

# Application: East Effort's Community Health Ambassadors Initiative

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Leading Practices/pratiques exemplaires

## Summary

**ID:** 0000000023  
**Status:** Leading Practice  
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## Application Form

Completed - Dec 24 2021

## Application Form

### Contact Information

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### Organization

East Toronto Health Partners

What are the criteria within the standards that aligns with this leading practice (optional)?

(No response)

## Mailing Address

This information is used to mail the certificate if the submission is accepted as a Leading Practice. Organizations will receive an electronic certificate recognizing their achievement. Organizations can also receive printed Leading Practices certificates (up to 3 printed copies) upon request.

Address:	825 Coxwell Avenue
Country:	Canada
Province/State:	Ontario
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## Title of Leading Practice:

East Effort's Community Health Ambassadors Initiative

## Sector

Community Health Services

## Leading Practice Description:

A Leading Practice is an innovative, people-centred, evidence-informed practice that has been implemented by teams in an organization. The leading practice has demonstrated a positive change related to safe and reliable care/service, accessible and appropriate care/service, and/or integrated care/service.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

On December 21, 2020 the provincial government announced \$12.5 million of funding for 15 high-needs communities in Ontario to help deliver key interventions in neighbourhoods that were hardest-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These interventions were to include community outreach and education, increased access to COVID-19 testing and wraparound support using a case management approach. Flemingdon Health Centre (FHC), a member of the East Toronto Health Partners (ETHP) Ontario Health Team, was named the Lead Agency for East Toronto. This project came to be known as East Effort - Community Covid Response Project (or 'East Effort').

East Effort focused its work in Crescent Town/Taylor-Massey, Warden Woods, Oakridge, Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park – communities that were identified as being disproportionately and severely impacted by COVID. These neighbourhoods shared many socio demographic similarities including having high percentages of low-income families, multigenerational households and many newcomers to Canada.

The East Effort initiative adopted an inter-sectoral approach to engage with partners and stakeholders from diverse sectors to take rapid action for COVID relief. An East Effort Steering Committee was created and included staff and community voices to guide the project and explicitly hold partners accountable to anti-oppressive practices.

A prime sub-initiative of East Effort included recruitment of Community Health Ambassadors (or CHAs). CHAs are neighbourhood-embedded residents who provide hyperlocal outreach and direct COVID supports to community members in need. The trusted connections to the communities CHAs live in were critical to the extent of their overall reach and impact in keeping neighbourhoods safe.

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## People-Centred

The submission describes how:

- Team/team members are engaged in the planning, design, development, implementation and/or evaluation of the practice.
- Team/team members' engagement is clearly identified as an enabling factor for the practice.
- Team/team members' experiences and perspectives are captured.
- The strategies that are used to involve team/team members in the process.
- The practice empowers team/team members as active partners in health services or education planning and delivery.

*Definition of Team/team members:* All individuals working, volunteering, or learning together within the organization to meet the needs of clients, families, and the community, including leaders, management, workforce, clients, social and health care professionals who hold privileges, contracted providers, volunteers, and students. As partners in care, clients and family members who clients identify as essential partners in care, are recognized and treated as members of the team, and share in decision making and accountability. The specific composition of a team depends on the type(s) of service(s) provided and/or activity performed.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

East Effort's Community Health Ambassadors initiative embodied the People-Centred Care model because it demanded equal inclusion and involvement of vested residents – who the initiative was intended to help – throughout the lifecycle of the project.

The project steering committee included active residents who contributed to decision-making affecting priorities, activity types, resource allocation, design and evaluation based on emerging community concerns and feedback. In addition to this, CHAs with lived experiences of health inequity were consulted at every stage of the process. They participated in regular brainstorming sessions and focus groups to evaluate progress and impact of the work that had been done.

Various engagement strategies were implemented to connect with residents, especially those living in hard-to-reach parts of the neighbourhood. These included having the CHAs:

- provide assistance with interpretation and translation for residents
- offer culturally-competent support to minimize disruptions to knowledge transfer and exchange due to language barriers

- serve as accompaniments for resident going to vaccine clinics
- create and moderate online community groups to share evidence-based information on current COVID public health guidelines and ensure that residents can gather safely and participate in knowledge sessions

CHAs engaged in in-person outreach through door-knocking and flyer distribution during lockdown periods. They hosted information booths in public areas, such as shopping plazas and parks, to serve as low-barrier access to information and discussion. CHAs also supported mobile neighbourhood drives to encourage residents – particularly shift workers and mothers with young children – to get tested and vaccinated.

## Evaluation Methodology

The submission describes how the practice was evaluated. Information provided clearly states:

- The measurable objectives targeted in the evaluation.
- The quantitative indicators or qualitative information collected, with a clear connection between the measurable objectives and the indicator.
- The method or tool used to gather the information.
- The time when the evaluation was started and completed.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

The Community Health Ambassador program was continuously monitored and evaluated by the Steering Committee to make sure there was equitable allocation and flow of resources to communities most in need. Between the periods of January to October of 2021, CHAs contacted over 70,000 individuals living in high-priority communities in East Toronto through outreach and engagement activities and facilitated distribution of more than 10,000 adult and child PPE kits. In addition, over 1,400 clients were supported through case management with the Individual and Family Support Fund.

Metrics on CHA-driven operations were progressively reported back to the lead agency on a monthly basis via an Activity and Financials Reporting tool. Statistics captured as part of the reporting structure included:

- number of health and social services organizations engaged
- number of unique individuals served through outreach activities
- number of individuals receiving case management
- number of referrals made to voluntary self-isolation

A cumulative summary report was then forwarded to Ontario Health.

At the end of Phase II of the initiative, the Steering Committee reconvened in dedicated virtual meetings to brainstorm project successes, challenges, best practices and lessons learned to compile a final report. This report was intended to be a case study for health and community agencies, as well as funders, to use for future similar initiatives.

## Demonstrated Intended Results

The submission describes the tangible results that the practice produced and results that demonstrate a positive change related to safe and reliable care/service, accessible and appropriate care/service, and/or integrated care/service.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

East Effort's CHA initiative has achieved significant positive results for high-priority neighbourhoods in East Toronto. This was done by enhancing client experience through restored and improved trust, establishing greater coordination between available services and improving outcomes at a population level with community-based education that fostered greater compliance with COVID health guidance and stay-at-home orders. CHAs also enabled COVID-positive residents to safely self-isolate by building connections with case workers who then created pathways for wraparound services such as hot meals, medicine delivery, rent relief, etc.

Among the many clients that received support from East Effort, the Bengali Information Employment Services shared their experience on behalf of local residents as follows:

'Thank you for supporting the mental health of Bengali Community...The community was greatly impacted by COVID-19 and needed support immediately in the areas of mental health along with other supports.'

As evident from the CBC article "Toronto's high-risk communities need much more support, COVID-19 outreach workers say" published in November 2020, communities subject to historic systemic and social injustices were most impacted by COVID.

Through the relentless and widespread advocacy efforts by CHAs, there was a decline in prevalence of COVID-positive cases (decrease from the average of 22% to under 15%) and a steady uptake in testing and vaccination. In another Global News article entitled "How a Toronto neighbourhood called a coronavirus hotspot is pushing back against COVID-19" published in December 2020, the author noted that significant progress was made by community outreach and efforts which allowed for increased community testing.

## **Spread and Sustainability**

The submission describes how the practice will be sustained (there is a sustainability plan) and how it is or can be replicated and/or spread to other areas of the organization and externally.

The submission indicates that there has been or will be a spread of success and lessons learned internally and externally in the system.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

There are currently more than 50 Community Health Ambassadors involved in extensive service coordination and COVID-recovery work in East Toronto.

With the success of East Effort, there is understandably a heightened interest in sustaining the high level of community engagement beyond the pandemic and ensuring community members continue to be actively engaged in co-designing solutions and outreach through the Community Ambassador model. This can and will be sustained through the East Toronto Health Partners OHT and the region's Building Back Better recovery strategy for health systems.

The long-term plan includes advocating for a formalized structure where Community Ambassadors are strongly connected to the work of both EHP and other intersectional agencies in East Toronto in order to build a sustainable and lasting system of engagement work. This would be the foundational layer for positive community outcomes such as increased access to coordinated supports, reduced service duplication, increased efficiency, reduced health inequities, demonstrated equitable health outcomes and improved client/provider experiences.

Some of the work that needs to be done to successfully sustain this initiative includes continuing ongoing work around successful system navigation and reviewing service gaps, overlaps and crossovers that may exist between providers and strategies.

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## **Adaptability to Other organizations**

The submission describes how the practice may be implemented in other organizations.

And describes, based on your experience, the potential barriers and facilitating elements that other

organizations wanting to adopt this practice may need to consider. Strategies to overcome these barriers and to achieve buy-in are included.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

East Effort's success can be replication by other organizations by reviewing, adapting and implementing the following key factors:

**Foundational principles:** Core principles of East Effort were established early on and formed the groundwork to drive the project forward. These principles were based on transparency, community-focused engagement and capacity-building while fostering an agency-agnostic approach to learning and implementation.

**Embrace risk:** An early challenge for the initiative was balancing urgency with thoughtful delivery of services to respond to immediate and pressing needs. The lead agency and team took a risk by spending time upfront to develop a detailed project plan, build an assets list, map out community engagement and hold consultations to understand emerging needs and resource optimization.

**Role of Steering Committee:** The quick formation of a Steering Committee, with the CEO of the lead agency as the Chair, allowed for nimble action, thus removing decision-making bottle necks. Being deliberate about the composition of the Steering Committee to ensure agencies represented were serving all the communities was critical to project impact and success.

**Recruitment of Community Ambassadors:** Organizations ensured a diverse recruitment of community ambassadors across target demographics of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, faith, language and sexual orientation.

**Funding Breaks:** Administrative delays in acquiring funds between project phases was an ongoing challenge as it caused a ripple effect in delays with community fund distribution. This also created a risk of losing valuable CHAs and their knowledge as they moved onto other priorities during the layover period.

## **Innovative/Transformative**

The submission states if the practice is innovative or transformative.

**Innovative:** The practice clearly improves upon existing processes/outcomes in a meaningful way or is new and novel. The practice employed exemplifies creativity.

**Transformative:** An existing practice, already implemented elsewhere, is adapted and applied in a significantly different manner by the organization.

Please make sure the following section below is filled and has no more than 250 words.

The use of Community Health Ambassadors as a part of East Effort, is an innovative practice. This practice was modeled on an existing collaborative framework made up of 35+ ETHP members, community agencies, individuals and grassroots groups, and then further enhanced to include wider and deeper community engagement through peer-led action. During this time, 75+ Community Ambassadors representing a cross-section of their communities emerged in informal leadership roles, enabling trust-based, timely and relevant interventions for over 70,000 individuals who faced significant challenges as a result of the COVID pandemic.

This initiative exemplified creativity by committing to consistent, values-driven coordination of community support through mobilization of the CHAs across the targeted neighbourhoods. Traditional forms of support require community members to proactively reach out for support that they require. However, this innovative and creative effort engaged resident leaders to reach out to their own communities and form a two-way communication channel between agency and resident to allow for a trusted flow of information and resources.

The close social connections of CHAs to communities they lived in, the knowledge base of resident leaders and their deep understanding of prevalent and emerging community needs made this initiative widely pervasive and impactful. In the absence of CHA support, it would have been challenging to cater to localized needs, particularly at a time when individuals felt vulnerable to reach out to those beyond their immediate household. Thus, this initiative proved to be effective in helping keep communities healthy and safe with localized solutions.

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By submitting this form you agree to our [Terms and Conditions](#).

### Responses Selected:

I agree.

## Supporting Documentation

### Incomplete

Supporting document is included only as additional information, which the reviewers may or may not review. Hence, please ensure that the content in description and criteria sections are clear, articulate, and present the information accurately as much as possible.