Public Health Champion Awards

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<th>April 18, 2011</th>
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**SUMMARY**

The Toronto Public Health Champion Awards were established in 2008 as a legacy initiative commemorating the 125th anniversary of Public Health in Toronto. They provide public recognition to individuals and organizations that have made an outstanding contribution to public health in Toronto. At the May 2010 Board of Health meeting, Toronto Public Health (TPH) committed to conduct an evaluation of the first three years of the Public Health Champions Awards with recommendations for the future of the awards. This report summarizes key findings from the evaluation and outlines the recommended changes for future award cycles.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Public Health Champion Awards continue in its present structure with awards presented to an individual and organization on an annual basis;

2. Toronto Public Health implement the revisions outlined in this report to the nomination, promotional, and award ceremony processes and timelines for 2012;

3. The award timelines be revised to a January to June cycle to better fit with community work cycles. As a result of the change in schedule, the next Call for Nominations will open in January 2012 and the awards will be presented in June 2012;

4. The Public Health Champion Awards Selection Committee continue to be comprised of three or four members of the Board of Health and one member from each of the four Local Health Committees. Co-Chairs will be appointed from the Selection Committee Board of Health members;
5. The Board of Health appoint three or four members to the 2012 Selection Committee following the appointment of citizen members; and

6. Local Health Committees be requested to appoint one member each to the 2012 Selection Committee.

Financial Impact
There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY
The Public Health Champion Awards were created as a legacy initiative for the 125th Anniversary celebrations and are to be presented annually. The purpose of the awards is to recognize outstanding contributions by individuals and organizations to public health in Toronto. At the May 2010 Board of Health meeting, the nomination and selection process for the 2010 awards program was confirmed. Included in this decision was a recommendation to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of all three years of the Public Health Champion Awards with recommendations for the future of the awards.

COMMENTS
Evaluation Process
A retrospective evaluation of the Public Health Champion Awards was conducted by staff from December 2010 to February 2011. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess community and staff awareness and interest in the Public Health Champion Awards program, with the goal of strengthening the nomination process and raising the profile of the program. As part of the evaluation, contextual information on nominations received from 2008 to 2010, program reports and documentation was collected and analyzed. To obtain a diverse range of perspectives from different stakeholders, interviews were conducted by phone or in person with 22 key informants, including samples of previous nominators, people who have not nominated, program staff, selection committee members, and past recipients. Questions focused on the awards process, including nomination and outreach, and aimed to assess community awareness and interest in the Public Health Champion Awards program. Other award programs were also contacted to gain insight on nomination experiences and lessons learned related to promotion and outreach.

Evaluation Findings
The evaluation showed that there is clear value and strong support for maintaining the Public Health Champion Awards. In its three years of operation, there is a certain level of awareness about the awards in Toronto. The Awards Program has had enthusiastic and committed Selection Committees. The program has benefitted from clear processes established to improve the nomination process and promotion efforts year over year. Most importantly, it has provided a valuable tool for the promotion of public health work and the recognition of community partnerships. There is recognition that the program is
still relatively new and it takes time and considerable effort for such a program to be established and fully achieve its objectives.

The awards have presented an opportunity to recognize the important work of community partners. However, nomination patterns indicated that nominations were low in number compared to expectations and that there were gaps in nominations from some sectors (e.g. municipal, business/workplace, education, some community health programs, mental health sector, hospitals, community-specific organizations serving the north district of the City).

Perceived barriers to participating in the Awards Program were: lack of time; lack of priority; perceived poor probability of winning; lack of awareness; and lack of know-how to apply.

While promotion and communications strategies have been strengthened year to year, there is general agreement that the current approaches have not been sufficient to stimulate adequate nomination activity. Factors that contributed to this consisted of limited communication about the scope of public health work and the Awards Program, lack of clarity and transparency of expectations and process with respect to the call for nominations, the structure of the awards program, the organization and promotion of the ceremony, timelines for the call, and the influence of external events (e.g., H1N1).

**Recommendations for the Public Health Champion Awards Program**

Further program development is required to strengthen the promotion of the awards and improve the program and community response. This can be done in three ways. First, by developing a more sophisticated and comprehensive communication strategy that builds on and refines past promotion techniques, profiles past recipients, and considers use of social media. Second, by enhancing the specificity and transparency of the nomination process by re-designing the nomination form to a standardized form that specifies the type of information required and provides examples of the work of past recipients. Third, by strengthening the awards ceremony by ensuring a consistent award venue and date, and establishing a permanent, visible display of recipients.

TPH should also review the awards program in two cycles to assess the effectiveness of the adjustments and, if necessary, to consider the feasibility and value of other options for improving promotion and profile of the awards.

**2012 Awards Process**

Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that TPH revise the nomination and promotional processes and timelines. In addition, it is recommended that TPH use the remainder of 2011 for program development and issue the next call for nominations in 2012. The following schedule is proposed for the 2012 calendar of activities:

- Call for Nominations open: January 2012
- Call for Nominations closes: February 2012
- Selection Committee Convenes: April 2012
- Notification of Award Recipients: June 2012
- Award Ceremony: June 2012
The evaluation of the Awards Program highlights areas for further program development and enhancement in order to strengthen the program and continue to recognize the outstanding contributions of individuals and organizations to public health in Toronto. Staff will work with the Selection Committee co-chairs to ensure that the recommendations outlined in this report are addressed and will open the call for nominations in January 2012.

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SIGNATURE

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