



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Provincial Funding for inSPOT Toronto

Date:	April 27, 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

To inform the Board of Health of the receipt of \$59,220 in funding from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC), AIDS Bureau in order to support a new Toronto Public Health service, inSPOT Toronto. inSPOT Toronto is an online e-notification service aimed at reducing the prevalence of syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Toronto.

In February 2007, Toronto Public Health (TPH) was asked to submit a proposal to MOHLTC, AIDS Bureau for funds to launch and advertise inSPOT Toronto as part of the AIDS Bureau's syphilis reduction efforts. TPH received \$59,220 in funding from the MOHLTC for the establishment, launch and online promotion of this new service to facilitate online partner notification of sexually transmitted infections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. the Toronto Public Health 2007 Operating Budget be increased by \$59,220 gross, \$0 net to reflect provincial funding received to support the inSPOT service.
2. this report be forwarded to the Budget Committee for consideration.

Financial Impact

This report recommends an increase of \$59,220 gross expenditures and \$59,220 revenues to the 2007 Toronto Public Health Operating Budget. There is no net cost to the City for this initiative.

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

ISSUE BACKGROUND

An outbreak of infectious syphilis in Toronto began in late 2002 and peaked in 2004. There were 384 cases reported in 2004 compared to 31 cases in 2001 (pre-outbreak). In 2005, Toronto began to experience a decline in the outbreak with 250 reported cases of infectious syphilis reported (a decrease of 34% compared to 2004). The decrease appears to have slowed down through 2006 with 233 reported cases.

The outbreak is occurring in men who have sex with men (MSM) in Toronto. Risk factors contributing to the outbreak include unprotected oral sex, high rates of partner change, anonymous partners/venues and recreational drug use. Of concern is the high rate of HIV co-infection in people with infectious syphilis, with 30 to 36 percent of cases co-infected between 2002 and 2005.

COMMENTS

Infected persons who engage in high-risk sexual activities often connect with their sexual partners through online chat rooms and e-mail. If infections are spread, the only personal identification information that the partners know of each other are their e-mail addresses. The inSPOT service will enable sexual partners to notify one another that they may have an STI and of the need to get tested prior to being contacted by Toronto Public Health.

inSPOT Toronto proposes to facilitate partner notifications by applying the solution that the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) implemented and which has proven to be effective. inSPOT allows people to log onto a website (called inSPOT) in order to send anonymous or non-anonymous electronic cards (e-cards) to their partners to notify them of a possible exposure to an STI. To reach target audiences in order to make them aware of this new online service, site specific promotional resources will include banner ads with several internet service providers, and print ready materials such as palm cards.

The allocation of \$59,220 through MOHLTC, AIDS Bureau is to establish inSPOT and internet links to gay-targeted websites, and to promote the launch of inSPOT Toronto through condom inserts and palm cards. Banner ads will run on a cyclical basis on numerous gay websites over the course of several months around the launch of inSPOT

Toronto. When the banner ad is clicked on, it will take the web surfer right onto www.inspot.org where they will find the inSPOT Toronto portal and STI assessment and treatment information.

The benefits of inSPOT Toronto are as follows:

- Residents infected with an STI are made aware of this new service allowing them to notify their sex partners through an anonymous on-line partner notification system. The discomfort associated with disclosing an STI is a major barrier to notifying sex partners.
- Online advertising creates a network of links directing users to inSPOT Toronto and provides outreach to on-line communities connecting up with sexual partners.
- Online advertising and this new online partner notification system expands TPH services and information provision. Improved communication will help control the spread of STIs. This medium allows for a far-reaching connection with the communities and age groups that use the internet to establish social contact, some of whom are hard to reach.
- This project expands TPH presence to Toronto populations by promoting on-line community services.
- This project augments TPH's current method of contact tracing.

Toronto Public Health will launch this service to the community in the Spring of 2007.

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SIGNATURE

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