

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2015 February 19

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## **ENDORSEMENT OF ONTARIO'S SPECIAL NEEDS STRATEGY (SNS)**

### ***Recommendation***

*It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 015-15 re Ontario's Special Needs Strategy.*

### **Key Points**

- Ontario's Special Needs Strategy, announced in February 2014, will put in place a new standard developmental screen for preschool children; coordinated family-centred service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex needs; and an integrated approach to the delivery of rehabilitation services for children and youth.
- MLHU is an active participant in development of the local proposal.
- On behalf of the local planning tables in our region, MLHU applied for and received a grant to hire a facilitator to assist in developing the proposals.
- The support of the multi-ministry Special Needs Strategy by the MLHU Board of Health will reinforce the importance of the involvement of public health and the alignment with existing public health programs.

### **Overview of the Special Needs Strategy (SNS)**

In February 2014, the ministries of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Community and Social Services (MCSS), Education (EDU) and Health and Long-Term Care announced a provincial strategy to improve services for children and youth with special needs in Ontario. The SNS is guided by the vision "An Ontario where children and youth with special needs get the timely and effective services they need to participate fully at home, at school, in the community and as they prepare to achieve their goals for adulthood."

First steps of the SNS include putting in place:

- A new standard developmental screen for preschool children;
- Coordinated family-centred service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex needs; and
- An integrated approach to the delivery of rehabilitation services (speech-language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy) for children and youth from birth to school exit.

The ministries identified 34 service delivery areas and tasked them with developing local proposals for coordinated services and integrated rehabilitation based on ministry provided specific policy guidelines and plan templates. Participants at the local proposal development tables include leaders from across the education, health and children/youth service sectors. Input from families as well as front line service providers is required in the development of the proposals. The proposal for coordinated services is due to the ministries by June 2015 and the proposal for integrated rehabilitation is due by October 2015.

## **MLHU's Role in the Special Needs Strategy**

London and Middlesex and Elgin and Oxford were identified as 2 distinct planning districts. However as many of the community partners at the planning tables provide services to the entire Thames Valley Region, a decision was made to combine the districts and have one planning table for Integrated Rehabilitation and one for Coordinated Services. There are approximately 171,165 children from birth to 21 years of age in London, Middlesex, Elgin and Oxford. It is estimated that 10% (17,116) have special needs and will benefit from this strategy.

Local tables were able to apply to the ministries for one time funding to hire a facilitator to assist them in developing their local proposals. MLHU was identified as the lead agency to receive the grant and contract with a facilitator. In December 2014, MLHU conducted a formal Request for Proposals process. In January 2015, Maria Sanchez-Keane from the Centre for Organizational Effectiveness was awarded the contract.

Both proposal development tables began meeting in December 2104. Representatives from approximately 16 local community agencies providing services to children and youth and their families participate on the planning tables. Managers from Family Health Services are sitting at both the Coordinated Services table and the Integrated Rehabilitation table representing MLHU's early years programs and services.

## **Conclusion/Next Steps**

The Special Needs Strategy will build on the existing strengths in our community to help ensure that children and youth with special needs and their families receive the services that they need in a seamless and effective manner. MLHU will continue to be an active participant in the development of the local proposals. As the lead agency for Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing and Blind Low Vision programs in the Thames Valley region, MLHU is required to be a signatory on the local proposal for Integrated Rehabilitation. The Board of Health will receive regular updates as the plans develop in anticipation of the requirement for the Board of Health to be a signatory.

Further information about [Ontario's Special Needs Strategy](#) can be found on line.

This report was prepared by Ms. Diane Bewick, Director, Family Health Services, and Ms. Debbie Shugar, Manager, Family Health Services.



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