacts of pandemic on houselessness is being borne by the many Black and Indigenous community members overrepresented in encampments.

Community safety and community-based alternatives to policing: Community safety is a broad term encompassing many challenges, but what is clear is that the current model of policing is not meeting the needs of communities and leaving many residents, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous and racialized, feeling unsafe. There are proven alternatives of expansion and funding for

community-based responses to mental health and other social crises, instead of policing, that can provide a more specialized and effective approach to addressing the root causes of community safety. Such alternatives include holistic models that support diversion, transformative justice/ healing, and preventing recidivism, connected to longer-term pathways to economic opportunities. A wholistic approach to safety needs to address issues from road safety to street lights, but also the impacts of historic discrimination and injustice.

Harm reduction/the opioid epidemic: Opioid poisoning and overdose deaths have ballooned during the pandemic. Lockdowns and other pandemic restrictions created conditions that increased the risk of overdose and drug poisonings. Harm reduction services need to be expanded and given the flexibility to adapt services to meet evolving needs, including safer supplies and safe consumption sites with necessary supports.

Community Sector funding: The community sector has been grappling with the challenges of responding to increasing demand for services, but without the sufficient support and funding. The sector is having to respond to gaps in government service provision as new needs have emerged throughout the pandemic. Increased and flexible funding needs to be made available to the community services sector to provide them with the stability to continue to respond to emerging and evolving community needs. As pandemic funding ends, bridge funding needs to be made available to agencies to continue meeting the needs of clients. A key challenge is that wage increases within the sector have not kept up with rising costs of living and funding partners need to contribute to a labourforce strategy for care and community-based, frontline workers.

Employment and income:. For those living on social assistance, the rates are insufficient to cover basic needs as the cost of rent and food rises. Low-income residents need better access to good jobs and training that can provide them with a living wage and the opportunity to build wealth. Community ownership, social purpose entrepreneurship, and other community wealth-building models are an important part of the solution as well.

Mental health (for communities and organizations/staff): The stress of over two years of the pandemic and growing inequality across the city has taken a toll on the mental health of many residents, including youth and seniors, and the community sector staff that have been working to support communities throughout this period. Support and funding to provide mental health services and education, particularly culturally appropriate support, is insufficient to meet the current needs.

Cost of living: Low-income residents and organizations serving vulnerable populations are being hugely affected by increases in the cost of living. Inflation is going up rapidly but funding is not keeping up with inflation in the community services sector, resulting in a devastating impact on service delivery.

Climate change: Many low-income residents and neighbourhoods are experiencing the impacts of climate change disproportionately, such as extreme heat and flooding, affecting their health and safety.

Mistrust/polarization: Misinformation spread on social media and the internet has supported growing mistrust and polarization, often tied to extreme political ideologies. Vaccine engagement during the pandemic has become a source of divisiveness due to misinformation online and a mistrust of the medical establishment from historic abuse and systemic discrimination.

Anti-Black racism: In the early part of the pandemic, the death of George Floyd sparked many new initiatives to address anti-Black racism, but we have not seen substantial shifts and there is a lack of accountability.

Access to space and spatial justice: Access to space for community-sector agencies is dwindling as affordable and free spaces that were once available in church settings or lower-cost commercial spaces become developed or rent increases. Public spaces like community centres and schools are becoming out of reach for the community sector to afford, limiting the availability of agencies to have programming close to where clients can access it easily. Without affordable and appropriate space located in the communities they serve, the community sector cannot provide the services that residents need.

Vaccine engagement and COVID care: As the COVID-19 virus continues to disproportionately affect certain communities, ongoing vaccine engagement and access to COVID care (including access to boosters, testing, and treatment), continues to be required to support overall public health. As the city and province moves away from emergency measures, ongoing support is needed to ensure that COVID health care is taking place in communities that are underserved and underrepresented.

Grassroots support: Grassroots organizations are an important part of the community sector. Grassroots leaders and groups have stepped up during the pandemic to provide supports to communities where larger organizations were unable. Tensions exist between grassroots and nonprofit organizations. There is a need for capacity building for both grassroots organizers and nonprofits and a need

to understand how to support infrastructure for grassroots leaders and groups to drive self-directed community action.