

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

January 5, 2006

To: Board of Health

From: Dr. David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health

Subject: Health Canada Funding for Peer Nutrition Program Evaluation

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Health of the receipt of Health Canada funding to evaluate Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition Program and to seek approval for an amendment to the Toronto Public Health 2006 Operating Budget with respect to this funding.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

Toronto Public Health has received approval for an allocation of \$35,000 through the Health Canada Innovation Fund to contract services that will develop and conduct a program evaluation and prepare the required documentation in consultation with Peer Nutrition program staff and community partners. Funding must be spent by March 31, 2006, as the Health Canada Innovation Fund ends on March 31, 2006.

Approval of this one-time initiative will increase the 2006 Proposed Operating Budget for Public Health by \$35,000 gross and \$0.0 net.

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) an amount of \$35,000 gross expenditure and \$35,000 revenue be added to the 2006 Toronto Public Health Operating Budget for the Peer Nutrition Program Evaluation; and

- (2) this report be forwarded directly to the Policy and Finance Committee meeting scheduled for January 23, 2006, due to time constraints for the use of the funding; and
- (3) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

The Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition Program was established in 1999 with the goal of improving infant and child feeding practices and the food selection, purchasing and preparation skills of parents with children aged six months to six years. The program is uniquely designed to reach parents of diverse ethno-racial communities who are often missed by traditional nutrition programs. It reaches more than 2,000 parents and 3,000 children each year and is delivered in 30 different languages at more than 60 community sites. Service is delivered through an innovative peer education model that combines direct education from Community Nutrition Assistants with the support of professional dietitians and nutritionists.

In May 2004, Toronto Public Health submitted a proposal to the Health Canada Innovation Fund for the purpose of conducting an evaluation of the Peer Nutrition Program using an action research approach. Although approved in December 2004, there was insufficient time to complete the project by the end of Health Canada's fiscal year, March 31 2005. The proposal was re-submitted in 2005 and was approved. At the September 26, 2005 meeting of the Board of Health, and at the October 20/21 2005 meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee, and then forwarded on to City Council at its October 25, 27, 28, and 31 2005 meeting where final approval was granted to increase the 2005 Toronto Public Health Operating Budget by \$51,000 with an off-setting increase in revenue from Health Canada. Unfortunately, delays in negotiating the final contract between Health Canada and the City of Toronto meant that none of the funding flowed to the City in 2005 and the project did not begin. Because the Health Canada Innovation Fund ends on March 31, 2006, a revised proposal was submitted to reflect the shorter time lines and reduced cost. Health Canada has approved \$35,000 for a Peer Nutrition Program evaluation that has been slightly reduced in scope. All funding will flow in 2006 and must be spent by March 31, 2006.

Comments:

This project is intended to develop a program evaluation model that can be used for community peer programs. Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition Program offers an excellent case study for the development and testing of such an evaluation model. The project will include developing the action research evaluation model, testing its applicability on the Peer Nutrition Program, and analyzing the results of the evaluation with a view to identifying lessons learned in relation to the delivery of a community-based peer program. Health Canada will use this information to support replication of a peer nutrition program in other communities across Canada and the development and evaluation of other community-based peer programs.

The project will provide Toronto Public Health with valuable information about the effectiveness of the Peer Nutrition Program. Program evaluation is currently limited to the collection and analysis of program delivery statistics and participant satisfaction surveys. This funding provides Toronto Public Health with a unique opportunity to actively engage participant families and communities in a more in-depth evaluation. The timing of this evaluation is particularly useful as the expansion of the program that was approved in the 2005 Operating Budget has recently been implemented.

Conclusions:

Program evaluation is an important component of all programs. This funding provides an excellent opportunity to expand existing program evaluation through the development and application of a program evaluation methodology that is uniquely suited to the community-based peer education approach of Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition Program.

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