



MIDDLESEX-LONDON HEALTH UNIT

REPORT NO. 17-23

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: 2023 March 16

CITY OF LONDON FUNDING TO SUPPORT CANNABIS PROGRAMMING

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 17-23, re: “City of London Funding to Support Cannabis Programming” for information.

Key Points

- Every year since 2019, the City of London earmarked a portion of their [Ontario Cannabis Legalization Implementation Fund \(OCLIF\)](#) for the Middlesex-London Health Unit’s cannabis program.
- Funding from the City of London is secured for 2023; however, no additional funding is anticipated for 2024 as the City’s OCLIF funding will have been spent.
- [Appendix A](#) provides information on 2023 funding that has enabled the Health Unit to increase its Enforcement Officer capacity to fund two, temporary 1.0 FTE Enforcement Officers to respond to increased demands on enforcement, and to support the implementation of public education activities.
- [Appendix B](#) provides a summary of cannabis enforcement work from 2022.

Background – A Community Approach to the Legalization of Non-Medical Cannabis

In November 2017, the City of London convened the Cannabis Implementation Working Group (CIWG) to prepare for the implementation of a legalized non-medical cannabis supply system. The CIWG was comprised of City staff from planning, licensing, bylaw enforcement, fire prevention, and governmental/external relations, representatives from the London Police Service, and representatives from the Middlesex-London Health Unit. Collaboration between municipal, enforcement, health, education and community/social service partners was essential to locally respond and adapt to this complex policy change and protect public health and safety.

To support municipalities in their role of the implementation of a legalized non-medical cannabis system and to address activities within the illegal cannabis market, the Ontario Government created the [Ontario Cannabis Legalization Implementation Fund \(OCLIF\)](#). Between 2019 and 2021, municipalities across Ontario received funding, on a per household basis, to address implementation costs including: increased enforcement by public health, police, bylaw enforcement, and corresponding court administration; increased response to public inquiries; by-law and/or policy development (e.g. workplace health and safety policy); and public education. A full list of funding by municipality is archived [online](#) for reference.

Every year since 2019, the City of London earmarked a portion of OCLIF for the Health Unit’s cannabis program. Public health work related to cannabis had historically been included within the broader program

area of “substance use”; however, with the legalization of non-medical cannabis, there are greater expectations and demands on public health to: monitor the trends and harms associated with cannabis use; provide public education and respond to inquiries from the public regarding potential health risks; field complaints and enforce the laws related to the consumption of non-medical and medical cannabis; and to work with municipalities and workplaces to support them in the development and enforcement of policies and bylaws. As outlined in [Appendix A](#), this funding has enabled the Health Unit to increase its Enforcement Officer capacity from 3.2 FTE to 5.2 FTE (from 2021 to present) with the recruitment of two additional temporary full-time equivalents. The funding also increased the Health Unit’s capacity to assess the burden of cannabis use and the impact in the community, public education, and health care provider outreach initiatives. Funding from the City of London is secured for 2023; however, no additional funding is anticipated for 2024 as the City’s OCLIF funding earmarked for the Health Unit is anticipated to be spent by year-end.

Cannabis Use Trends

According to data collected by Statistics Canada (2022), 27% of Canadians aged 16 years and older reported using cannabis in the past year; an increase from 25% from the previous year. Cannabis use within the last twelve months is highest among young people, with 50% of young adults aged 20-24 and 37% of youth aged 16 to 19 reporting past year use. Twenty-four percent (24%) of those who used cannabis in the past 12 months reported an increase in their cannabis use during the COVID-19 pandemic. This change in use was reported primarily by youth and young adults, with stress, anxiety, boredom, loneliness and a lack of a routine or schedule as the most common reasons cited (Statistics Canada, 2022). Additionally, concerning trends regarding cannabis poisoning have also been observed over the last ten years. According to Public Health Ontario (2020), emergency department visits for cannabis poisonings in Middlesex-London increased significantly from 2013 to 2018 and were over two times higher than Ontario rates. In the two years following the legalization of cannabis edibles, oils, and extracts in 2019, researchers from Toronto SickKids hospital found that there was a four-fold increase in unintentional cannabis ingestion, a three-fold increase in intensive care admissions for severe cannabis poisonings, and nine times more emergency department visits per month for cannabis poisonings in young children across Ontario.

Public Education and Enforcement

The smoking and vaping of medical and non-medical cannabis is regulated provincially by the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017*, which is enforced by the Health Unit’s Tobacco Enforcement Officers. While cannabis retail stores are licensed provincially by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, cannabis retail stores also sell vapour products, which are inspected by Health Unit Enforcement Officers. [Appendix B](#) provides a summary of cannabis enforcement work from 2022. In 2023, the Health Unit is using Poison Prevention Week, which runs from March 19th to March 25th, to encourage parents, guardians and caregivers to reduce cannabis poisonings in children through the roll-out of a social marketing campaign and the development of an adult caregiver outreach strategy. Given the concerns regarding early initiation of use by youth and young adults and impacts on mental health outcomes and brain development, the creation of a social marketing campaign targeted to older youth/young adults is planned for 2023.

Next Step

As OCLIF comes to an end in 2023, the Health Unit will continue to monitor the impacts of cannabis in the community and pursue opportunities to minimize harms associated with this substance.

This report was submitted by the Healthy Living Division.

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Alexander Summers, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name being the most prominent.

Emily Williams, BScN, RN, MBA, CHE
Chief Executive Officer