

CITY OF HAMILTON

Public Health & Community Services
Healthy Lifestyles & Youth Branch

 Report to: Chair and Members Public Health and Community Services Committee	 Submitted by: Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, Medical Officer of Health
 Date: October 22, 2004	 Prepared by: Sue Connell x5255 Linda Godin x2244 Colleen Stahlbrand x3758

 **SUBJECT:** *Hamilton Walks Strategy (HCS04084) (City Wide)*

 **COMMENDATION:**

That report HCS04084, *Hamilton Walks Strategy* be received as information only.

Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, Medical Officer of Health
Public Health & Community Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 

Hamilton Walks is an exciting comprehensive strategy to re-create a culture of walking in Hamilton. Hamilton is facing an epidemic of obesity in its children and adults. Many children no longer walk to school, fewer adults include walking in their daily lives, and fewer older adults walk in their community. It is time for change. A culture of walking will build on current community programs and contribute to *Building a Strong Foundation* with health, social and environmental benefits. This strategy is timely in light of the recent launch of the ACTIVE2010 strategy by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. *Hamilton Walks* fundamentally supports all Hamiltonians to be more physically active which supports the ACTIVE2010 strategy. (www. active2010.ca, 2004).

Hamilton's beautiful waterfront and trail system is an ideal environment for walking. It is our intention to enrich and extend our partnerships across city departments through the *Hamilton Walks* strategy. The strategy is envisioned to be comprehensive, inclusive, and target people across the lifespan where they live, work and play. Preliminary work is in process with current partners to build on community assets and promote safe, accessible, pleasant walkways to support good health, quality of life and the

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environment. More specifically the goals of the *Hamilton Walks* strategy are:

- (1) To create a *Culture of Walking* in Hamilton to enhance health, quality of life, and prevent obesity and chronic diseases
- (2) To promote walking for physical activity as well as an active form of transportation
- (3) To promote walking pathways and trails within the city and beyond
- (4) To facilitate, support, and promote new and existing walking groups (e.g. enhance and expand current free neighbourhood walking groups and pedometer use)
- (5) To advocate for enhanced access to city sidewalks, pathways and trails
- (6) To advocate for a safe walkable community to support the walking strategy
- (7) To advocate for a provincial and national walking strategy
- (8) To promote school zone safety
- (9) To advocate for anti-idling programs to improve air quality in school zones
- (10) To promote the health of children and families by encouraging active forms of transportation to and from school

Current active partners include Public Health and Community Services (PHCS), Healthy Living Hamilton, Municipal Parking System, Hamilton Safe Communities, Hamilton-Wentworth School Boards, Hamilton Police Service, Trauma Prevention Council, Green Communities Association of Ontario and Green Venture.

BACKGROUND:

Hamilton needs to promote physical activity to support overall health and healthy aging in the community. Physical activity reduces the risk of chronic diseases and obesity in the general population and falls and injuries in older adults.

Hamilton adults are becoming increasingly overweight and sedentary.

- 19.2% of adults in Hamilton are obese (CCHS,2001) up from 18.0% (RRFSS, 1997)
- 38.8% of adults in Hamilton are overweight (RRFSS, 1997)
- 51.7% of Hamiltonians over the age of 12 are physically inactive (CCHS,2001)
- 1,236 of hospitalizations (2000-01) among Hamilton older adults were fall-related (Ontario Trauma Registry, March 2002)

Hamilton children and youth are also becoming increasingly sedentary.

- 68% of Canadian children live within walking distance of school but just 36% walk (Environics/Go for Green, 1998)
- 57% of Canadian young people are so sedentary that it is harmful to their health, and only 38% of girls and 48% of boys are active enough for it to benefit their health (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2002)

Air quality problems created by vehicle use affect all ages. Children are particularly vulnerable because they inhale more pollutants per pound than adults.

- Hamilton has a higher (10.8%) prevalence of asthma than Ontario (8.5%) (Hamilton District Health Council, PH & CS, 2004)

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- Asthma is one of the most prevalent respiratory diseases in children and the number one cause of school absenteeism in Canada. (Pollution Probe Canada, 1998)
- In one year, nine families walking daily to school prevents approximately 1000 kg of greenhouse gas emissions. (Pembina Institute: www.climatechangesolutions.com)

Walking is the activity of choice. Research supports promoting walking as an entry level activity for sedentary people. It is the safest and most natural form of physical activity people that can do anywhere, anytime. Walking is highly affordable and poses very few barriers.

Walking regularly can help reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes, stroke, some cancers and falls in older adults. Walking is most likely to be adopted by both men and women, a range of ages, and all socioeconomic and diverse populations. Brisk walking has the greatest potential for increasing overall physical activity levels of sedentary populations and supports current public health recommendations (Hillsdon & Thorogood, 1996).

Public Health Recommendations

- Children & Youth: 30 minutes of vigorous activity daily and 60 minutes of moderate activity daily (Health Canada, 2002)
- Adults: accumulate 30 – 60 minutes of physical activity at a moderate pace most days of the week. (Health Canada, 1998)

Other Ontario public health departments promote walking initiatives to address the need for increased physical activity, for example, Ottawa (GOTTAWALK), Sarnia, Bruce-Grey, Sudbury, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington, and York Region. Walking strategies are also very successful across the United States.

Hamilton has existing initiatives that will build upon and support the ***Hamilton Walks*** strategy. These current initiatives target different audiences where they work, live, and play, for example, children, parents, employees, and older adults, at schools, worksites, community centres, and older adult buildings.

Current Hamilton Initiatives:

- (1) *Active & Safe Routes to School Program* advocates for active modes of transportation (i.e. walking, inline skating, cycling) by families travelling to and from school. This program has been active since 1996, in Ontario. The program is a highly respected provincial initiative involving approximately 1000 schools. The program has been successfully implemented worldwide. The *2004 International Walk to School Day (IWALK)* event involved:
 - 31 schools in Hamilton
 - Hamilton pilot sites for enhanced initiatives to increase the numbers of families and children using active modes of transportation
 - 36 countries, and an estimated 3 million walkers
- (2) *Workplace Walking Pilot Project* involves a 1-month pedometer loan to encourage inactive and active employees to walk at three worksites

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- (3) *Walking Groups Project* includes development and support for neighbourhood walking groups, mall walking groups, and stroller walks
- (4) *Walkable Communities* is a new project to promote safe and accessible sidewalks, pathways, and trails for all citizen and in particular older adults

ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES:

- Other physical activity alternatives to a Walking Strategy would be expensive, and challenged by issues of access, income, and safety. Childhood obesity, adult obesity, chronic diseases and falls in older adults are growing issues in our community. By building physical activity into their lives at an early age, it is more likely that our young people will continue to be active throughout their lives.
- This is also a strategy to maintain the health of aging boomers and to avert future dramatic increases in health care utilization costs for the City of Hamilton. Fall related injuries in people 65+ are estimated to cost \$2.8 billion a year in Canada. We need to act now because the oldest of the baby boomers are almost 60 years old.

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

No financial, staffing or legal implications.

POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:

Building A Strong Foundation: Vision 2020, G.R.I.D.S. (Growth Strategy), and Official Plan .

CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES:

Consultations within PHCS include:

- Healthy Lifestyles and Youth Branch
- Hamilton Housing Corporation
- Culture and Recreation Division

We plan to consult with *Building a Strong Foundation* to make essential partnerships.

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

This strategy supports the City of Hamilton Strategic Plans

- (1) Walk this Way – A City of Trails: Council will partner with the Hamilton Conservation Authority and other community agencies to integrate and promote a city-wide trail system
- (2) Vision 2020 – To promote health and prevent disease and injury

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- (3) Vision 2020 – To develop the social and physical environment to create barrier-free community that allows all citizens to participate fully in life
- (4) Vision 2020 – To encourage a shift in personal lifestyle and behaviour towards transportation choices that enhance personal health and fitness, save money, and have the lowest environmental cost
- (5) Vision 2020 – To use alternative modes of movement, such as walking, biking, and public transit every day