

Strategic Plan

FY14 - FY18

Wellesley Institute 5.0

Transforming and sustaining healthy communities by reducing health inequities within a population health framework



The Wellesley Institute engages in research, policy and community mobilization to advance population health.

Acknowledgements

We wish to recognize the work undertaken by the Board, Staff and external resources in developing the FY14-FY18 plan.

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Introduction

The Wellesley Institute is a research and policy institute that works to drive policy, community and social changes that will improve the health of all who live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Vision 2025 and Mission 2018

Our vision is a healthier and more equitable Greater Toronto Area for all.

We believe the way to advance this vision is to address the complex range of social, economic and environmental determinants that shape population health and underlie systemic health inequities.

Our mission is to advance population health and reduce health inequities by driving change on the social determinants of health through applied research, effective policy solutions, knowledge mobilization, and innovation.

We believe healthy cities enable all, including marginalized and disadvantaged communities, to reach their full potential. Therefore we strive for:

- excellence in population health research, policy analysis and leadership
- responsiveness to, and engagement with, the diversity of interests, background, and perspectives across GTA communities, and within our Board, staff, partners, and stakeholders
- efficient operations and planning in order to maximize our financial and intellectual resources
- innovative and creative ways to achieve our goals

Over the previous strategic periods we have consolidated and clarified the Institute's role as an applied research and policy institute focused on urban population health. We have increasingly:

- been recognized as a credible and influential source of evidence-based policy alternatives by stakeholders and opinion leaders, ranging from national policy forums and research institutions through provincial Ministries and LHINs to third sector and city-building collaborations
- had significant successes in building equity into health reform
- established a strong presence with local and international research networks, formed extensive community partnerships, and influenced government policy forums in our priority areas
- contributed to better knowledge and understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of the social determinants of health
- acted as a catalyst and convener in building and sustaining multi-sector collaborations

This plan emphasizes the evolving role of the Institute as both a producer of applied research and pragmatic policy solutions and as an influencer informing public and policy debate.

Overview

We will concentrate on four priorities:

- shaping policy and program change that will reduce the depth and severity of economic inequality, precarious work and poverty, and their adverse health impacts
- improving access to affordable housing and reducing the adverse health impacts of homelessness and inadequate housing
- ensuring more equitable access to high-quality health care for all
- working on interconnected issues that cross social determinants, such as identifying the foundations of healthier and more equitable communities (in our view the social determinants of health rarely operate alone)

Success in our work requires the following four enablers:

- quality research to inform policy analysis and shape credible, and concrete recommendations for change at the local level
- a comprehensive strategic communications and knowledge mobilization strategy
- leveraging our resources through core activities and our impact through collaborations and partnerships
- evaluating the effectiveness and impact of our work, and drawing the lessons learned into improving our focus and activities

Finally, our diversity initiative will become an integral part of our values, guiding principles and actions.

Priorities

Priority 1: Reducing The Impact Of Economic Inequality

Economic inequality is one of the most fundamental determinants of health.

What Success Will Look Like

- Policy changes are made at the provincial and federal level that reduce labour market inequality including: increases in the minimum wage, strengthened employment standards legislation, modernized labour relations act, changes in temporary foreign workers legislation and policy
- Increased public understanding and conversation on the impact of income inequality on health outcomes across a broad and diverse population
- Increased public understanding and conversation on the role of quality public services in reducing economic inequality and enhancing health outcomes
- Toronto's budget process is more inclusive and real, per capita spending on services and capital investments that are health enhancing are protected or increased

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Commission research on the impact of economic inequality on health outcomes in Toronto and of labour market inequality on health outcomes

- Intervene annually in budget processes with blogs, policy papers, and presentations highlighting the impact of public finance on economic inequality and on health outcomes
- Produce a series of policy papers that identify the impact of labour market policies on economic inequality and health outcomes

Priority 2: Enhancing Affordable Housing

Affordable housing contributes significantly to good individual and population health; conversely, precarious housing and homelessness have adverse health impacts and are major factors in systemic health inequities.

What Success Will Look Like

- Funding of the national affordable housing, homelessness and mental health and housing initiatives will remain at current levels, as measured by total federal, provincial and municipal investment within the GTA and City of Toronto annual budgets
- A comprehensive package of housing policies, programs and legislation which is instituted to reflect the Housing First approach to ending homelessness, including supports and services, housing supply, housing adequacy, security of tenure and affordability measures
- Innovative and effective new social finance options are developed, recognized, and institutionalized to fund housing and homelessness initiatives
- A robust national and local set of housing and homelessness indicators and measurements is created
- Systematic planning frameworks are established to monitor and report on progress towards ending homelessness and ensuring adequate housing for all

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Support and strengthen ongoing research, policy and collaborative initiatives and local, provincial, national and international partnerships that can continue to effectively exert pressure for a national housing strategy, and to secure stronger provincial and local policies and programs
- Commission research on social capital investment and other vehicles, and develop and support collaborations that contribute to the development of new financial mechanisms to fund housing
- Expand outreach to shape and frame public, media and political discourse, to build stronger awareness of the interconnections between housing and health and to increase understanding of the benefits housing-related interventions bring at the systems level

Priority 3: Building Equity Into Health Care

Equitable health care access is crucial to reducing the impacts of the social determinants of health. Access and quality, when inequitable, contribute to poor health. Our research, policy analysis and collaborations are geared to shaping health care policy and system reform so that equity is embedded within strategy, service delivery and institutions.

What Success Will Look Like

- National professional, provider and health policy organizations; the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and provincial public health organizations; health care service providers and other key components of the health care system increasingly adopt and implement explicit equity priorities and commitments

- More effective and consistent use of equity-focused planning such as Health Equity Impact Assessment supports program planning and service interventions that enhance equity and address access barriers
- Key drivers of system transformation, such as quality improvement, chronic disease prevention and management, and primary care reform, increasingly prioritize and embed equity
- More equitable access, particularly recognizing the diverse needs of the GTA, to high quality care for all contributes to reduced inequities in health outcomes and to improved population health

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Produce a coherent and integrated series of reports and papers, designed to fit together into an overall health system equity roadmap
- Commission research, produce papers and develop forums and partnerships to address key reform and system issues through an equity lens, such as integrating equity into performance measurement and management systems
- Deliver frameworks, planning tools, other resources and consultant advice to LHINs, providers, networks, practice collaboratives and other stakeholders to enable them to effectively incorporate equity into their operations and commitments
- Participate in collaborations and partnerships, advisory committees, policy, practice and professional networks, and other appropriate forums to promote equity approaches and implementation.

Priority 4: Connecting The Social Determinants And Healthy Communities

Our first three priorities are designed to drive change in particular social determinants of health but we know that these determinants and policy spheres do not operate in an isolated fashion. To enrich the three specific priorities, we will also work in an integrated way on initiatives that cross the social determinants of health.

What Success Will Look Like

- A stronger and more resilient community sector that is better able to meet the health and social needs of community members and takes into account the realities of the broad range of communities and stakeholders in the GTA
- Policy processes and frameworks increasingly recognize the complex and dynamic nature of social determinants of health and the need to incorporate systems and longer-term approaches. Governments increasingly develop and use policy frameworks, such as Health in All Policies and Health Equity Impact Assessment that reflect these approaches
- Increased cross-sectoral policy collaboration and coordination both within and across government, community and other sectors
- Policy changes to improve the social determinants of health will lead to a positive impact on population health and reduced overall health inequities

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Promote a systems approach to issues in population health; emphasizing the, interconnected relationships and interactions that exist between determinants and the equally complex nature of policy development on these interdependent problems

- Continue to explore the use of research methods and communication tools to enhance understanding and capacity to act on determinants of health, such as the Making The Connections exhibit and video
- Work to identify the policy, governance, social, infrastructure and other prerequisites for a healthier and more equitable GTA. This will consist of an annual program of research, policy briefs and partnership work to intervene in budget processes to ensure population health implications are taken into account.
- Address new or emerging issues that affect population health and where our policy interventions could make a major difference. For example, each year we will continue to produce several health equity impact assessments of key policy initiatives through our Real Cost Of series. We will implement systematic planning checklists to ensure we only take on issues closely aligned to our strategic priorities and that are manageable within available resources
- Through partnerships, we will bring together people to foster new ideas and relationships that will improve local social, cultural, economic and environmental resources, resilience and conditions
- Commission research to analyze how an effective and responsive community sector can enhance population health and research to identify the public policy and investments needed to enable a vibrant community sector to flourish

Enablers

Enabler 1: Research

Research is a foundational enabler to our work. Our success relies on the ability to produce credible and reliable research evidence, balanced with strong analysis and interpretation.

What Success Will Look Like

- Our research is recognized as inclusive and essential to understanding and addressing issues in population health by key stakeholders and community partners
- Our research advances population health by informing and shaping policy debates, by raising new perspectives and by promoting new approaches that can lead to policy, program and/or community actions
- Our work provides evidence-based knowledge and tools for our community partners and stakeholders to advocate and take action on policy issues relevant to population health
- Our research contributes to advancements in population health research at local, regional, national and international levels through publication and research partnerships

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Adopt a commissioned approach to our community research that ensures methodological and analytical rigor
- Work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders on external research projects allowing us to use our expertise to contribute to local evidence on critical issues in population health
- Work to integrate inclusive and participatory processes to inform and shape research priorities and practices through research partnerships, policy alliances, and consultation practices
- Focus on the implications of current social and economic dimensions of population health, such as changes in the social and living conditions across communities; identify situations or populations at increased vulnerability; examine the impacts of cuts and changes in services (health care, housing etc); and opportunities for action and intervention in local communities

- Produce a series of reports, papers and blogs exploring the community, institutional and policy foundations of healthier communities, including issues such as innovative service delivery, effective and responsive community organizations, and community resilience

Enabler 2: Strategic Communications And Knowledge Mobilization

Even the best policy and research reports will not drive community and policy change on their own. We need to use communication strategies to inform the debates by reframing the issues and get our research and analyses to the right people at the right time.

What Success Will Look Like

- Institutions, policy makers, opinion leaders, and community organizations change programs or policies or reframe critical issues in directions that reflect our proposals and that enhance urban population health
- Key policy and opinion leaders refer to our material, use our ideas and recommendations, cite our research, recognize expertise and partner with us on projects that advance our priority directions
- The Wellesley Institute brand, beyond the individuals who work here, is recognized as credible, innovative, trustworthy and policy-relevant in population health research
- Downloads and visits to the website steadily increases
- Wellesley Institute products distributed through outreach and knowledge mobilization are used by a broader range of diverse community partners

How We Will Achieve Success

- Host and collaborate on events, forums, talks, and working groups
- Identify critical policy and community issues where intervening to highlight population health and health equity implications can reframe the parameters of policy discourse and debate
- Engage in strategically targeted conversations on related, real-time public policy and population health issues using social media, blogs, op-eds, and other media materials and platforms, and participate in influential policy forums and processes
- Improve impact assessment by using media monitoring, web analytics, and other measurement tools to become more strategic in project and communications planning, by identifying research issues and by targeting policy interventions and commentary
- Expand our evaluation strategy to identify benchmarks for web analytics and other outcome measures, milestones, targets and other effective ways to assess the uptake and influence of our products

Enabler 3: Collaborations And Partnerships

Shifting policy paradigms, addressing deep-seated structured inequality and driving action on fundamental social problems requires broad-based efforts. Working through collaborations and partnerships is crucial to leveraging the impact of our work and enhancing the breadth and power of community movements mobilizing for change.

What Will Success Look Like

- Broad coalitions, collaborations and partnerships focus on policy and community changes that will improve population health within the GTA

- Consultation and collaboration with individuals, groups and organizations which may have differing perspectives becomes integrated into our outreach
- Health and health equity as well as their underlying social determinants, are increasingly integral to public policy debate
- Diverse community perspectives and interests, including the most marginalized, are incorporated in public debate
- Community and business organizations, governments and their local leaders prioritize population health within their spheres of action and influence

How We Will Achieve Success

- Participate in broad networks of academics, advocates, residents, community leaders, business people, policy-makers and non-governmental organizations to help us identify issues and opportunities for intervention, and to understand and influence change-makers
- Systematically use relationship mapping and other processes to most effectively align our partnership work with our strategic priorities
- Seek and build “the right collaboration for the right issue” and “surprising coalitions or unusual suspects” to advance our strategic priorities, make pragmatic social gains, and build healthy communities
- Stay connected and grounded in community level interests and concerns through the many community-based networks and partnerships in which we work, and through holding community forums and other events
- Develop a comprehensive diversity strategy to ensure our work is aligned with the full diversity of GTA communities

Enabler 4: Evaluating Effectiveness And Impact

Wellesley has developed a clearly articulated strategy or theory of change for how we organize our research, policy analysis, knowledge mobilization and collaborative work. We have developed an evaluation framework that helps us assess the effectiveness of our activities and impact all along this chain:

- how we identify key policy issues and pathways for change in social determinants of health
- the quality and credibility of our research, policy analysis and products
- our communication and knowledge mobilization efforts in relation to specific policy spheres and audiences
- how our work influences and is taken up by government policy makers, community partners and other stakeholders
- how we shape policy and public debate and increase understanding and support for addressing systemic health inequities and their underlying determinants
- how our work as a whole affects and influences policy changes in our priority areas, from short-term effects in increasing knowledge and affecting specific policies, through mid-term changes in the framing and direction of key policy spheres, to long-term impact on reducing health inequities and improving population health
- how we expand our reach and collaborations with a diverse GTA

What Success Will Look Like

- Our evaluation framework generates insight into how effective our work is: how it is perceived, used and valued by priority audiences and stakeholders; how we are progressing in terms of strategic priorities and annual objectives; and how we are contributing to more effective and equitable policy development. (These insights are then fed back into planning processes that can effectively maximize identified strengths and opportunities, and adjust programs and processes as needed)
- Lessons are learned about how to most effectively contribute to reframing public and policy debate and discourse to emphasize equity, population health and progressive alternatives
- Evaluation findings help to ensure our financial and human resource investment is effectively deployed
- Our current and new stakeholders believe that the Wellesley is a credible and influential source of evidence-based policy alternatives and assists them in creating change

What We Will Do To Achieve Success

- Through a comprehensive evaluation strategy and framework, we institute systematic, reliable and actionable assessment of our activities, effectiveness, and influence and how we contribute to shaping policy, community and social change
- Build the lessons learned from this ongoing evaluation into continuous internal innovation and improvement
- Report regularly to the Board through high-level dashboard-type quantitative indicators and illustrative impact narratives and integrate evaluation into systematic quarterly and annual reporting and planning that is clearly linked to the strategic plan

Conclusion

Our plan builds on the evolution of previous strategic plans but places greater emphasis on the integration of our strategic priorities, our need to better define what success will look like, and our desire to evaluate the Wellesley Institute's impact.

We also wish to fully integrate diversity in all that we do so that it becomes an integral part of our values, culture, mandate, and activities and is central to all that we do as an Institute.

We will continue to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and opportunistic within the context and boundaries of this strategic plan as we view the GTA with the lens of population health.

Finally, while this plan is for internal use, we will ensure that we communicate our strategy to our partners and stakeholders so that they can better understand how we may collaborate.