



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto Public Health Response to Syrian Refugee Health Needs

Date:	January 11, 2016
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

On November 24th, 2015 the Federal Government of Canada announced that 10,000 Syrian Refugees would resettle across Canada by the end of 2015. It was anticipated that most of the 10,000 refugees arriving would be Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs). Further to this commitment, the Federal Government promised to facilitate the resettling of an additional 15,000 refugees mostly government assisted refugees (GARs) by the end of February, 2016. The Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) run by COSTI Immigrant Services in Toronto, received over 300 GARs the first week in January.

Toronto Public Health has been working closely with the Toronto Newcomer Office to coordinate and collaborate on the dissemination of health and settlement information to assist with the resettlement process. Additionally, Toronto Public Health has worked closely with the Toronto Refugee Health Network and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to anticipate, plan and effectively respond to the health needs of this population, specifically in the areas of immunization and dental care.

Financial Impact

TPH's response to the Syrian Refugee resettlement is currently being accommodated within the existing operating budget. TPH will continue to monitor any financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

On September 9th, 2015 Councillor Joe Cressy submitted a request to Executive Committee requesting the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to report directly to September City Council on a City of Toronto Resettlement program targeting Syrian Refugees.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-83502.pdf>

In September, 2015 City Council adopted the recommendations set out in staff report, "City of Toronto Resettlement Program" with amendments. The program includes mobilization and preparedness activities and post arrival supports.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-83896.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

As of the date of this report, approximately 11,342 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada. Of these, 6,916 have arrived in Ontario and approximately 2,200 in Toronto.

The Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) operated by COSTI Immigrant Services on behalf of the Federal Government is providing temporary housing in hotels for the Government Assisted Syrian Refugees (GARs) until permanent housing can be found. COSTI Immigrant Services is preparing to receive a total of 2,200 GARs, with approximately 300-400 GARs arriving over the next few weeks. Of the 900 refugees currently at the RAP sites, it has been reported that approximately half are children arriving with their families and extended family members. It has also been reported that Arabic is their first language and they have limited English proficiency. COSTI Immigrant Services reports that there will be five temporary RAP centres opened in the coming weeks, which will provide temporary housing for approximately four weeks and a variety of settlement and health services.

As part of its role in the resettlement of Syrian Refugees, TPH is participating in the City's Inter-Divisional Syrian Refugee Resettlement Committee, the City's Refugee Task Force, community and health care networks aimed at coordinating services and response activities.

COMMENTS

The GARs have been identified to have many needs as they arrive in Canada. These needs include housing, clothing, furniture, language, adequate income and health. The immediate public health care needs of GARs identified by health care providers are vaccination and dental care.

TPH is supporting access to immunization by working with the Toronto Refugee Health Network and the Ontario Government Pharmacy Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Service (OGPMSS) to ensure sufficient vaccine supply in primary care clinics. Additionally, TPH is providing immunization services at the first RAP temporary housing site including influenza vaccines and vaccines required to attend school in Ontario under the Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA).

TPH held a flu clinic on January 15, 2016 and is delivering full service immunization clinics on-site at the first RAP centre once every two weeks. TPH will continue to work with the local Toronto Refugee Health Network to ensure that future GARs receive appropriate immunization services through the primary care system.

Physicians who are working with the newcomer Syrian community have reported seeing a large percentage of children and adults from the first RAP site with severe dental issues.

TPH is responding by treating these new Canadians, both children and adults, with the most severe emergency dental care needs as quickly as possible. TPH's dental staff are also working with the Toronto Refugee Health Network and COSTI Immigrant Services to connect refugee clients to dental care in the community for ongoing care. The Interim Federal Health program covers emergency dental care for both adults and children. The province has also announced that children will be eligible for the provincially-funded Healthy Smiles Ontario dental program. However a process for establishing eligibility has not yet been shared with public health units at the time of this report.

As future RAP sites open, TPH foresees increased pressures on immunization and dental services. TPH will be monitoring the service demands over the coming weeks and months. TPH will continue to collaborate and coordinate with health care partners to respond to the immediate health needs of Syrian refugees.

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