



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2014 March 20

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## LOCAL REPRESENTATION AT NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS CONFERENCE

### ***Recommendation***

*It is recommended that Report No. 021-14 re Local Representation at National Homelessness Conference be received for information.*

### **Key Points**

- All Our Sisters 2014 is a national conference held in London which allows for knowledge exchange and solution building on issues relating to homelessness and housing insecurity among women at risk.
- MLHU is integrally involved in planning the All Our Sisters 2014 national conference, and functions as the Treasurer for the All Our Sisters committee.
- The Middlesex-London Health Unit will sponsor four local women to attend the May 2014 conference, at a total cost of \$2,000 to ensure that there is local representation of women with the lived experience of homelessness.

### **Background**

The “All Our Sisters 2014” conference is the second national forum on housing and safe communities for women and will be held in London from May 12 to 14, 2014. The conference hosts delegates from across Canada who are committed to creating a national network of partners to address national, regional, and local issues relating to women and homelessness. These issues include the social, economic, health, and practical issues affecting homeless women and women at risk of homelessness. The forum provides an opportunity for service providers, community members, policy makers, government officials, academics, change agents, and women with lived experience of homelessness to come together to promote safe and sustainable housing and safe communities for women. The conference promotes collaboration between diverse agencies, organizations, and individuals at local and regional levels, and supports the development of strategies for a sustainable national network.

Homelessness intersects with many issues relevant to public health, such as injury prevention, exposure to health hazards, mental health, addictions, sexual health, and healthy child development. Public Health Nurses on the Best Beginnings team provide services to homeless women and families in shelters in London and Middlesex County, and also provide home visits for women who are at risk of homelessness. The Reproductive Health team is currently assessing the extent of the issue of homelessness among pregnant women in our community. Harm reduction services are provided by the Sexual Health team to women who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness. In order to provide effective service to women experiencing homelessness or living in unsafe housing, we need to better understand the unique needs and challenges they face.

## The Voice of Homeless Women

The participation in the conference of women with lived experience of homelessness allows their voices to be heard and provides service providers access to this unique perspective. Women who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, bring diverse knowledge and experiences to the conference, filling a gap which would otherwise be missing. At the first All Our Sisters conference in 2011, 118 attendees and presenters were women from across Canada with lived experience of homelessness. Six of these women were supported to attend through MLHU (\$3,000). MLHU also contributed \$2,000 towards speaker costs.

The 2014 conference will also feature women from coast to coast, telling their stories about the barriers they face in attaining safe and sustainable housing, as well as the root causes of homelessness. The conference steering committee solicits sponsorships for honorariums to enable homeless women from across Canada to participate in the forum. The cost for one local woman to attend the conference is \$500. In addition to in-kind contribution in the form of staff time organizing the event, MLHU will support the attendance of 4 local women to participate in this 3 day event (\$2,000). Several staff and managers are involved in planning for the 2014 conference. MLHU is also acting as the treasurer for the event including the receiving and disbursement of funds. Other agencies committing funds include the University of Western Ontario, Sisters of St. Joseph, London Business Professional Women`s Group, Catholic Women`s League, WOTCH and Unifor Canada.

## MLHU Policy Development

Currently MLHU does not have a policy or guidelines to assist us in determining contributions (in-kind and financial) to community sponsored health related events. The Senior Leadership Team is in the process of establishing a series of criteria which will ensure equity and due process as opportunities of this nature arise.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kathy Dowsett, Manager, Best Beginnings Team and Ms. Heather Lokko, Manager, Reproductive Health Team.



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Medical Officer of Health

<p><b>This report addresses</b> the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Foundational Standard</p>
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