

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

February 9, 2004

To: Board of Health
From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health
Subject: Supplementary Funding for the Food Safety Program

Purpose:

To seek Board of Health approval to increase the Toronto Public Health 2004 operating budget request in order to match new provincial funding for the Food Safety Program.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

The 2004 EMT Recommended Base Operating Budget for the Food Safety Program is \$8,052,191 gross (\$3,776,995 net). The Province has announced an additional subsidy allocation of \$451,672 to the City of Toronto to increase compliance inspections for the Food Safety Program, but as this is a 50% shared program, it requires matching City funding. This program enhancement of \$903,344 gross (\$451,672 net) and 11 permanent staff is not included in the 2004 EMT Recommended Budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact statement.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. The Board of Health endorse an increase of \$903,344 gross / \$451,672 net to the Toronto Public Health 2004 operating budget request, which would allow TPH to hire an additional 10 Public Health Inspectors and 1 Area Services Clerk to ensure compliance inspections and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) audits of food premises according to provincially mandated requirements;
2. The Board of Health forward this report to Budget Advisory Committee for consideration;
and

3. The appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to implement the recommendations in this report.

Background:

Ontario's Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines require three inspections per year of high risk food premises, two inspections per year of medium risk food premises and one inspection per year of low risk food premises. In addition, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) audits must be conducted annually in all high risk food premises. There are currently 16,680 food premises in the City of Toronto, of which 4,588 are high risk, 7,154 are medium risk and 4,938 are low risk.

In a letter dated November 13, 2003, the provincial government offered additional funding to enable all health units in Ontario to fully implement all requirements of the Food Safety Program (see Attachment 1).

Comments:

Toronto Public Health (TPH) currently has 79 public health inspectors assigned to the food safety program. In 2002, compliance inspections were completed on 95% of high risk premises, 91% of medium risk premises and 35% of low risk premises. Routine HACCP audits have not been conducted since 2001 so that staff could focus on compliance inspections in high and medium risk food premises. Such audits are still conducted if a food premises is implicated in a foodborne outbreak.

In each year since amalgamation, events have occurred which have adversely affected TPH's ability to meet all mandated requirements under the Food Safety Program. For example, major events in 2002 included World Youth Days and a labour disruption, and in 2003 these included the SARS outbreak, the blackout and the Aylmer meat investigations. This pattern is likely to continue in the future, resulting in Food Safety inspectors being re-deployed to assist with emergencies and unplanned events as they arise.

The re-introduction of annual HACCP audits will further affect the ability of staff to implement all of the provincially mandated, minimum inspection requirements. A compliance inspection in a high risk food premises currently takes about 70 minutes to complete. Inclusion of a HACCP audit increases this time requirement to 280 minutes. Inspection rates will be further reduced unless additional resources are obtained to address the increased workload.

In a letter dated November 13, 2003, the Province allocated \$451,672 to Toronto Public Health, provided that the City matches this funding. This would result in a TPH operating budget increase of \$903,344 gross / \$451,672 net, enabling TPH to hire 10 Environmental Health Officers/Public Health Inspectors and 1 Area Services Clerk. This additional funding would enable the Board of Health to achieve its mandate to deliver 100% of the compliance inspections required for all high, medium and low risk food premises and 100% of the annual HACCP audits required in all high risk premises, barring any major urgent events that may require reallocation of staff.

Conclusion:

All boards of health in Ontario are required to meet the minimum mandatory requirements for Food Safety that have been set out in the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines. The Province of Ontario has provided an opportunity for the Board of Health to reach its mandated objective. If approved, this will create additional pressure on the TPH operating budget request.

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Dr. Sheela V. Basrur
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List of Attachment:

Appendix 1: Letter dated November 13, 2003 from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care