TRAIL AREA HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM (THEP) LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS FROM THEP PARTNERS, FEBRUARY 2025

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 reflections reinforce THEP's commitment to being **inclusive, collaborative, transparent, and community-centered**. Addressing lead exposure in the Trail area continues to require a holistic approach: one that considers the **built indoor and outdoor environment**, evolving science, program interconnectedness, and the lived experience of families.

We recognize that prevention is not driven by a single action or a single source, and that progress happens when all parts of the system work together.

As blood lead levels in children reach lower levels, the work becomes more nuanced and requires holistic strategies and ongoing collaboration.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1. A holistic understanding of lead exposure is essential

Holistic consideration across all THEP focus areas is essential for continued progress. We are increasingly seeing that it is not the lead in soil or lead in air we need to worry about in isolation, but rather the **combined effect of multiple small sources,** including historical lead from deteriorating paint and legacy dust, in our built environments**.** As blood lead levels decline, **small and cumulative sources, become increasingly important**. Each program area provides a critical piece of the puzzle.

- Data illustrates that lead in paint is prevalent and continues to require attention.
- Lead in settled dust, in soil, and in paint are all potential pathways.
- In 2025, one family's example of removing lead-based paint before soil management illustrated how coordination across programs enhances positive outcomes.

Deeper integration, refined analysis, and sustained partnership are necessary in this complex setting.

2. Intentional engagement increases blood lead clinic participation

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Participation in blood lead (BL) clinics is on the rise after a period of declining attendance since the COVID pandemic. These gains demonstrate that **intentional effort translates into improved health monitoring and prevention**.

Examples of efforts made by outreach teams:

- Concerted focus on engagement, improved communication and remaining adaptive.
- Staff skill development improves service delivery.

3. Meeting families where they are matters

Engagement is not linear. Readiness of families to engage differs and information “makes sense” to people at different times. However, being available, patient, and consistent builds trust. Being visible and present in the community are vital in relationship building and influence exposure prevention outcomes.

Examples of meeting families where they are include:

- Respecting timing, reducing barriers, and providing multiple ways to access information.
- Accepting that progress looks different for everyone.

4. Difficult access properties: A challenge and a win

A high percentage of prioritized soil management properties in 2025 were difficult to access. With coordinated effort, reaching properties is feasible and barriers due to access can be overcome. This represents a significant success and demonstrates perseverance in action.

Examples of efforts to reach properties include:

- Using technology such as soil conveyors, custom built soil chutes, hand digging, and craning equipment into steep residential yards where feasible.

LOOKING AHEAD

Onboarding is ongoing and relational

With new people joining THEP partner organizations, formalizing the onboarding should be a priority. It should not start and stop with orientation: relationships must be central and internal communications must support transitions.

Transaction costs (time, effort) are real, but investing in relationships strengthens resilience across staff turnover. There are opportunities to explore living onboarding documents;

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technology-supported onboarding (e.g., interactive tools, videos, quizzes, guides); as well as knowledge capture and transfer strategies.

Documentation is not enough: sharing is equally important

Documenting THEP's work matters, and sharing our work matters just as much. We must communicate what we are doing; explain what we are learning; clarify evolving science; and influence broader provincial guidance where appropriate. Different people absorb information differently and our communications should reflect that reality.

Specific areas of work for 2026:

1. Clarify THEP's role in lead in paint and embed in updated LSR program.
2. Strengthen public communication on dust and its various forms.
3. Meet people where they are at, including using modern communication tools.
4. Start to develop the next strategic plan aligned with WARP/MHO recommendations.
5. Continue to prioritize community engagement.
6. Strengthen onboarding and internal communication.

Progress in complex environmental health work is rarely driven by one intervention. It is adaptive, collaborative, relationship-based, holistic, and persistent. Each action - large or small - contributes to healthier children, stronger families, and a more informed community.

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