



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2014 September 18

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## PROVINCIAL POVERTY PROJECT

### **Recommendations**

*It is recommended that the Board of Health:*

- 1. Encourage all candidates in the municipal election to complete the municipal candidate survey; and,*
- 2. Participate in the local poverty simulation event in November and encourage City and County councilors to participate.*

### **Key Points**

- Poverty negatively impacts health and the ability to create a healthy, vibrant community.
- A collaborative local and provincial project is underway with the goal of building awareness and support among local decision makers for healthy public policy to help reduce poverty and food insecurity in municipalities across Ontario.
- A municipal candidate survey was distributed to London and Middlesex County municipal election candidates including questions about the candidate's views on municipal governments' role in poverty reduction, affordable housing and affordable transportation.
- Survey results will be posted on the Health Unit website starting September 29th.
- Municipal, provincial and federal government representatives are encouraged to participate in the next phase of the project, the local poverty simulation event planned for November.

### **Background**

Poverty negatively impacts health and the ability to create a healthy, vibrant community. It is a real concern when any Middlesex-London resident can't afford basic needs, including nutritious and sufficient food. Income is one of the best predictors of health; however, many Middlesex-London residents perceive upstream social determinants of health, like income and education, as having less impact on health compared to downstream factors, like access to health care and lifestyle choices, which indicates the need for greater public awareness. These social determinants of health are influenced heavily by public policy decisions that are made by municipal, provincial and federal governments.

This project is being led by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health and supported by local planning teams. It is a collaborative initiative with the goal of building awareness and support among local decision makers for healthy public policy to help reduce poverty and food insecurity in municipalities across Ontario. Currently, 15 regions are participating in the project, including Algoma, Chatham-Kent, Elgin St. Thomas, Grey Bruce, Huron, Kenora-Rainy River, Middlesex-London, Niagara, Peel, Perth, Peterborough, Sudbury, Timiskaming, and Windsor-Essex. The Ontario Public Health Standards mandate Boards of Health to address the social determinants of health with the objective of reducing health inequities. This is one strategy to help meet the requirement.

The current initiatives include a municipal election candidate survey (Sept/Oct 2014) and coordinated, local poverty simulation events (Nov 2014).

### **Municipal Candidate Survey**

Informed by a literature review of available evidence, the municipal candidate survey aims to raise awareness with:

- municipal election candidates about evidence-based strategies that municipalities could employ to address local poverty.
- voters about municipal election candidates' views on poverty reduction strategies for municipalities, including those that impact food access.

A draft survey, with the content informed by evidence and composed primarily of close-ended questions, was prepared and disseminated to the local planning teams of participating communities. The local planning teams then tailored the questions to meet the local community context and need. At the time of preparing this report, the London and Middlesex County surveys were still being finalized; however, questions intend to address candidate views on the municipality's role in poverty reduction, affordable housing and affordable transportation. The survey was distributed to London and Middlesex County candidates September 15<sup>th</sup>, with a response requested by September 26<sup>th</sup>. Results will be posted starting September 29<sup>th</sup> on the [Health Unit website](#). The candidate survey and literature review was funded in part by a grant from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. The final version of the municipal candidate survey will be provided to the Board of Health on September 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Next Steps**

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) has endorsed the project and intends to promote the municipal candidate survey as part of a public health primer sent to all candidates. Locally, the municipal candidate survey results will be promoted primarily through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). The survey results may also be promoted at various All Candidates Events across London and Middlesex County by representatives from the organizations on the local planning team.

The second phase of the project is coordinated, local poverty simulation events occurring across Ontario in November. Local decision makers and influencers, including City and County Councilors, Members of Provincial Parliament and Members of Parliament will be invited to attend a London and Middlesex County poverty simulation event. At the event, participants will be assigned roles in 'families' and will manage the unexpected challenges of a marginalized life and barriers to accessing community resources during a simulated month. The goal of the poverty simulation is to impact programming and policy decisions by affecting local decision makers and influencers' attitudes toward people living in poverty and the barriers they face.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitian, and reviewed by Ms. Jayne Scarterfield, Public Health Nurse, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team.



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<p><b>This report addresses</b> the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2014): Foundational Standard 3, 4, 5, 8, 9; Chronic Disease Prevention 7, 11, 12.</p>
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