

## **The Ontario Healthy Kids Panel Report**

<b>Date:</b>	March 18, 2013
<b>To:</b>	Board of Health
<b>From:</b>	Medical Officer of Health
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides an overview and recommends endorsement, in principle, of *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*, which is a comprehensive three-pronged strategy to address the issue of childhood obesity and promote the health and well-being of children and youth in Ontario. The Ontario Healthy Kids Panel presented a series of recommendations in its submission to Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on March 4, 2013 and proposed a number of actions to implement the strategy.

This report also highlights some initiatives being undertaken in Toronto, as well as several of the Board of Health's policy and program directions that support the recommendations of the Healthy Kids Strategy. In addition, this report recommends that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care consider some amendments to strengthen specific recommendations proposed in the Healthy Kids Strategy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:**

1. The Board of Health endorse, in principle, the recommendations of *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*;
2. the Board of Health request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to consider amendments to strengthen specific recommendations, as follows:

- a. Recommendation 1.4: Support and encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and sustained for up to two years or longer with appropriate complementary feeding;
  - b. Recommendation 2.1: Ban all commercial advertising/marketing to children under 13 years old;
3. the Board of Health request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to adopt the recommendations and proposed actions outlined in the implementation plan of the Healthy Kids Strategy, including the six milestones identified for year one;
4. the Board of Health request the Province of Ontario to increase its Student Nutrition Program funding, starting in year one of the proposed implementation plan, as an additional milestone; and
5. the Board of Health request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to include Toronto as one of the ten initial communities involved in Ontario's version of EPODE.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

### **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In January, 2012, as part of the Action Plan for Health Care, the Government of Ontario set a target of reducing childhood obesity by 20 per cent in five years. The Healthy Kids Panel, a multi-sectoral panel of 18 experts, was created to develop recommendations for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. After conducting its deliberations between May to December 2012, the Ontario Healthy Kids Panel submitted its report, *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy* (see Appendix 1), to Honourable Deb Matthews on March 4, 2013

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy\\_kids/healthy\\_kids.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf).

The Panel engaged in a consultation process involving thought leaders and experts from diverse perspectives, including a number of associations/organizations. The Panel consulted with parents and children/youth through focus groups and a parent survey. Written submissions from the public were also reviewed.

The Panel reported that almost one in three children/youth in Ontario is overweight or obese and the problem is more severe in boys than girls and in Aboriginal children. To reach the ambitious obesity reduction target, the Panel recommended a three-part strategy, recognizing that no one measure will solve the problem of childhood overweight and obesity:

1. Start All Kids on the Path to Health
2. Change the Food Environment
3. Create Healthy Communities

The Healthy Kids Panel also proposed an implementation plan for the Healthy Kids Strategy in the following three action areas:

1. Make Child Health Everyone's Priority
2. Invest in Child Health
3. Use Evidence, Monitor Progress, Ensure Accountability

The Panel emphasized that health is much more than about weight and cautioned that an overemphasis on weight is stigmatizing and does not address many of the factors contributing to unhealthy weights. The Healthy Kids Strategy is a comprehensive approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, creating healthy communities and mitigating the broader social and health disparities affecting children.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Overweight and Obesity of Children/Youth in Toronto**

The combined overweight/obesity rate for children/youth 2-17 years in Toronto was 28.3% in 2004, according to the Canadian Community Health Survey. This rate almost doubled from the Canada Health Survey findings in 1978/79. The Healthy Kids Panel report noted that the proportion of Canadian 12- to 17-year olds who are overweight/obese increased from 14 per cent to 29 per cent between the two survey periods, and the proportion of children who are obese tripled from three per cent to nine per cent.

### **Toronto Initiatives and Policy/Program Directions Supporting the Healthy Kids Strategy**

There are many Toronto Public Health (TPH) initiatives that support the recommendations of the Healthy Kids Strategy, as well as many of the Board of Health's policy directions. The following examples are arranged according to the three areas of focus identified in the Healthy Kids Strategy.

#### **Start All Kids on the Path to Health**

The Healthy Kids Panel, recognizing the importance of preconceptional, prenatal and infant health to the long-term impact on weight and health, proposed five recommendations addressing these critical life stages. Relating to these recommendations, TPH already delivers a range of programs and services.

One example is the recently launched "What's Your Plan" preconception health promotion campaign. The Healthiest Babies Possible program also provides nutrition interventions for pregnant women who are nutritionally at risk of having poor birth outcomes. Later this spring TPH will be launching its new e-learning prenatal education program. Toronto Public Health is very actively engaged in promoting breastfeeding. In January 2013, Toronto Public Health achieved the BFI (Baby Friendly Initiative) designation. The goal of the BFI is to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates by protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding. Given that the Board of Health has already endorsed exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and sustained

breastfeeding for up to two years or longer with appropriate complementary feeding, recommendation 1.4 of the Healthy Kids Panel needs to be strengthened to promote breastfeeding beyond six months. Toronto's Peer Nutrition Program supports parents and caregivers of children aged six months to six years; this unique skills-based nutrition education program is culturally adapted to Toronto's diverse population and is offered in many languages.

## **Change the Food Environment**

The Healthy Kids Panel proposed ten recommendations to adapt the food environment to make it easier for families to choose nutritious foods. Recommendation 2.1, to ban the marketing of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods, beverages and snacks to children under age 12, is problematic in that it fails to recognize the complexities and potential loopholes in a nutrient-based advertising ban. Implementing such a ban would require a lengthy, and potentially contentious, process to define healthier foods/beverages. Similar approaches, such as in the U.K., still allow marketers to promote unhealthy foods to children via popular characters and branding messages that do not explicitly show foods. The Board of Health is on record advocating for a total ban on all commercial advertising/marketing to children under 13 years of age. A comprehensive ban would be a more effective strategy for promoting the health and well-being of children.

The Healthy Kids Strategy has recommended that all restaurants, including fast food outlets and retail grocery stores, be required to list the calories in each item on their menus and to make this information visible on menu boards. A report to the Board of Health on menu labelling will be presented in April 2013, outlining proposed recommendations and actions to expand menu labelling in Toronto, since this is an important way to empower people with information to make healthier choices.

The Healthy Kids Strategy report includes a recommendation to establish a universal school nutrition program for all Ontario publicly funded elementary and secondary schools. This recommendation aligns with the Board of Health's endorsement of a vision for student nutrition programs to be delivered in all Toronto schools so that students who would benefit can achieve the positive health, learning and behavioural outcomes that result from this key nutrition strategy. The Board of Health forwarded the *Nourishing Young Minds* report, which provided a review of the Student Nutrition Program in Toronto, to the Healthy Kids Panel, as an input to its strategy development. Student nutrition programs currently reach over 144,000 Toronto children and youth each day in 463 schools/community sites that operate 682 meal programs. Municipal and provincial funding cover less than 20% of the costs of a fully implemented program. The Board of Health endorsed a five-year plan for stabilizing existing programs and expanding to higher need schools. Toronto City Council approved an increase of \$1.48 million in the 2013 budget process, bringing the 2013/14 municipal funding to approximately \$5.3 million. The Board of Health has also requested the Province of Ontario to increase its grant funding investment proportionally to match increased City investment. In 2013/14, to match the City's increased investment, an additional \$1.2 million would be required from the Province for grants to Toronto student nutrition programs.

Many Torontonians face economic and geographic barriers to accessing nutritious and culturally appropriate foods on a regular basis. Several neighbourhoods in the City are underserved by quality and lower-priced food retail options within easy walking distance, along with relatively poor access to public transit. While income is the most important determinant of food security, the quality of food retail environments has been found to be predictive of diet and health outcomes. The Toronto Food Strategy team has mapped measures of Toronto's food retail environment. The results showed geographic inequalities in the density of healthier food retail outlets, but also found that there are relatively few feasible locations for new supermarkets. The team is coordinating a project to identify strategies to encourage and support smaller food retail establishments, such as convenience stores, to sell nutritious and affordable foods.

### **Create Healthy Communities**

The Healthy Kids Panel proposed eight recommendations to create healthy communities to promote healthy eating and physical activity. The report included a discussion on the importance of mental health and the resilience required for children to be healthy. The need was identified for social change to help parents raise healthy children. A community development approach, such as the EPODE (Ensemble Prévenons l'Obésité des Enfants – Together Let's Prevent Childhood Obesity) model developed in France in 1992 and now in use in 15 countries, was highlighted as an evidence-based approach to childhood obesity prevention that could be tailored to Ontario communities. This model is very similar to the 2013 budget proposal endorsed by the Board of Health to initiate a school/community-based childhood obesity prevention program in selected higher need areas of Toronto. This proposal was not approved by City Council in the 2013 budget process.

The role of schools and child care settings was examined, including the current limitations of DPA (Daily Physical Activity) and the Ontario School Food and Beverage Policy. The importance of role models and champions was also explored. The Panel made recommendations regarding implementation of the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

Although the recommendations did not highlight physical activity, each specific recommendation further outlined a number of proposed strategies addressing both physical activity and healthy eating. For example, embedded within the recommendation on making schools hubs for child health and community engagement, enhancements to the health and physical curriculum were proposed, as well as play-based learning, active school transportation and built environment initiatives, improvements to community use of schools and access to affordable opportunities to physical activity.

There are many health initiatives in Toronto to support the Panel's recommendations to create healthy communities, and in particular for making schools hubs for child health and community engagement. Some examples include the Toronto District School Board's Fit for Life initiative and Health Action Teams in Toronto Catholic District School Board schools. Both initiatives support physical activity and healthy eating initiatives within school specific action plans and include Toronto Public Health as a

partner. Toronto Public Health staff also work with schools, child care centres, after school programs and community agencies on a wide array of programming related to physical activity and healthy eating, such as PALS (Playground Activity Leaders in Schools), Active and Safe Routes to School, Rethink What You Drink, Who are You?, among others.

The 2011 *Healthy Toronto by Design* report highlighted the many factors that influence health and the importance of the City's role in promoting health. Toronto Public Health has worked in partnership with others to highlight issues of concern and propose approaches to address them. This has resulted in a series of reports, including: *The Walkable City*; *Road to Health*; *Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods*; *Creating a Healthier Toronto through the Official Plan*; and *Improving Health and Health Equity through the Toronto Parks Plan*. These reports provide evidence of the impact of the built environment on health, highlight opportunities to improve health and propose policy approaches that can create environments that support active living and improve access to healthy food. Work is underway to develop active city design principles and guidelines that can be used to encourage improvements in the way the City is built to address health inequities and increase opportunities for active transportation and recreational activity in school communities across the City.

### **Proposed Implementation Plan for the Healthy Kids Strategy**

The Healthy Kids Panel proposed "how to" advice to implement the "what to do" three-pronged strategy, urging the Province to invest in a minimum ten-year commitment, starting immediately, recognizing that no one policy, program or action will be enough on its own to reach the target. An investment of at least \$80 million per year in new funding was proposed, representing 0.17 per cent of the Ontario health budget and 1.7 per cent of what the Province is currently spending on the consequences of obesity.

The Panel proposed six milestones to be delivered in the first year of implementing the strategy. One milestone specified having at least ten communities involved in an Ontario version of the EPODE model. Toronto is well positioned to be one of the ten initial communities. Toronto Public Health conducted an evidence-based review in 2012 to identify school-based interventions to address obesity prevention in children 6-12 years of age. The recommendations from the evidence-based review are guiding staff in planning, implementing and evaluating obesity prevention initiatives in school communities. A pilot project, involving two lower income/higher need communities in the City, will be initiated in the 2013/14 school year. Many of the evidence-based review recommendations align with the Healthy Kids Panel recommendations and proposed implementation plan, particularly the critical success factors identified by EPODE, which include a community development approach, enabling legislation, strong links to the municipality and people who can influence the built environment, as well as a focus on families and neighbourhoods most at risk.

The Panel did not specify a milestone specific to provincial Student Nutrition Program funding. An additional milestone is required so that the Province increases its investment

starting in year one of implementation of the Healthy Kids Strategy. Student nutrition programs in Toronto and throughout the Province are chronically underfunded; enhanced core funding would increase access to nutritious breakfasts among nutritionally at-risk children/youth.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the report of the Ontario Healthy Kids Panel, *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*, provides a sound three-pronged strategy and action plan to address childhood obesity prevention and the health and well-being of children and youth in Ontario. The report is comprehensive, reflects public health priorities and promotes the importance of evidence-based and cost-effective ways to reduce childhood obesity. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has already announced that an inter-ministerial working group will be formed to direct government action on implementing the recommendations of the Healthy Kids Panel. The Panel indicated that Ontario lags as much as 10 years behind other jurisdictions in addressing the issue of childhood obesity. Clearly, there is no time to wait in investing in children's health.

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## **SIGNATURE**



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Medical Officer of Health

## **ATTACHMENT**

Appendix 1: *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*, Ontario Healthy Kids Panel, March 2013  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy\\_kids/healthy\\_kids.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf)