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December 12, 2011

Budget Committee, Toronto City Council
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West, 10th floor, West Tower
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: Cancellation of Wheel-Trans Service for Ambulatory Dialysis Patients

Dear Members of the Budget Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the over 800 registered ambulatory dialysis clients who use Wheel-Trans to get to and from treatments upon which their very survival depends. The Kidney Foundation is deeply concerned over the TTC's potential cancellation of this vital service in order to achieve a savings of \$5 million from the 2012 budget.

The TTC, through Wheel-Trans, has been transporting dialysis patients for over 20 years and continues to be the best organization to provide this service. It has the infrastructure to ensure booking, tracking and timely pick up and delivery of patients, and has developed an understanding of the needs of the patients and the potential adverse medical effects of the treatments they are receiving. This service is not an exemption or exception, but a restricted TTC service Wheel-Trans committed to provide to this community, a service that members of this community rely on.

Dialysis treatments take place on average three times a week. And while these are life-saving treatments, they do not replace normal kidney function and they can be extremely debilitating. Dialysis patients can suffer from overwhelming fatigue before and after treatments. As you can imagine when you are asking a machine to do in four or five hours what your body does over a 48-to-72 hour period, you would expect that you might get some significant reactions. Treatments leave patients disoriented ... weak and nauseated as a result of severe blood pressure swings during the dialysis process ... to the extent that simply walking across the street can be overwhelming ... not to mention walking a number of blocks to get to the nearest TTC stop. Quite simply, dialysis patients cannot safely use the conventional TTC system to get to and from their treatments.

We have been working with TTC Chair Karen Stintz and Wheel-Trans staff to try to address these concerns. On December 14, 2011 the TTC will vote on final approval of the 2012 budget. It is expected that Karen Stintz will make a motion to amend the budget to approve The Kidney Foundation's request for a six-month delay of implementation of any decision to discontinue Wheel-Trans service for ambulatory patients.

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Dialysis patients have not been formally notified of any changes, nor have they or the health workers that serve this community had adequate time to make alternative arrangements if this service is cancelled in less than four weeks. To implement this decision on such short notice would be an extreme disservice and life threatening to these patients, who are all members of the community you were elected to serve.

We believe the TTC has an obligation to find service alternatives, and the Kidney Foundation is committed to helping do that. But this cannot be done in four weeks time. And while we don't believe the TTC should walk away from this service that patients depend on, we also recognize the financial pressures that the city is under.

We urge all members of the Budget Committee to support this change to the TTC budget so that over the next six months a permanent solution can be found. We recommend bringing Toronto Local Health Integration Networks, Ministry of Health & Long Term Care representatives and others to the table to consider other funding options and ensure the continuation of this vital service.

If you require additional information please contact Janet Bick, Government Relations Advisor at 905-278-3003 ext. 4970 or jbick@kidney.on.ca.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Young', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Terry Young
President, Central Ontario Chapter

cc: Jim O'Brien, Executive Director, Ontario Branch, The Kidney Foundation of Canada
Helen Angus, Vice President, Ontario Renal Network