To: Mayor and Members  
Board of Health

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Date: February 12, 2008

Re: Equal Access Program Update (BOH08006) (City Wide)

Council Direction:
This report is provided in keeping with the Board of Health policy on communication between the Medical Officer of Health and the Board of Health, as outlined in Report PH06038.

Overview of Program Activities
The Public Health Services’ (PHS) Equal Access Program works to ensure that residents of Hamilton have access to mandatory public health programs, by reducing educational, social, cultural and environmental barriers. Barriers can include, but are not limited to:
- education and literacy levels;
- language;
- culture;
- geography;
- economic circumstances;
- sexual orientation;
- individual or systemic discrimination (based on age, ethnicity, gender, etc.);
- social factors including social isolation, and;
- mental and physical abilities.
**Mandate/Standards**

The Equal Access Program is a mandated program as outlined in the 1997 Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (MHP&SG) published by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, pursuant to Section 7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7, s.7(1).

The Equal Access Requirements and Standards state that the Board of Health will:

1. Provide mandatory public health programs and services, whenever practical and appropriate, which are accessible to people in special groups for whom barriers exist;
2. Select facilities to conduct public health programs which are barrier-free and have suitable access for special groups;
3. Establish ongoing community processes to identify needs, recommend approaches and monitor progress toward achieving access to the mandatory public health programs and services; and
4. Ensure that the health needs for the Francophone population are met.

**Draft Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS):**

The draft Ontario Public Health Standards released on April 30, 2007 and adopted in principle by the Province, state that the Boards of Health shall ensure that barriers to accessing public health programs and services are minimized. In addition, the OPHS require that public health units have the capability to identify, plan and deliver programs and services that are equally accessible to all residents within and across all public health service areas.

**Resources: Budget and Staffing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Activity</th>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>FTE</th>
<th>Staff/Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Access Program</td>
<td>Cost shared 75:25</td>
<td>$76,333</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Equal Access Public Health Nurse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How are we doing**

**Impact on health of Hamiltonians**

The Equal Access Program participates in a coordinated and collaborative approach with Public Health programs, community agencies and other health and social services to:

1) Timely respond to the needs of newly arrived clients and assist them in overcoming multiple barriers (e.g., unfamiliarity with the Canadian Health Care System; culture and language), when accessing services and programs
2) Address the immediate public health care needs of newcomers, such as the coordination of the provision of on-site ethnoculturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate public health services. For example, participation in the coordination of immediate public health services for Karen Refugees who began to arrive in Hamilton in 2006.

3) Create proactive solutions and identify other immediate clients’ needs such as the referral to dental services, housing, children education, and income support.

4) Deliver public health services within a holistic approach, which incorporates anti-racist, anti-oppression, educational, social, psychological, behavioural, physical and cultural perspectives, such as the organization and delivery of health education workshops to familiarize clients and community members with various health services and programs.

5) Contribute to the education of citizens of Hamilton, students, community partners and PHS staff members’ professional development on various components of the Equal Access Program and other issues related to accessibility to health care services and diversity. For example, the Equal Access PHN acts as Project Consultant for 2Q03 nursing students, and as a Preceptor to facilitate student-learning opportunities during the clinical placements of Level IV nursing students, who are interested in public health and community health services, immigrant and refugee health, and resettlement issues.

Emerging Issues/Opportunities

Equal Access Program Review:
As part of PHS’ organizational commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement, and its obligation as a public service organization to provide reasonable access to residents of Hamilton, PHS conducted an internal review of the Equal Access Program in 2007.

The findings provided valuable information to identify staff needs and gaps in services, and served as the foundation to develop action plans, a service delivery framework and recommendations for re-designing the PHS Equal Access Program. Four major themes emerged: 1) Build internal capacity, 2) Improve internal processes, 3) Strengthen stakeholders’ relationships, and 4) Continue collaborative initiatives. Five priority actions resulting from the Equal Access Program Review will be implemented in 2008.

1. Establish a Public Health Equal Access Committee (PHEAC).
This Committee will have staff representatives from all disciplines across PHS Divisions. The purpose of this committee is to foster staff’s knowledge and skills to capitalize upon diversity and on own strengths and existing assets; provide support and networking opportunities; disseminate and exchange information; filter down information to own Divisions and facilitate the collection of information for synthesis and report writing.

2. Oversee Legislative Compliance.
This priority action relates to the identification, understanding and dissemination of new or revised pertinent legislation that relates to accessibility to public health services. Examples of legislative compliance are the French Language Services (FLS) Act, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and other legislation related to accessing and the delivery of public health programs and services.

**Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA):**

The [2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)](http://example.com) is a provincial law that recognizes the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario.

Businesses and organizations that provide goods or services to people in Ontario are now legally required, as set out in the [Ontario Regulation 429/07](http://example.com) (Accessibility Standards for Customer Service), to make their customer services operations accessible to people with disabilities. The Regulation 429/07 came into force on January 1, 2008. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Services apply to the designated public sector organizations on and after January 1, 2010 and are the first in a series of standards that will help lead to a fully accessible Ontario by 2025.

The Equal Access Program will lead the assessment and implementation of PHS initiatives and the reporting of PHS compliance with this Regulation. This activity has links to the City of Hamilton’s Barrier-Free Design Guidelines (2006) and the Access and Equity Office.

3. **Develop an Inventory of Staff Language Competencies.**

Diversity promotes inclusiveness and ensures that everyone is valued as a unique individual, and celebrates our differences and similarities collectively.

The Equal Access Program will lead the assessment of PHS staff language proficiency, which will result in the development of a Language Bank or Inventory. This will assist in identifying PHS’ diverse workforce, training needs and service delivery strategies, to meet the needs of the community and staff members.

In addition, the Equal Access PHN will participate in the development of a diversity-training program to ensure that PHS staff members achieve diversity and cultural competency when delivering public health services. The diversity training will ensure that all PHS employees have the opportunity to maximize their potential, enhance self-development, and contribute to the development of a diverse organization.

4. **Implement a Harmonized Business Process for Purchasing Cultural Interpretation and Translation Services.**

PHS is in the process of revising and implementing cultural interpretation and cultural translation processes, to reduce communication barriers between clients who do not speak English or French and PHS staff members, and address language barriers to accessing public health services.
The Equal Access PHN and key staff members will develop a monitoring process to identify cultural interpretation and cultural translation cost-benefit, trends, services utilization and quality of cultural interpretation and translation services. The Equal Access PHN will liaise with suppliers of cultural interpretation and cultural translation services, to act as a focal point and improve the coordination of these services, ensure a smooth process between both parties, and assess and find solutions when challenges arise.

This priority action will inform PHS staff of the Equal Access Program Review outcomes, its framework and recommendations, and will improve communication and information sharing related to equal access issues.

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC): Public Health Core Competencies
The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals are the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the practice of public health. The Equal Access Program will participate in the Public Health Core Competencies staff training activities related to the Diversity and Inclusiveness category. This category identifies the socio-cultural competencies (inclusive attitudes, behaviours, practices, programs and policies) required to plan, implement, adapt and evaluate public health programs, and interact effectively with diverse individuals, groups and communities.

PHS Strategic Plan:
The PHS Strategic Plan, Goal F: Recruit, develop and retain a competent, flexible workforce, directly relates to the work of the Equal Access Program, in particular, to the Strategic Direction of “cultivating the development of cultural competencies in PHS staff.”

Summary/Conclusion
The Equal Access Program plans, implements and coordinates public health interventions, and accessibility and diversity activities in collaboration with PHS’ programs and community partners. In addition, the Equal Access Program has created and maintained community partnerships and interdisciplinary efforts to comply with the MOHLTC equal access requirements and standards and other pertinent legislation.

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