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WOMEN ABUSE PROGRAMS IN YORK REGION

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 1, 2004, from the Commissioner of Health Services and the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Community and Social Services be requested to provide 100% funding for a comprehensive survey to determine the extent of violence against women in Ontario.
2. This report be submitted to Community Services and Housing Committee for information purposes.
3. This report be forwarded to Laurel Broten, MPP, Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier of Ontario, appointed to help protect women from domestic violence.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to respond to a request from the Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee at its meeting of October 2, 2003, that an analysis of the need for additional women's abuse programs in York Region be conducted.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Women Abuse Issue

Women abuse is defined as "physical, emotional, psychological, stalking/harassment, sexual, financial and/or threats of such abuse directed at a female by a person known to her in an attempt to control her" (York Region Women Abuse Protocol, 2003).

In 1993, Statistics Canada released the results of the Violence Against Women Survey, which identified that 29% of ever married/cohabiting Canadian women had been subjected to violence at the hands of their partner at some point in the relationship. Three percent of this group reported at least one incident in a one year period. Younger women are at greater risk with 12% of Canadian women aged 18–24 reporting at least one incident of violence by a partner in a one year period. In almost two-thirds of wife assault cases, the violence occurred on more than one occasion. Forty-five percent of women who experienced spousal violence indicated that they had suffered injury and 43% of these women required medical attention. According to Statistics Canada, 69 men

in Canada were accused of killing their current or ex-wife in 2001, whereas 16 women in Canada were accused of killing their husbands.

The impact of abuse goes beyond the women who are the subject of the abuse and includes their children. Four in ten women report that their children witnessed the abuse. Between 80 and 90% of children in homes where there is spousal violence are aware of and affected by the violence. Child behaviours associated with witnessing family violence include aggression and internalization of problems with negative side effects on social and academic development.

A comprehensive survey of the prevalence of abuse in York Region has not been conducted. The following data, however, provides an indication of the magnitude of the concern:

- York Regional Police respond to approximately 3,500 domestic incidents per year. In 2003, 993 charges were laid against a male party in relation to some form of abuse against a female party. These charges were distributed throughout York Region.
- In 2002, York Region Children's Aid Society received 1,042 referrals for service involving domestic violence. Sixty percent of these referrals were from the south areas of York Region (Central - 25%; North - 15%).
- York Region Health Services, Public Health Branch, recently completed a review of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC) program documentation, for families who gave birth in 2001 and received at least one home visit; 7.8% of women in the sample population disclosed abuse. Eighty-eight percent of the disclosures occurred during the home visit and when the woman was asked about abuse.
- As at November 14, 2003, York Region Public Health Nurses were providing interventions to 26 women who identified being abused. These represent families who reside in 7 of the 9 municipalities within York Region.
- Over a 31 month period ending in 2003, there were 690 visits to the Regional Domestic Violence Program at York Central Hospital.

York Region's statistics are not unique to this region alone, but reflect those in other regions throughout Ontario.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 York Region's Diverse and Growing Population

York Region is a complex and growing region and continues to be one of the fastest growing areas in Canada. By 2001, York Region represented 14.4% of the total GTA population. This unprecedented growth has resulted in an increase in demand for services, including those for women subjected to violence. The diversity of the

population—economic, urban-rural, language, ethnicity—presents a major challenge in providing appropriate resources.

According to the 2001 Census, 39.1% of York Region's population was foreign-born. The leading places of birth for York Region immigrants were Hong Kong, China, the Russian Federation, Iran, India, and South Korea.

The factors that contribute to violence against women are complex and service providers must therefore respond with a variety of strategies in order to meet the needs of women who are experiencing violence.

4.2 Services and Supports Available in York Region

4.2.1 The York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee (VAW)

The York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee was established in 1997. This is a collaboration of service providers, including York Region Health Services, whose mission is to “develop and implement a coordinated plan for a comprehensive community-based service system” to support women who have been subjected to violence. In the fall of 2003, VAW completed the review and distribution of the York Region Woman Abuse Protocol. This comprehensive document defines the role of services available in York Region within the following service sectors: justice, shelters, health and intervention. Attachment 1 provides a list of services available to residents of York Region.

4.2.2 Health Services Department, Public Health Branch

4.2.2.1 Women Abuse Identified through HBHC Program

The HBHC program, established in 1999, is a prevention and early intervention initiative for families expecting children or families with children up to the age of six years. It is designed to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve his or her potential through healthy development in childhood. Screening and assessment interventions identify infants and pre-school children at risk of poor child development for a wide variety of reasons including violence in the home.

Families at high risk, including those where woman abuse has been identified, are referred to the HBHC high risk home visiting program through which they receive visits from both Public Health Nurses and Family Visitors. In addition, they are referred to appropriate community services and agencies.

York Region Health Services, Public Health Branch, recently completed a survey of HBHC documentation to provide baseline data regarding the disclosure of woman abuse. The conclusions are set out in section 3.1 of this Report. In 2004, Public Health Nurses will receive training in the implementation of “Routine Universal Comprehensive Screening” (RUCS). The goal of this initiative is to promote early identification of woman abuse and to determine whether or not indicators of abuse are present. It is anticipated that the use of the RUCS protocol will increase the number of women who

disclose abuse and provide the opportunity to address immediate safety concerns in order to make appropriate woman-directed referrals. The funding for this initiative is through the Early Child Development, Prevention of Injury and Family Violence program and is 100% provincially funded.

4.2.2.2 Healthy Sexuality and Birth Control Clinics

Public Health Nurses at York Region Sexual Health Clinics provide screening, awareness, education and referral services for young women regarding violence in their relationships. Although there is no concrete data to support it, there is a strong belief that many high school and college-aged women who attend the clinics are subjected to violence in dating relationships.

4.2.3 Community Services and Housing (CS&H) Department

Sandgate, located in Jackson's Point (30 beds), and Yellow Brick House, in Aurora (21 beds), are the two transitional homes in York Region for women leaving violent environments. Yellow Brick House also provides temporary housing for homeless women who may or may not have been abused.

York Region's CS&H Department is responsible for assisting eligible residents in the transitional homes by providing financial support and access to benefits. The costs are shared with the province on a 80/20 basis.

The province pays a per diem rate to the shelter for each member of the benefit unit. The Regional Municipality of York provides a Personal Needs Allowance of \$112 per month for each family member. Individuals and their dependents may remain at the shelter for up to six weeks.

CS&H staff visit the shelters to determine the need and financial eligibility of each resident on admission to the shelter. Residents are considered to be Ontario Works applicants. If eligible, and benefits are required during their stay at the shelter, an Ontario Works application is completed. Benefits may include prescription drug coverage, travel to medical appointments and a community start-up allowance to establish a permanent residence.

4.3 Next Steps

An extensive network of supports and services to assist abused women are available throughout Ontario. This network is severely limited by the chronic lack of funding that the system has received. In order to achieve the goal of preventing violence and providing safety and support to the women subjected to violence and their families, a workshop hosted by the Regional Municipality of York will be organized for the fall of 2004. Appropriate organizations and groups from across Ontario will be invited to participate in order that a comprehensive plan can be developed to address the need in Ontario. Funding for the workshop has been identified in the 2004 Early Child Development (ECD) budget and will be funded 100% by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Providing services which enable abused women in York Region to access resources and safe accommodation, ensures that York Region continues with many of its objectives, including providing Safe Neighbourhoods, Meeting Peoples Basic Needs, Supporting Safe and Secure Communities, Promoting Wellness and Planning for Human Services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost of conducting a workshop on Women Abuse in 2004 will be \$25,000. The \$25,000 cost will be funded 100% by the MOHLTC, as part of the ECD initiatives in 2004 (Injury and Family Abuse Prevention). This workshop was not included in the initial 2004 Public Health budget and this opportunity has only been made available due to the additional ECD funding from the MOHLTC. This additional funding is the subject of another report on this month's agenda. Table 1 details the breakdown of the expenditures involved with conducting the workshop.

Table 1
Women Abuse Prevention Workshop Costs for 2004

	Expenditures
Purchase of Service	\$20,000
Program Costs (facilities, food, supplies, printing, etc.)	5,000
Less: Provincial funding (100%)*	25,000
Net Expenditures for ECD	\$ 0

* 100% Provincial funding is subject to approval of ECD report.

Included in the \$20,000 for purchase of service is the cost of setting up the workshop, conducting focus groups with both service providers and specific target groups representative of York Region's population, a facilitator, providing a report outlining the recommendations as a result of the workshop and focus groups, promoting and distributing the York Region Women Abuse Protocol, the development of a funding strategy and potential sources of a comprehensive survey in 2005.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

No municipality is exempt from the impact of violence against women. Although there are resources available across York Region, they are not necessarily distributed in a manner that allows women to access services in a timely way, or which reflect their unique needs. A survey of the extent and distribution of violence against women and the needs of these women and their families will ensure that residents in all municipalities will receive the services and supports that they require.

7. CONCLUSION

Violence against women is pervasive. No one group owns the problem. It is not uniquely a problem of economics, culture, or ethnicity. Therefore, the initiatives that work to prevent this violence and then to provide safety and support to the women and their families must reflect the complexities of the issue.

In order to inform future planning and decision-making, it is recommended that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Community and Social Services be requested to fund a comprehensive survey in 2005 of the extent, distribution and nature of violence against women in Ontario.

A workshop to bring appropriate organizations and groups together in the fall of 2004 and a comprehensive survey in 2005 will inform service providers of the extent, nature and distribution of violence against women, and lead to the development of a comprehensive plan towards addressing violence against women.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachment referred to in the foregoing has been forwarded to each Member of Council with the April 15, 2004 Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee agenda and a copy thereof is on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)