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PROVINCIAL BED BUG CONTROL INITIATIVE

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated May 3, 2011 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Council authorize additional expenditures of up to \$340,396 by March 31, 2012 for education and outreach and for vulnerable population supports related to bed bug infestations, offset by 100% provincial funding with no tax levy impact.

2. PURPOSE

This report is prepared for Regional Council in order for it to carry out its legislative duties and responsibilities as the Board of Health under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. It seeks authorization for additional expenditures of up to \$340,396 offset by one-time 100% provincial funding for education and outreach and for vulnerable population supports related to bed bug infestations.

3. BACKGROUND

Bed bug infestations are increasingly prevalent worldwide and difficult to eradicate

In recent years, there has been an escalation in the number of bed bug infestations in most countries around the world. The resurgence of a pest rarely seen since the beginning of the twentieth century is likely a result of several factors, including increased local and global travel, new limits on pesticides, and the ability of bed bugs to build resistance to insecticides.

Infestations can occur in houses, apartments, hotels, hospitals, and a range of other public or private settings. The risk of exposure extends to the entire population, since any individual who comes into contact with bed bugs can bring them back home.

Once an infestation occurs, bed bugs are difficult to get rid of since they can hide deep in narrow crevices and are very adaptable. They live not only in bed frames and mattresses, but also in other furniture, electrical outlets, walls, baseboards, and carpets. In multi-

dwelling units such as apartments and condos, bed bugs can migrate from one unit to another through cracks, vents or spaces in a shared wall. Adult bed bugs can survive for more than a year without feeding.

The number of bed bug infestations in Ontario is underreported

According to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the global increase in bed bug infestations is reflected in Ontario. The work being done by Ontario pest control companies has doubled in the past two years due to bed bug infestations. In Toronto, where there are large numbers of multi-occupancy premises, accounts of bed bug infestations became more common starting in 2003, and reports of infestations to Toronto Public Health increased from 26 in 2003 to over 2,000 in 2010. Reports of infestations have also increased in other urban, suburban and rural settings throughout the province.

It is difficult to determine the true magnitude of the problem, however, because of the stigma associated with bed bugs and because reporting infestations is not mandatory.

A community survey will help determine if bed bugs are impacting York Region residents

Due to York Region's proximity to Toronto and the natural population flow across municipal boundaries, there is a concern that the number of bed bug infestations in York Region could grow.

Evidence suggests that bed bugs are already a concern for some York Region residents. York Region's Health Connection public health telephone line received 111 bed bug-related calls in 2010, up from 12 in 2008. Anecdotal information from York Region Social Services and Housing Services indicates that some clients have experienced bed bugs, particularly in domiciliary hostels.

A survey has been sent out to local community partners and stakeholders to help assess the populations and settings that are most impacted by bed bugs and to determine the extent of the problem.

Bed bugs are not known to transmit human diseases

There is no evidence that bed bugs transmit diseases. Problems associated with bed bugs include difficulty sleeping and secondary infection due to itching and scratching.

The most significant health effects of bed bugs, however, are psychological. Individuals living in infested residences often experience stress, anxiety, and depression related to the social stigma of bed bugs.

Vulnerable populations are affected most negatively by bed bug infestations

Anyone can get an infestation of bed bugs; however, vulnerable populations may have limited capacity to take the necessary steps to deal with the infestation, and/or they may have limited access to supports, leading to more intense infestations and more severe impacts. Vulnerable populations as defined by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care include:

- Individuals with physical disabilities, mental illness or addiction issues
- People living on low income
- Individuals who are under-housed or homeless
- People who are frail elderly

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Province is providing health units with one-time funding to lead a bed bug response

In response to the rise of bed bug infestations across the province, a Bed Bug Summit was hosted by Member of Provincial Parliament Mike Colle in September 2010. Representatives from all levels of government, landlord associations, tenant groups and the pest control sector participated in discussions in order to generate recommendations to deal with the problem.

Based on those recommendations, the Ontario government has initiated an education campaign and has committed up to \$5 million in one-time 100% funding for Ontario's 36 public health units. Funding is intended to support activities in one or both of two streams:

- 1) Education and outreach
- 2) Supports to vulnerable populations

Although the provincial government is coordinating its response through health units, it acknowledges that bed bugs are not exclusively or primarily a public health issue, and that public health programs alone will not resolve the problem. At the provincial level, the impact of bed bugs cuts across the jurisdiction of many ministries:

- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Ministry of the Environment
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- Ministry of Consumer and Business Services
- Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport

- Ministry of Children and Youth Services

At the local level, health units are expected to collaborate with community partners to maximize resources and develop local capacity.

Education and outreach activities will increase public and stakeholder awareness of prevention, identification and control measures

Provincial funding for education and outreach to the public and stakeholders is meant to enhance awareness and knowledge in the identification, prevention and control of bed bug infestations. York Region Public Health intends to use this funding to enhance bed bug information resources across a range of media and to train staff. Activities may include the following:

- Providing guidance and information related to bed bugs through the York Region Health Connection telephone line.
- Enhancing information available on York Region's website on bed bug identification, control and prevention, including provision of information in other languages.
- Raising public awareness of bed bugs through pamphlets, special event displays and media (e.g. newspaper ads and local television).
- Working with local schools and post secondary institutions to disseminate information to their student body and families.
- Providing educational materials to staff, special interest groups and community partners on prevention, identification and control.

Supports to vulnerable populations will provide assistance in combating bed bug infestations through existing and new partnerships

Provincial funding to help provide supports to vulnerable populations impacted most negatively by bed bug infestations acknowledges public health's role in addressing health inequities. York Region Public Health will use this funding stream to leverage current supports and to develop further partnerships to access these populations. For example:

- Partnerships have been developed between Public Health, Community Services, Social Housing and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association representatives to identify strategic directions for a bed bug support program.
- A bed bug working group will be developed to act as a forum for information sharing and collaboration, building upon existing partnerships that can reach the vulnerable client population who may be experiencing bed bug infestations.

- Funding to Regional or municipal programs and community partners that work with vulnerable populations for a possible range of services, including:
 - Landlord/owner education to verify infestation
 - Treatment preparation (provided by approved service providers) to assist individuals who need help moving furniture from walls, cleaning, de-cluttering etc.
 - Treatment application and post-treatment evaluation (provided by approved service providers)
 - Facility maintenance (e.g. sealing cracks with caulking, repairing peeling wallpaper, vacuuming, etc.)
 - Mattress covers

Local data collection on bed bugs will be enhanced

While the reporting of bed bug infestations is not mandatory, health units receiving provincial bed bug funding are expected to collect local data on the degree of infestations, and the populations and settings most impacted. Reporting of this data to the Province will allow for better assessment of the scope of the problem and the effectiveness of implemented interventions.

Surveillance techniques for the collection of this data will include monitoring of calls received by Health Connection as well as surveying community partners on the degree of infestations they have witnessed. The Province has announced that it will provide guidance to health units in relation to surveillance and reporting requirements at a later date.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no net cost to the Region to implement a one-time bed bug control initiative. The Province is providing one-time 100% funding in the amount of \$340,396 to York Region for this program. This funding covers the period up to March 31, 2012.

Table 1 outlines the anticipated cost of each component of the program.

Table 1
Cost of bed bug control initiative in York Region

Component	Cost
Education and outreach activities	\$ 60,000
Supports to vulnerable populations	280,396
Total	\$340,396

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local community agencies will have the opportunity for input and information sharing through a bed bug working group.

Coordination of a response to bed bug infestations through York Region Public Health will especially impact the most vulnerable residents of local municipalities.

7. CONCLUSION

The Province has announced one-time 100% bed bug control funding. As required by the Province, York Region Public Health intends to use this funding for education and outreach and for collaboration with community partners to provide supports to vulnerable populations. Local data collection will help assess the effectiveness of this initiative. These activities are intended to help limit and prevent new and worsening bed bug infestations in York Region.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health, at Ext. 4012.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.