To: Mayor and Members  
   Board of Health

From: Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc,  
      FRCP  
      Medical Officer of Health  
      Public Health Services

   Telephone: Ext.3501  
              (905) 546-4075

   Facsimile: erichard@hamilton.ca

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Re: Youth Engagement Strategies Applied by Public Health Services  
    PH06022  
    (City Wide)

Council Direction:
Not applicable

Information:
The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Health with an update of services provided to youth by Public Health Services, and the approaches used to involve youth in the planning and delivery of such services.

A broad range of services for youth is provided by Public Health Services as required by the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines and Child and Adolescent Services:

**Family Health Division:**
- Counselling for youth and their families through Child and Adolescent Services, including the Brief Therapy, Forensic, Child and Family Intervention and Trauma Treatment Programs
- Prenatal classes and home visiting for pregnant youth
- Teen Fathers’ Groups, which aim to reduce child abuse and enhance child development by supporting positive parenting strategies among adolescent fathers
- Teen prenatal classes held at Grace Haven, Hill Park Secondary School, Red Hill Family Centre, St. Martin’s Manor, and Transitional Youth
• Home visiting for pregnant and parenting adolescents through the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program

Health Protection Division:
• STD and Sexual Health clinics where youth can access confidential sexual health counselling, information and treatment services. A confidential sexual health information phone line is provided where youth can ask questions of a public health nurse. Many youth access information through our webpage. Group education and presentations are provided to youth serving community agencies and youth upon request. A key activity is the investigation of reportable STDs by public health nurses to ensure youth with chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV are educated and treated and sexual partners notified.
• Hepatitis B and Meningococcal C vaccine clinics for youth are offered at each secondary school location and at Public Health Service Immunization clinics.

Healthy Lifestyles and Youth Division:
• School Program: Health promotion through provision of resources, classroom sessions, peer support groups such as Girl Talk, peer-led programs and support of school Health Action Teams in a comprehensive approach addressing health instruction, health and support services, social support and a healthy physical environment. School health promotion topics include sexual health, healthy eating, physical activity, healthy weights, substance abuse prevention, tobacco use prevention and injury prevention.
• Substance Abuse Prevention: “Party in the Right Spirit” is an event that raises awareness of the risks and consequences of alcohol use by youth. Planned in collaboration with community partners such as School Boards, the Trauma Prevention Council and the Sexual Assault Centre, students representing all secondary schools in the Hamilton area gather to hear speakers and attend facilitated discussions. Youth are then challenged to go back to their schools to hold school specific awareness events.
• Chronic Disease Prevention Program: Community-wide awareness campaigns such as TV Turn-off Week and Winter Active, skill building programs such as Youth Cooking Clubs and Feel the Power Feel Fit Girls, and support for School Boards in the development of school nutrition policies.
• Dental Program: Dental treatment for youth with dental needs and financial barriers to receiving treatment
• Tobacco Control Program: Provision of curriculum support material for teachers, smoking cessation groups, and social marketing campaigns such as Not To Kids

Youth Involvement in Program Planning:
It is a recognized best practice to engage youth directly with the development of strategies and services for youth. The process of youth engagement, however, requires added staff time and resources. While several Public Health Services program areas solicit feedback from youth on the structure and effectiveness of their services and how to improve services provided. Where funding has allowed, three program areas are actively applying full youth-engagement strategies to develop, deliver and evaluate their services. Youth-led, adult-supported programs provide young people with a unique
opportunity to acquire leadership, employability, social, citizenship and resiliency skills while forming healthy, positive relationships with their adult counterparts and peers.

Three examples of programs applying youth-engagement strategies include:

**Youth Net**
In April 2000, Youth Net was established in Hamilton. This program was designed to address the findings of the Canadian Youth Mental Health and Illness Survey that reported youth were experiencing significant levels of distress and dissatisfaction with the existing mental health system. Structured as a mental health promotion and early intervention program run by youth for youth, youth are reached through focus groups which are led by older trained youth. Young people discuss issues that affect their lives and how they deal with them. Youth struggling with a mental health problem can get help if needed. The Youth Advisory Team advises the program Steering Committee and works on projects such as the Youth Net Services Guide (distributed to focus group participants) and letters of recognition to service providers deemed by youth as “Youth Friendly” to improve the mental health and well-being of youth in the community. In addition to youth, the Steering Committee includes representatives from agencies providing services to youth: Alternatives for Youth, COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Team), Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Public Health Services, SISO (Settlement and Integration Services Organization) and CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).

**Bullying Prevention**
Working in partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic School Board, Public Health Services staff have recruited youth leaders from local secondary schools to develop youth specific strategies to prevent bullying. With staff support, Youth Advisors created a poster and have facilitated bullying awareness sessions at local schools. As active members of the Bullying Prevention Coalition, youth are working with the coalition members to provide direction to a community wide communication campaign currently under development.

**HCAAT (Hamilton Crew Against Tobacco):**
The Hamilton Crew for Action Against Tobacco is a youth-led, adult-supported anti-tobacco industry movement whose mandate is to reduce youth tobacco use by exposing the targeted marketing practices of the tobacco industry.

Over the past six years the City of Hamilton Public Health Services, in partnership with the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board and numerous community youth-serving agencies and organizations, has developed programs aimed at reducing youth tobacco use. The foundation of these programs is a strong and vibrant, youth engagement framework. The Hamilton Crew for Action Against Tobacco (HCAAT) serves as the anchor and core of this model.

A provincially recognized program modelled after successful youth movements in the United States, HCAAT has successfully demonstrated their ability to engage, motivate and inspire local and provincial youth to become tobacco control advocates who play a
central role in the development of healthy public policy, community education, and supportive environments.

Youth have participated in and led sessions at local, provincial, national and international youth conferences and forums on tobacco control. With adult support, youth have designed, executed and evaluated a variety of social-marketing campaigns, including street marketing tactics, focussing on tobacco use prevention and denormalization. Most recently, on World No Tobacco Day (May 31, 2006) HCAAT planned, coordinated and oversaw a large-scale community demonstration and march aimed at educating youth and the wider community about the tobacco industry’s role in the tobacco epidemic. This event involved over 100 local youth.

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Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
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