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AUGMENTING PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY TO ADDRESS SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated August 17, 2011, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the addition of 2.0 permanent full-time Public Health Nurse positions, offset by 100% provincial funding, to the York Region Public Health staff complement.
2. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services or designate be authorized to execute the necessary agreements on behalf of the Region with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

2. PURPOSE

This report is prepared for 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 Council approval to implement a provincially-funded initiative to enhance health unit capacity related to the social determinants of health, by adding 2.0 new permanent full-time Public Health Nurses to the Public Health Branch staff complement.

3. BACKGROUND

Addressing the social determinants of health is fundamental to the work of public health

The health status of individuals and communities is determined by complex interactions between numerous biological, behavioural, psychosocial, economic, and environmental factors known as the determinants of health. The social determinants of health are those determinants of health that relate to social and economic conditions. These include culture, gender, education, employment conditions, income, and the physical environment, among other factors.

The Ontario Public Health Standards address the determinants of health throughout individual standards by requiring health units to assess the distribution of the

determinants along with incidence of disease and injury in determining the level of need for programs. In program planning and management, epidemiological and surveillance data and research results can help identify subsets of the population who have comparatively less control over factors that influence their health, who experience health inequities, and for whom public health interventions may have a substantial impact.

Provincial funding for two new Public Health Nurses is intended to address needs of populations impacted negatively by social determinants of health

Acknowledging that a focus on the social determinants of health is important to fulfilling the Ontario Public Health Standards, the Province has announced an initiative to augment health unit capacity in this area. Funding has been made available to each board of health in Ontario to support the salaries and benefits of two new full-time Public Health Nurses who will address local program and service needs from a social determinants of health perspective. The majority of Ontario's health units have accepted this funding, including other regional municipalities such as Peel, Durham, Halton and Niagara.

Funding is subject to the following conditions:

- Funds must be used to recruit qualified Public Health Nurses holding the requirements specified in Regulation 566 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*.
- Funds must be used to provide enhanced supports to those impacted most negatively by the social determinants of health.
- Funding is subject to the 2010 Program-Based Grants Terms and Conditions.

This initiative is part of the 9000 Nurses Commitment, a key component of the provincial health human resource strategy, and aligns with the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Enhanced focus on social determinants of health aligns with priorities of Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan and related strategic initiatives

As stipulated by the Province, the two new Public Health Nurses are to provide enhanced supports to address the program and service needs of populations impacted most negatively by the social determinants of health in the health unit, and identified by the board of health as priority populations. Since the social determinants of health encompass such a broad range of factors, they may have a variety of negative effects across a number of populations. In order to ensure that knowledge and expertise is optimized, the Public Health Branch will align the areas of focus of the two new nurses with the Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan, which provides a strategic, holistic approach to integrating departmental programs in response to key human service issues in

the Region. Therefore, while the nurses will maintain a public health nursing perspective in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards and the College of Nurses of Ontario's practice standards, their work will also have a positive impact on Regional social service priorities.

Two related initiatives for community change, the Human Services Planning Board's *Making Ends Meet in York Region* strategy and the York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy, provide more comprehensive frameworks, developed collaboratively with community stakeholders, for addressing the needs of specific priority populations who will constitute important areas of focus for the two new Public Health Nurses.

1) *Making Ends Meet in York Region* strategy

Priority population: Economically vulnerable individuals and families

The low- and moderate-income population represents a significant portion of York Region's residents (36.3% of the total population, or 321,245 people). The growing number of York Region residents who are subject to economic vulnerability threatens the long-term sustainability of the health and well-being of York Region's population and communities. The high cost of housing is a major contributor to this, and creates strain on individuals' ability to access the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, the Human Services Planning Board of York Region has identified its priority area of focus to be low- and moderate-income families and individuals in York Region, many working and educated, who are continuously struggling to make ends meet.

2) Local Immigration Partnership initiative's Immigration Settlement Strategy

Priority population: Newcomers to York Region

York Region's changing demographic profile is tied to immigration, which is driving local growth and diversity. In 2006, over 40 per cent of the Region's residents were born outside of Canada, and it is projected that by 2031 immigrants will comprise more than half of the Region's population. The need to strengthen community capacity to support this rapid growth is emphasized by the York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy, the York Region Local Immigration Partnership initiative funded by the Government of Canada through Citizenship and Immigration. The Immigration Settlement Strategy focuses on ensuring that newcomers have adequate supports to participate in and contribute to the community.

One new full-time Public Health Nurse will address determinants of health from a child development perspective

Healthy child development is a determinant of health. Public Health Child and Family Health programs are based on the premise that the environmental conditions that children are exposed to in the earliest years, including quality of relationships and learning environments, play a critical role in their growth and development. There is growing

recognition of the importance of investing early in children's lives to establish positive pathways to schools, promote healthy living and develop human capital.

In line with the Department's strategic initiatives, one of the new Public Health Nurses will support children and families who are challenged or isolated due to their immigration status, family income and/or housing situation, as well as due to violence, addictions or physical or emotional health problems. The right supports, including health care and services for high-risk children, will help families and children to reach their full potential.

It is proposed that this new Public Health Nurse have specialized knowledge and expertise to address reproductive and child health program needs of vulnerable populations by developing targeted support and interventions in areas of family violence, perinatal mood disorders and healthy child development among marginalized populations. The family violence service delivery will include screening and assessment of individuals for the identification of family or domestic abuse, referral to appropriate services and health teaching about healthy relationships. Perinatal mood disorders encompass a wide range of mood disorders that can affect women during pregnancy and the first year postpartum. The nurse will screen women for perinatal mood disorders, refer to appropriate services and offer interventions that will reduce the risk for low birth weight as well as strengthen attachment between infant and parent which leads to healthy child development and enhanced learning in the preschool years. This nurse will also help increase staff capacity to reach and service priority populations by providing training and development opportunities, help strengthen partnerships between York Region Public Health and other providers who serve vulnerable groups, and help ensure that the public health perspective is considered in action plans for the *Making Ends Meet* and Immigration Settlement Strategies.

The other new Public Health Nurse will focus on social determinants of infectious diseases

Economically and socially vulnerable groups have higher rates of infectious diseases. Some of this is due to environmental conditions, such as overcrowded, substandard housing, which increases the likelihood of transmission of diseases such as influenza and tuberculosis. However, other factors, such as behavioural risk factors and poorer access to health services, also play a role. For example, studies consistently find poor vaccine uptake among low-income families, with one study of six low-income neighborhoods in Saskatoon finding that immunization rates at two years of age were half that of more affluent neighborhoods. As a result, the burden of a wide array of infectious diseases is greater among vulnerable populations.

Among newcomers, language and cultural issues create further barriers. They may prevent individuals from accessing health services, which can not only jeopardise their own health but also that of the wider population (when community outbreaks are not reported to public health, for example). Interventions to interrupt infectious disease

transmission need to take into consideration cultural, linguistic and economic challenges which these individuals face.

It is proposed that this new Public Health Nurse have specialized knowledge and expertise to address infectious disease program needs of vulnerable populations by developing targeted support and interventions to improve infectious disease reporting, vaccine coverage, case and contact investigation, and outbreak management among marginalized populations. This nurse will also help increase staff capacity to reach and serve priority populations by providing training and development opportunities, help strengthen partnerships between York Region Public Health and other providers who serve vulnerable groups, and help ensure that the public health perspective is considered in action plans for the *Making Ends Meet* and Immigration Settlement Strategies.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Ministry is providing up to \$170,040 in 100% funding for the recruitment of 2.0 permanent full-time Public Health Nurse positions to help address the social determinants of health in York Region. The current 2011 regional budget can absorb this recruitment without any financial implication. Annualization impacts of approximately \$6,000 net tax levy will be incorporated in the 2012 budget, as provincial funding will not cover the full annual salary and benefits cost. In light of the new Accountability Agreements being rolled-out and enforced by the Ministry, this small regional contribution enables the Region to leverage mandated resources, in addition to promoting an integrated service delivery approach throughout the department.

In the event that the Ministry discontinues funding for these 2.0 Public Health Nurse positions, the Public Health Branch will report back to Council with an analysis of the situation and recommendations.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

A public health initiative that targets priority populations through a social determinants of health lens will optimize the well being of the York Region community at large.

7. CONCLUSION

The Province is providing health units with funding for two new full-time Public Health Nurses to address and increase capacity related to the social determinants of health. These nurses are to work towards addressing the needs of populations identified by the board of health as being most negatively impacted by the social determinants of health.

The Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan and related initiatives, the *Making Ends Meet* strategy and the Immigration Settlement Strategy, identify priority areas of focus to address human service needs and strengthen community wellbeing in the Region. In line with these strategic directions, York Region Public Health proposes to use the provincial funding to recruit Public Health Nurses who will work within the Child and Family Health Division and the Infectious Diseases Control Division of the Public Health Branch, respectively, with a focus on the particular health needs of economically vulnerable groups and newcomers. The two provincially-funded nurses will help increase program and staff capacity and ensure that priority populations are considered in program planning and evaluation, in order to better serve these populations and improve community health status.

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.