

Bed Bug Program Funding Update

Date:	June 6, 2012
To:	Toronto City Council
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All Wards
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has been involved in supporting bed bug control activities since 2005. During the period May 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, a dedicated multi-disciplinary team realized substantial service accomplishments. This new approach was the result of provincial funding received after extensive advocacy by City Council, the City Manager's Office, TPH and the Board of Health (BOH) over the past few years.

Toronto Public Health received \$1,216,518 in time-limited funding from the Ontario government to deliver a comprehensive bed bug control program in 2011. This funding was allocated to various control activities (e.g., inspection, assessment, extreme cleaning/unit preparation), supplies and equipment (e.g., vacuums, bedding encasements, replacement beds), and for the staffing costs related to six public health inspectors and a manager who work with three public health nurses as an integrated response team. With this funding, TPH also supported other key City partners with implementing bed bug control activities within their respective jurisdictions, including Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA).

With the exception of on-going provincial funding for three public health nurses, all funding received by TPH in 2011 was one-time only, and expired on March 31, 2012. While TPH recognizes the value of the one-time funding provided by the province, bed bugs remain an on-going housing, public health and social issue that will likely continue for some time. Despite numerous requests for continued provincial funding sent to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, on-going provincial funding has neither been formally committed nor announced.

This report provides an overview of efforts and requests made by TPH and the BOH, as well as key City partners, community and health organizations and Toronto City Council for on-going provincial bed bug funding in 2012.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is a history of reports, decisions and recommendations made by the BOH and Toronto City Council regarding bed bug control activities dating back to 2008. The history details the extensive efforts made by the City to secure the funding needed to address bed bug infestations affecting Toronto residents, especially the City's most vulnerable populations.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The loss of dedicated provincial funding has resulted in a significant reduction in TPH bed bug service levels. The staffing complement for bed bugs has now been reduced to one Public Health Inspector/Bed Bug Specialist (for the entire city) and three PHNs. With only one PHI Bed Bug Specialist available, the number of vulnerable clients that will be annually assisted will be reduced to approximately 30. At present, this specialist is dealing with a backlog of more than 30 cases.

COMMENTS

A series of requests have been made by TPH, the BOH, City Council, City Partners and community groups to the Minister and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to consider continued funding of the TPH Bed Bug Team beyond March 31, 2012, with TPH initiating these requests as early as in November 2011.

Toronto Public Health:

As a condition of provincial one-time funding, TPH was required to submit four Public Health Unit Bed Bug Support Fund Reports:

- Initial Project Report – submitted November 23, 2011
- Initial Surveillance and Evaluation Report – submitted February 8, 2012
- Final Project Report – submitted May 25, 2012
- Final Surveillance and Evaluation Report – submitted May 25, 2012

In addition to providing detailed information on the progress accomplishments and outcomes of the TPH Bed Bug Team, as well as the work undertaken by TCHC and SSHA, these reports highlighted the steady demand for bed bug services, and the associated funding necessary to address bed bug infestations in the City beyond March 31, 2012.

In conjunction with the submission of the November 23, 2011 Initial Project Report, TPH staff met with senior Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care representatives to present the report. It was at this meeting that TPH staff emphasized the level of need for bed bug services in Toronto, and made a request to the ministry to consider funding beyond March 31, 2012.

Between January and April 2012, TPH senior management communicated the need for on-going funding from the province at various meetings and during phone conversations with ministry staff; the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) wrote to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in January and May 2012 (as per the direction of the BOH) requesting on-going provincial funding.

City Manager's Office:

In March 2012, the City Manager again wrote to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care requesting a provincial funding commitment for the TPH bed Bug Team effective April 1, 2012.

City Partners, Community and Health Organizations, Private Sector and City Residents:
In addition to the City Manager, a number of partners of the TPH Bed Bug Team and city residents advocated for provincial funding by writing letters and sending emails to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in March and early April, 2012.

Woodgreen Community Centre held a press conference at City Hall in March, 2012, calling on the provincial government to provide continued funding for the TPH Bed Bug Team, in order to support infestation control activities for the City's most vulnerable populations.

Toronto Board of Health:

A number of staff reports on the TPH Bed Bug Team, funding and demands for service were received and approved by the BOH in 2011 and 2012. Many resulting motions related to calling on the province to provide on-going funding in 2012, and resulted in the multiple reports and motions being sent to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

City Council and Committees:

At its February, 2012 meeting, City Council unanimously voted to request the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide a clear commitment to on-going base funding for all components of the bed bug control strategy effective April 1, 2012. A copy of this decision was sent to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. City Council reaffirmed this vote in April and May 2012.

City Budget Committee unanimously demonstrated its support for the continuation of provincial funding at its meeting in May, 2012

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.BU25.3>).

Request To Meet with Minister of Health and Long-Term Care:

Between April and June, 2012, the Office of the MOH made several requests to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care's office to arrange a meeting with the Minister, the MOH and the Chair of the BOH (as directed by the BOH). The purpose of the meeting is to discuss bed bug funding and secure a provincial commitment. Ministry officials have indicated that the Minister is willing to meet but as of June 6, 2012 a date for the meeting has not yet been scheduled.

CONCLUSION

Toronto Public Health received a letter on April 20, 2012, from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, indicating that while the ministry cannot commit to providing additional funding at this time, the ministry will review the matter based upon the bed bug funding reports submitted by TPH and other health units in Ontario.

Toronto Public Health remains hopeful that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will favourably respond to the clear on-going demand and need for this service in the City of Toronto.

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SIGNATURE

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