

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2015 June 18

UPDATE ON MINISTRY'S ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM CHANGES

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 039-15 re Update on Ministry's Oral Health Program Changes be received for information.

Key Points

- The integration of all provincial publicly-funded oral health programs for children and youth into one Healthy Smiles Ontario program has been delayed until January 2016; children eligible to receive services under current programs will be eligible in the new program.
- The integrated dental program will include preventive dental services, and emergency and essential treatment for families in need.
- Little is known about the future program's governance, funding mechanisms, and implementation plan.
- The implementation delay to January 2016 is not expected to negatively impact service delivery but is likely to impact 2015 financial projections by approximately \$140,000.

Background

On December 16, 2013, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) announced several changes to Oral Health Programs effective August 2015 ([Appendix A](#)). A summary of the proposed changes and their implications were outlined in [Report No. 007-14](#) re Changes to Oral Health Programs.

Recent Communications from the Ministry

On May 29, 2015, the MOHLTC released a Health Bulletin ([Appendix B](#)) which announced that the integrated dental program for children and youth will be expanded to include:

- preventive dental services currently delivered by public health units, which are critical to preventing oral health issues from escalating and reducing emergency room visits
- emergency and essential treatment for families in need based on clinical assessment and demonstrated financial hardship

In addition, it was stated that the full implementation date of these changes has been extended to January 2016. Included therein is a commitment from the MOHLTC to ensure that children currently eligible for free dental services will continue to be eligible in the future integrated program.

The delay, extended eligibility, and maintenance of services commitments arose from the advice of public health and other sectors who raised concerns that the proposed changes would reduce access to care and that the timelines were too aggressive. In addition, a working group is developing recommendations for the Ministry regarding new and related requirements to be included in the Ontario Public Health Standards ([Appendix C](#)).

Implications for the Middlesex-London Health Unit

As previously shared in Report No. 007-14, it is likely that MLHU will no longer be involved in claims management.

While recent communications have confirmed the intention to maintain preventive dental services, and clarified that “public health units will be asked to assess eligibility for preventive services which will be available to clinically eligible children whose families attest to financial hardship”, it is unclear who will be providing those services.

Similarly, while the Ministry has stated they “will also provide further direction to Public Health Units on a common approach to be employed to assess financial hardship for preventive and urgent treatment”, public health’s role in delivering emergency and essential treatment is unclear.

Other implications of the changes to the Oral Health Programs and the clients served by them remain unclear given that the MOHLTC has not finalized details about the new integrated program’s governance, structure, funding mechanisms, and implementation plan.

Once available, additional information from the MOHLTC related to the following items will assist Health Unit staff to determine implications for Programs and impacts on the oral health of children and youth in our community:

- Process by which public health units and social service agencies will transition clients from their original program to the new program.
- Messaging to advise providers about implementation dates and transition process.
- The role of public health units with respect to preventive service delivery and disease surveillance currently mandated in the Ontario Public Health Standards.
- Overall funding model for future state and funding scheme during transition period.
- A communication plan for the public and families who are currently enrolled in the six different dental programs.
- Sustainable funding arrangements for publicly funded dental clinics

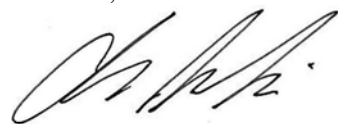
Budget Considerations

Had the program changes announced by the Ministry moved ahead as originally planned on August 1st, MLHU would have experienced a positive variance within the 2015 budget. With the recent announcement of the implementation delay to January 2016, no negative impact on service delivery is expected. There is likely to be, however, an impact on expected gapping by approximately \$140,000.

Next Steps

The MOHLTC continues to work closely with health units as the future state of the integrated program is planned and implemented. Two Health Unit staff members are actively engaged in this process at the provincial level, to ensure that the oral health needs of children and youth will continue to be met. Anticipatory planning for a number of scenarios is underway to ensure MLHU is as prepared as possible for various options that may unfold as the Ministry continues in its planning and implementation processes.

This report was prepared by Dr. Maria VanHarten, Dental Consultant, and Ms. Heather Lokko, Associate Director, OHCDSh.



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