

Toronto's Blind-Low Vision Early Implementation Plan

Date:	July 9, 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	HL6.14

SUMMARY

This report provides information on the implementation and funding of the new Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program. This program is 100% funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) (see Attachment 1).

In February 2007, the MCYS announced the Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention (BLV EI) Program as another of the foundation programs within the Best Start framework.¹ Best Start is a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to help give Ontario's children the best possible start in life by promoting an integrated approach to early identification, intervention and support for children's healthy growth and development. Toronto Public Health already delivers a number of programs, including Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, and the Infant Hearing Program, that support the Best Start plan for Toronto.

Vision loss and blindness affect every aspect of child development putting a child who is blind or has low vision at great risk for developmental delays. Early intensive intervention is therefore critical to healthy child development.² The BLV EI Program is therefore, an important addition to the range of services that promote healthy growth and development. It will provide an integrated system of services and supports to families and their children from birth to the transition into school in order to facilitate early identification and intervention. The BLV EI program will work in partnership with existing community services to deliver a multi-strategy approach which includes family support and intervention services, child care consultation and public awareness and a professional and parent education strategy.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Health about this new program and Toronto Public Health's plan for implementing it. The report also seeks approval to adjust the Toronto Public Health 2007 Operating Budget to include the related funding and staff complement and to award and execute the required purchase of service contracts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. the Toronto Public Health's 2007 Approved Operating Budget be increased by \$242,720 gross and \$0 net to reflect funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for the Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program;
2. the Board of Health endorse the Toronto Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention plan and support its implementation;
3. the Board of Health authorize the Medical Officer of Health to award, amend and execute purchase of service contracts with Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and Ontario Foundation for the Visually Impaired Children (OFVIC) to provide early intervention services and child care consultation for children low vision or blind and their families; and
4. this report be forwarded to the Budget Committee for consideration.

Financial Impact

Blind-Low Vision Program	2007			2008 GROSS
Source of Funds	Gross	Revenue	Net	INCREMENTAL
Base funding from MCYS	\$132,720	\$132,720	\$0	\$240,555
One time funding from MCYS*	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$0	(\$89,600)
TOTAL	\$242,720	\$242,720	\$0	\$150,955
Positions	4.0			(1.0)

* One-time funding of \$130,400 is allocated as follows: 2007 \$110,000 / 2008 \$20,400

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

Implementation Points

The MCYS has established a very short timeline for local planning and implementation of the BLV EI program. Planning, including community consultation, was done between February 1, 2007 and May 31, 2007. The Toronto BLV EI Plan was submitted to the MCYS on May 31, 2007 and approved shortly thereafter. A province-wide implementation date has been set for September 1 2007.

DECISION HISTORY

In 1998, Toronto Public Health responded to a Request for Proposals from the Toronto District Health Council to be the lead agency for Toronto's Preschool Speech and Language (PSL) Program, a new Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care initiative. The proposal was successful and Toronto Public Health has been the PSL lead agency ever since that time. In December 2000, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

(MHLTC) announced the Infant Hearing Program to be administered and delivered through the local PSL Program lead agencies. Consequently, Toronto Public Health is also the lead agency for the Infant Hearing Program (IHP). Similarly, it is the intent of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) who assumed responsibility for the oversight and funding of both programs in 2004, that the new BLV EI program be administered locally by the PSL/IHP lead agency.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Eighty-five percent of all learning is visual. Consequently, visual impairment affects all areas of child development, including cognitive, social, emotional, communication, self-help, and both fine and gross motor skills.³ Early, intensive intervention is therefore critical to healthy development and will make it possible for children with blindness or vision loss to reach their maximum potential. It is estimated that approximately 32 children are born in Toronto each year with blind or low vision.⁴ Toronto is also projecting a slightly higher incidence of children identified with blind-low vision may immigrate into the City.

In February 2007, the MCYS announced the Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention program. The goal of the BLV EI program is to provide an integrated system of services, delivering child and family centred education and support services for parents and caregivers of children who are blind or have low vision. Visually impaired children and their families will receive these supports and services in order to facilitate (promote) healthy growth and development and to enhance the activities of daily living necessary for personal and social sufficiency at home, in early learning and care settings and at school.

To ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the implementation planning, Toronto Public Health hosted a community consultation and planning day and subsequently established the Toronto Blind-Low Vision Working Group. This group has acted as an advisory group throughout the program's development. It will continue to act in an advisory role throughout the implementation of this new and innovative program.

COMMENTS

Toronto's BLV EI program will provide timely, comprehensive and integrated services and supports for blind or low vision children and their families. The program will use a three pronged approach that includes family support and intervention, childcare consultation, and public awareness and professional and parent education.

Family Support

A Family Support Worker (FSW) will provide comprehensive service coordination, case management, advocacy, grief counselling, facilitation of coping and family adjustment, development of partnerships with families and service providers, and facilitation of access to information and resources. The FSW will also develop and implement parenting, children's and sibling programs. As is the case for the Infant Hearing Program FSW, the BLV EI program FSW will be employed by Toronto Public Health.

Intervention

Intervention services will offer family centred parent training in the home and will focus on the educational needs of parents in supporting the individual developmental needs of the child. Services will include ongoing case management and assessment, monitoring of developmental needs and parent training and coaching.

As required by the MCYS and recommended by the Toronto BLV EI Working Group, Toronto Public Health will work in partnership with the existing early intervention service providers for blind and low vision children and their families. Currently, for City of Toronto families, early intervention services and child care consultation are provided by two organizations: the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and the Ontario Foundation for Visually Impaired Children (OFVIC). These agencies are ideally suited to continue to provide this service to families through a purchase of service agreement with the City of Toronto.

Childcare Consultation

Through the same purchase of service agreements, CNIB and OFVIC will also provide training and support to enhance and build on existing childcare consultation services including parent support groups, educational resources and classroom accommodation. This will ensure continuity of service for the family.

Public Awareness and Education

A multi-strategy approach to awareness and information provision will be used. Outreach to the general population and parents will include a population based communication campaign, website enhancements, and information packages for parents. Outreach to child and health professionals will include education directed at service providers, advanced education/training to infant development staff and allied health care providers, outreach to the medical community particularly to Ophthalmologists, Neurologists, Paediatricians, Family Practice Physicians and Optometrists and outreach to settlement workers and child welfare agencies.

Integration of the BLV EI program with other Toronto Public Health early identification programs and services and with broader corporate and community activities directed at integrated service planning for children will be an important component of implementation and ongoing service delivery and evaluation. This includes integration in Best Start and Best Generation Yet planning.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE



Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Letter from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (received July 6, 2007)

REFERENCES:

¹ Toronto Best Start Network. (2006). *Best Start Plan Toronto Vision for Children*.
URL: http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network.htm

² Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (April 2007). *Blind – Low Vision Early Intervention Program Guidelines*.

³ Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (April 2007). *Blind – Low Vision Early Intervention Program Guidelines*.

⁴ Toronto Public Health, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, City of Toronto. April 2007. Integrated for Children Information System service data.

Attachment 1

**Ministry of Children
and Youth Services**

Minister's Office

56 Wellesley Street West
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**Ministère des Services
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Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health
Toronto Public Health
277 Victoria Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 1W2

Dear Dr. McKeown:

As one of the 12 regional lead agencies of the new Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program, I would like to congratulate you on the successful facilitation of community planning for the new Blind-Low Vision Program in the Toronto Region and express my appreciation for your commitment to moving the implementation process along under tight timelines.

I am pleased to inform you of the annual investment for the Toronto Region Blind-Low Vision Program of \$364,980. Additional information will be sent to you shortly detailing the prorated amount you will receive for the 2007/08 fiscal year as well as any one-time start-up funds that have been approved.

Should you have any questions regarding the details of this funding, please contact Marlene Stein, Senior Program Consultant, at 416-327-7372.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Arlene Chambers".

Mary Arlene Chambers
Minister