

New TMU-PDSB program gives Peel students early exposure to healthcare careers

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The final component of The Future of Healthcare Program from Peel District School Board (PDSB), in partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), has just launched.

The first-of-its-kind initiative gives 25 PDSB secondary students a university-level learning experience focused on building a more just and equitable healthcare system.

TMU's Faculty of Community Services and School of Medicine with PDSB has brought forward its first course, Equity in the Future of Healthcare.

The 13-week course begins on September 17, 2025, and will serve as a student's weekly co-op placement.

The course centers on understanding health equity and inequity through case studies, personal reflections, and academic frameworks that examine power, privilege, and the social determinants of health.

It will explore how access, delivery, and representation issues shape equity and justice in Canada's healthcare system.

Students involved can explore real-world healthcare fields such as nursing, medicine, midwifery, nutrition, public health, and social work through guest lectures, hands-on activities, and visits to TMU labs and classrooms.

The program helps to prepare the next generation of health sector leaders.

Mirjan Krstovic, Resource Teacher with Peel District School Board, said he hopes the course will help students better understand what equity in healthcare is and how they can adopt an equity mindset to advocate for greater social justice for marginalized communities now and in the future.

"Being a change-maker begins by becoming aware of the issues and barriers that certain communities face when it comes to accessing and receiving healthcare. I wish for students to contribute to healthcare initiatives that will eliminate discrimination and prejudice on the basis of income, race, gender, ethnicity or language barriers," said Krstovic.

Krstovic said students frequently tell him they want to make a difference. He says he hopes the newly constructed knowledge and skills through the course will boost their confidence in ways that will allow students to see themselves as future healthcare professionals who are culturally sensitive and culturally responsive and care deeply about all members of our diverse communities.

"This out-of-school opportunity will give students early exposure to a university course where they will learn to tackle rigorous academic tasks such as research, writing academic papers, and developing advocacy skills," said Krstovic. "Students in this course will also receive two hours per week of academic mentorship from TMU students who will support the PDSB students through the academic tasks. I hope that this mentorship model, combined with the rich course content and field trips to nursing and midwifery labs, TMU campus and the TMU's new School of Medicine will have a positive and lasting impact on our PDSB students."

Dr. Ashifa Jiwa, Associate Dean, Equity & Social Accountability, School of Medicine at Toronto Metropolitan University, stated that at TMU, they believe that embedding critical thought and a broad perspective of what impacts the health of populations early in education is key to creating future leaders who will be creative visionaries for our healthcare system.

“By engaging high school students in this course, particularly those from communities that traditionally face barriers, we are challenging and inspiring them to see themselves as future leaders within our healthcare system. In doing so, we are investing in a future where healthcare is more representative, equitable and responsive to the needs of all Canadians. Representation in healthcare improves outcomes and reduces disparities, this program is part of that systemic change,” shared Dr. Ashifa Jiwa.

She shared that 25 students from five Peel secondary schools are enrolled in the pilot program and that many of these students come from communities that are underrepresented in health professions.

“This program is helping them see themselves as future doctors, nurses, midwives and more. A dedicated TMU student mentorship component ensures these high schoolers feel supported, connected, and confident throughout the course. The program is intentionally designed to build a sense of belonging and possibility, especially for those who've historically faced barriers in accessing post-secondary education or healthcare careers,” she said.