SUBJECT: Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) program PH06002(b) (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

That the continuation of the current PHRED partnership agreements with the University of Guelph and McMaster University with changes to increase accountability as described in Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) program report PH06002(b) be approved.

Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health
Public Health Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) program has been a distinctive feature of public health in Hamilton for nearly two decades. Through partnership agreements with the University of Guelph and McMaster University, university-based research leaders work with City of Hamilton Public Health Services (PHS) staff to deliver practice-relevant research.

In 2006, the MOHLTC announced a plan to maintain 50:50 cost-sharing for PHRED while all other cost-shared programs would move to 65:35 in 2006 and 75:25 in 2007. This change, compounded by a review of PHRED in early 2006 following the separation
SUBJECT: Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) program

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of PHS from Community Services, highlighted the need for a changes in how PHRED funds are allocated.

Recommended changes will shift PHRED from block grants to partners to funding in support of research networks that include both academic and PHS staff and that have clear accountability for deliverables. Successful networks will leverage PHRED funding to pursue external research resources.

BACKGROUND:

For nearly two decades, City of Hamilton Public Health Services (PHS) and its predecessor departments have had links with McMaster University and the University of Guelph, along with other academic institutions. These links enable the department to benefit from expertise in program design and evaluation, while building an evidence base for local public health practice.

In large part, these relationships have been funded and delivered through a provincial/municipal cost-shared program called PHRED – Public Health Research Education and Development. Health units (HU) in Sudbury, Ottawa, London and Kingston also support PHRED programs.

Information Report PH06002 was provided to the Board at its February 13, 2006 meeting and outlined the changing landscape and funding approach to PHRED. To sum up, the MOHLTC has declined to fund PHRED on a 75:25% cost-shared basis for 2007 but is willing to maintain a 50:50 cost sharing. For 2006, the approved PHRED budget of $1,035,730 was based on a 65:35 cost share with the MOHLTC. The resulting shortfall was $310,356.

Information Report PH06002a was provided to the Board at its October 23, 2006 meeting and described how PHS was managing the funding shortfall in 2006 and plans for 2007. By streamlining library operations, savings on journal subscriptions were identified. Additional resources were secured from the MOHLTC for a separate project which was brought in under budget, freeing resources to finance PHRED obligations. In short, no staff were let go and core activities and contractual commitments were delivered. This report describes plans for 2007.

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:

Report PH06002a identified several steps in preparing for 2007. As proposed therein, library services are being brought forward in the maintenance budget for the 75:25 cost-shared portion of PHS' 2007 budget. Library services are crucial for supporting PHS staff in staying current with developments in their professional fields and assisting them in translating new advances into more effective public health services and programs. In addition, PHS' library services are able to cost-recover some portion of their costs by selling services to neighbouring health units.
Pending Council approval of this recommendation, the agreement with McMaster Institute of Environmental Health (MIEH) will be expanded to maintain the base funding of $75000 and to include a summer student program that will create 5 summer scholarship opportunities. Successful applicants will work on projects of direct relevance to PHS as well as receive an exposure to the breadth of the work of public health on matters of environmental health. Applicants will be selected competitively through a joint effort of McMaster and PHS staff.

As noted in the October report, MOHs from the 5 PHRED units were looking at ways to facilitate more effective collaboration to spur the development of research nodes – clusters of practitioners and researchers focused on areas of relevance to public health. At this time, Hamilton is poised to establish leadership in this endeavour. PHS has informed all existing partners of the proposed changes.

Pending Council approval of the recommendation, a notice will be issued to PHRED’s current partners of the application process for PHRED funding in 2007. In place of block transfers to our partners, the partners will apply for funding to support a defined program of research development work over a 2-year period. The second year of funding will be conditional on the continued existence of PHRED in its current structure and successful completion of the contracted deliverables.

Successful applications will be those that i) identify a clear, practice-related deliverable (for example, tools to translate research knowledge into practice-relevant information or training courses for public health staff) for each of the two years of support, ii) integrate research staff from the partner universities and practice-based staff from PHS, and iii) articulate a coherent plan for how PHRED resources will be leveraged to develop successful high-quality research activities to be funded by external partners. Pending budget approval, it is expected that funds will be available for 3-4 such networks.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

Unless the City wishes to assume 100% funding obligations for the PHRED shortfall, changes in MOHLTC funding for PHRED leave no funding options other than the changes detailed in Report PH06002a and further described here. Continuing untied block grants to the partners, even at reduced dollar amounts, would fall short of the accountability expectations of both the Board and citizens.

**FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

None identified. Pending Council approval of the recommendations, the PHRED Agreements with the University of Guelph and McMaster University will be amended to reflect the changes in how funding flows.

**POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:**

N/A
RELEVANT CONSULTATION:

PHRED partners have been actively involved in the development of the proposed changes. In addition, the MOHLTC has been consulted and input sought from other organizations that support research activity.

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
Public services and programs are delivered in an equitable manner, coordinated, efficient, effective and easily accessible to all citizens.

☐ Yes ☑ No

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines?

☐ Yes ☑ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants?

☐ Yes ☑ No