To: Chair and Members
   Social and Public Health Services Committee

From: Dr. Elizabeth Richardson
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Re: Obesity Update (SPH05056) (City Wide)

Council Direction: This report is consistent with the Public Health and Community Services Department’s Strategic Plan, which was presented to the Social and Public Health Services Committee on May 24, 2005.

Summary
The Ontario Medical Association, in their most recent report, An Ounce of Prevention or a Ton of Trouble - Is There An Epidemic of Obesity in Children, states that “we may be raising the first generation of children who will not outlive their parents” (OMA, October 2005). There is no doubt that obesity is one of the biggest public health challenges today.

On December 1st, key community stakeholders will come together to learn about the serious implications of obesity for our population as well as hear one community’s experience in tackling the problem. Invitations to this forum have been sent to all Councillors. This stakeholder group will be asked to participate in the development of a strategy to address obesity in the Hamilton community that will be brought before Council for endorsement.

Information: Obesity Trends
The past 25 years have shown a considerable rise in the percentage of Canadian children and adolescents who are overweight and obese. Most notable was the increase among 12 to 17 year olds, whose rates for overweight/obesity more than doubled and whose rates for obesity tripled. In 2004, 18.1% of Canadian children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 were overweight and 8.2% were obese (Sheilds, 2005).

According to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) only 46.4% of adults in the City of Hamilton were considered normal weight (Statistics Canada). In contrast, 18.3% were obese and 35.3% were overweight.
We live in an “obesogenic” environment – communities, workplaces, schools, and homes that are conducive to encouraging obesity. There is a complex interaction of biological, lifestyle, physical, socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that influence a person’s ability to achieve a healthy weight. There is an urgent need to create an environment that supports healthy eating and physical activity.

Health Implications
The World Health Organization has declared that being overweight is one of the greatest health challenges in the 21st century (WHO, 2002). The health implications of obesity are alarming. Obese individuals are more likely than healthy weight individuals to experience chronic diseases and conditions such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke, gall bladder disease, hypertension, osteoarthritis, and some cancers (Health Canada, 2003).

Obesity in children and youth is also associated with psychosocial issues such as low self-esteem, which in turn can have a negative effect on academic achievement and social development (CMOH Report, 2004). Conditions such as depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder may also be associated with child and adolescent obesity (OMA, 2005).

Economic Impact
In 2000/2001, obesity cost Canada’s health care system roughly $4.3 billion both in direct costs, such as physician and hospital care and drugs, and indirect costs, such as lost earnings due to absenteeism and premature death associated with obesity (Katzmarzyk et al, 2004). The province of Ontario was thought to have spent $733.7 million on direct health care costs attributable to obesity in 1997. Hamilton residents were reported to have cost the health care system $40.7 million in direct health care costs related to obesity in 1997. This does not include indirect costs such as lost earnings due to employee lack of productivity and absenteeism that directly affect Hamilton’s workforce.

Effective Practice
Best practice dictates that effective strategies incorporate relevant community-based, multi-component, multi-setting approaches (CMOH Report, 2004). These are the approaches the Hamilton Public Health and Community Services Department, along with the City of Hamilton, will promote as we engage key stakeholders from many sectors in a made-in-Hamilton strategy. Since we all have a role to play in reversing the obesity epidemic, it is essential that we work together to reduce overweight and obesity rates among Hamiltonians.

Moving Forward
The Hamilton Public Health and Community Services Department has a strategic goal to develop a comprehensive, community-wide strategy to decrease the percentage of overweight and obese Hamilton children and youth aged 2-9 by the year 2009. This goal will be reached through:

- ensuring accessible physical activity and other recreational opportunities through improved access, GRIDS, and official plan
advocating and developing policies supporting increased physical activities in collaboration with external partners
advocating and developing policies supporting healthy eating
ensuring accessible healthy eating opportunities

Although the strategic goal focuses on children and youth, the strategy will also encompass the adult population as there are a significant number of adults who are overweight and obese or at-risk for unhealthy weights.

To date, the steps taken to reach this goal include:

- An internal Public Health and Community Services Department committee was formed to address several issues surrounding obesity.

- Two Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions were added in 2005 to the Chronic Disease Prevention Program within the Public Health and Community Services Department to begin to develop a strategy to address obesity. The strategy will identify and develop opportunities to work with key stakeholders in the community for obesity prevention programming.

- A partnership has been established with Dr. Salim Yusuf from McMaster University regarding research in the area of prevention of childhood obesity.

- An Obesity Position Paper is being developed to inform the community about Public Health and Community Services Department’s role in addressing the obesity epidemic. The position paper will also serve as a community development tool to engage key stakeholders and help inform the strategy.

- The City of Hamilton and the Public Health and Community Services Department are hosting a Key Stakeholders’ Obesity Forum on December 1, 2005. (See Appendix A). The forum will bring together key experts and sector representatives to examine how to move forward with an obesity strategy in Hamilton. The outcome of the forum will direct and inform the strategy on addressing obesity in the community. Public Health intends to be a key stakeholder in the community driven strategy.

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