Council Direction:

N/A

Information:

The draft Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) received approval in principle from the Ministers of Health & Long Term Care, Health Promotion and Child & Youth Services over the summer. The more detailed protocols that accompany the standards are currently being developed. The three Ministries are expected to finalize approval of the OPHS in late spring or early summer of 2008. Roll-out is expected in late 2008, which will include an education and training component for staff. Full implementation of the new OPHS by all Boards of Health is required by January 2009.

As the Board of Health noted in its feedback on the draft standards, resource implications of the standards will become clear once the protocols are released. A further update will be submitted to the Board at that time.

Background

As part of ongoing Public Health Reform and Operation Health Protection, the Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) in conjunction with the Ministries of Health Promotion (MHP) and Child & Youth Services (MCYS), has been overseeing the review and renewal of the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (MHPSG). These Guidelines were last revised in 1997.

A draft of the new Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), which will replace the existing MHPSG, was released in February 2007. The Board of Health was asked to provide feedback on these new draft standards on February 26, 2007. Public Health Services submitted feedback from staff and the Board of Health to the province in March 2007.

The draft OPHS replaces the existing Guidelines with program standards and lays the foundation for valid, reliable and meaningful performance measures to accompany the program standards. Ultimately this will result in a new approach to accountability through a performance management system that links performance standards and measures to a reporting system.
The new standards incorporate technical revisions to reflect new science, evidence and best practices in public health, and anticipate ongoing review and support processes so that the standards continually evolve. The standards are designed to balance the need for provincial standards with programs that are responsive to local needs and contexts.

**Current Status**

The MOHLTC is planning and developing next steps associated with the standards, which includes the development of supporting documentation such as new and updated protocols, an OPHS Support Manual and training and educational supports for board of health staff.

Protocol Development Teams (PDTs) began drafting protocols in September 2007. Protocols form part of the OPHS and provide direction on how boards of health must operationalize the requirement(s) outlined in the OPHS. The goal is to provide greater standardization in the province-wide implementation of public health programs.

Seventeen PDTs have been formed to draft 21 protocols. The three tobacco protocols are not being redrafted at this point in time. This will result in a total of 24 protocols for the OPHS. City of Hamilton Public Health Services has staff members represented on the following PDTs: Rabies Prevention and Control, Tuberculosis Prevention and Control, Food Safety, and Public Health Emergency Preparedness.

Following the development of draft protocols, a two phased consultation process will be launched with Board of Health staff and key stakeholders. Phase one will begin in late January 2008 and phase two will occur in spring 2008. The consultation with board of health staff and key stakeholder organizations will be comprised of a combination of strategies, including an electronic survey, posting on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry, and workshops as needed.

Following the consultation, the draft protocols will be reviewed and revised by the PDTs as needed and submitted for final Ministerial approval as part of the OPHS in the late spring or early summer of 2008.

A web-based OPHS Support Manual is currently being developed. The three ministry partners will work together to develop a comprehensive roll-out and implementation strategy for the standards and protocols. The roll-out strategy will include communication with key messages, support tools (for example, OPHS Support Manual) and activities (for example, workshops).

**Financial/Staffing Implications**

The Province has indicated that the revised standards must fit within the province’s fiscal envelope for mandatory programs. Financial implications related to the implementation of the new program standards will be brought back to the Board of Health as soon as they are available.

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