

# ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

## Budget Submission

November 2020

The Alliance for Healthier Communities is a coalition of community led primary health care organizations operating across Ontario. Our network represents 106 Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Community Family Health Teams and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics. Our members have played a pivotal role in Ontario's COVID 19 pandemic response. We remain committed to meeting the complex challenges facing our communities as Ontario initiates COVID-19 recovery. To meet Ontario's post COVID recovery needs we propose the following investments:

### 1. KEEP THE LIGHTS ON: FUND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance members are stepping up to meet the immediate needs of hardest-hit communities during COVID-19, from COVID testing to ongoing primary care to mental health and social services for isolated people. While our healthcare partners receive annual base funding increases, we have not seen one in over a dozen years. We need urgent investments to maintain vital infrastructure and meet demands for virtual care. Increasing base funding for community health organizations will ensure the sector is well positioned to respond to future pandemic waves.



*At TAIBU Community Health Centre in Scarborough, nurses and other providers continue to deliver vital primary care services such as diabetes education to their community.*

**Budget Request:** Annualized \$30M for a 5% base increase and annualized \$10.3M for technology costs to scale up virtual care.

### 2. RECOGNIZE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of people across Ontario. It has contributed to increasing isolation and intensified stress on people living with addictions. Now more than ever, urgent action is needed to address mental health and addictions care. Families and caregivers are under incredible strain, with little access to community based and accessible resources. At the same time, more people are dying from drug poisoning and the opioid overdose crisis. Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Nurse Practitioner Led Clinics and Community Family Health Teams have long offered health promotion, community development, social services and mental health services as part of comprehensive primary healthcare. Our sector provides complex mental health and addictions care. Despite this, we are excluded from the tables where mental health decisions and investments are made.

We need to act now to recognize comprehensive primary health care providers as mental health agencies in the right position to address the opioid overdose crisis. This can be achieved by funding safer supply programs, which will reduce deaths and harms caused by overdoses. Community led organizations have the expertise to provide this care and link people living with addictions to wrap around care.

**Budget Request:** Annualized \$5M for primary care approaches to mental health with a focus on harm reduction and safe supply

### 3. CREATE A PROVINCIAL BLACK HEALTH STRATEGY

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the physical, mental and economic health of Black Ontarians. We need to mandate the collection of sociodemographic and race-based data across the health system, create anti-Black racism and cultural safety training for all healthcare practitioners, and listen to Black communities regarding how to use data and targeted investments to reduce this stark health gap. Black health leaders within the Alliance for Healthier Communities have called for the recognition of anti-Black racism as a public health issue. They are experienced, connected experts who are well positioned to help lead this work and support the province in scaling up existing programs or developing updated interventions to close the gaps in healthcare to Black communities. A comprehensive Black Health Strategy can be developed through the allocation of \$1.5M towards the development of targeted COVID testing and response in Black communities, \$500,000 towards strategic planning and \$1M towards cultural sensitivity training in the healthcare sector to address anti-Black racism.

**Budget Request:** \$3M towards the development of a Black Health Strategy

### 4. INTEGRATE CARE TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

COVID has reminded Ontarians of how important housing, income, social connection and racism are as social determinants of our health (SDOH). We need to link more people with organizations that address SDOH through a comprehensive approach to primary healthcare, including social prescribing to track the health systems savings offered by referral to community and social services. We are happy to share detailed proposals for Team Care and Social Prescribing as needed.



*Staff at Carea CHC prepare grocery hampers for local families, both Carea clients and the broader community.*

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