

Modernization of the Ontario Public Health Standards

Date: May 3, 2017

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

On February 17, 2017, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) released the Standards for Public Health Programs and Services (SPHPS) Consultation Document. These standards will replace the current Ontario Public Health Standards (2008). The SPHPS specifies minimum requirements for public health programs and services in Ontario, and the City of Toronto Board of Health will be required to adhere to its requirements.

The MOHLTC held a consultation session with TPH on April 6, 2017 and also offered an opportunity to make a written submission. The focus of the consultation was to provide the opportunity to discuss any operational considerations, identify areas requiring clarity and where implementation supports would be required. The MOHLTC verified that the consultation was not for the purpose of providing general feedback or input on the revised standards.

Toronto Public Health has reviewed the consultation document and submitted a written formal response to the province highlighting the strengths of the proposed SPHPS and areas that require clarification for successful implementation. At this time, the MOHLTC has advised that implementation of the revised standards and protocols (the latter are yet to be developed), will commence January 2018, with the expectation that implementation will be completed over the course of that year.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

The SPHPS will replace the Ontario Public Health Standards 2008, which were presented to the Board of Health on January 19, 2009

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.HL20.5>.

COMMENTS

On February 17, 2017, the MOHLTC released the SPHPS Consultation Document. The SPHPS is published pursuant to Section 7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7., and specifies minimum requirements for public health programs and services in Ontario.

Toronto Public Health provided comments to the MOHLTC on the SPHPS Consultation Document on April 6, 2017, and an additional written response was submitted in late April 2017. This written submission is attached, and highlights strengths of the revised standards, and identifies areas requiring further clarification to support implementation. In addition, the formal submission identifies the need to clarify the relationship between local Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) and CEOs of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). This is a new requirement stemming from the Patients First Act, passed in December 2016. The submissions also provides detailed comments related to operational and organizational requirements which can be found in Attachment 1.

For the purposes of this report, TPH believes that the strengths of the modernized standards are as follows: Allowing boards of health to tailor programs to best meet the needs of their local community, thereby building in flexibility for local health units; embedding health equity in the foundational standards and mandating local health units to work with Indigenous populations; explicitly stating the importance of multi-sectoral partnerships, including with education, transportation, housing, and labour, to address the social determinants of health; and providing a stronger mandate for boards of health to address important public health issues, including mental health, natural and built environments, and climate change.

Areas requiring further clarity to ensure consistent implementation across all boards, as well as possible issues that may impact seamless implementation were also highlighted and include: Guidance on minimum requirements and accepted programs and services to be delivered locally is needed to maintain public health, ensure municipal funding within the current climate of fiscal constraint, and safeguard future provincial funding; explicitly and consistently use of the term "healthy public policy" and embedding healthy public policy in all standard requirements to provide a clearer mandate to address the social determinants of health through multi-sectoral partnerships; clarify the intent of the SPHPS by including definitions of key terms throughout the Standards or including a glossary; and ensure consistency in requirements across different program standards. For example, requirements related to health equity, priority populations, and healthy public policy should be identified in the requirements of each standard, rather than just some of them.

As there are five LHINs that are within the City of Toronto boundary, the absence of the requirements associated with formalizing the relationship between the MOH and CEO of LHINs is uniquely challenging, and has been raised with the MOHLTC through the consultation process. Specifically, the MOH has requested more information about the expectations for TPH and the Board of Health. In addition, consideration must be given on how to effectively and efficiently consult with the five LHINs at any one time and on any issue, program and/or service.

It should be noted that the MOHLTC has not yet released drafts of the accountability agreement, protocols, and guidelines associated with the SPHPS. These documents should further specify the required components of public health unit programs and services, and provide a clearer picture of the requirements of the new SPHPS. Toronto Public Health has requested that the MOHLTC provide the opportunity to give input into the development of these important documents.

The MOHLTC will finalize the SPHPS in spring 2017 and public health units are to begin the process of implementation in January 2018. The MOHLTC has indicated that it recognizes that throughout 2018, there will be a transition period between the old standards and new ones.

To facilitate transition to the SPHPS requirements, TPH has requested that the MOHLTC provide resources for change management and staff training, in addition to new funds necessary to meet the delivery of new program and service requirements.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Public Health Formal Submission on the Standards for Public Health Programs and Services (April 26, 2017)