

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2015 January 15

PROVINCIAL POVERTY PROJECT

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health participate in the Middlesex-London Poverty Simulation event on March 6, 2015, and encourage local City and County councilors, MPPs and MPs 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.
- The Health Unit has partnered with King's College, London's Poverty Research Centre, the Child and Youth Network, and United Way London & Middlesex to conduct local research related to the impact of participating in a locally designed and implemented poverty simulation.
- Municipal, provincial and federal government representatives are encouraged to participate in the Middlesex-London Poverty Simulation event.

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. Greater public awareness could help build momentum to address these issues. These social determinants of health are influenced heavily by public policy decisions that are made by all levels of government.

The Provincial Poverty Project, coordinated by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health and organized in participating communities by local planning teams, aims to build awareness and support among decision makers for healthy public policy to help reduce poverty and food insecurity in municipalities across Ontario. The Ontario Public Health Standards mandate Boards of Health to address the social determinants of health with the objective of reducing health inequities. The project initiatives include a municipal election candidate survey (Sept - Oct 2014) and coordinated, local poverty simulation events (Nov 2014 – Mar 2015).

The Board of Health has previously committed to supporting this project. For more information, see Board of Health Reports [031-14](#) and [054-14](#).

Municipal Candidate Survey

A municipal candidate survey, informed by a literature review of available evidence, was distributed to all London and Middlesex County candidates in September 2014. The survey aimed to raise awareness with

municipal election candidates about evidence-based strategies that municipalities could employ to address local poverty, and with voters about municipal election candidates' views on poverty reduction strategies for municipalities, including those that impact food access. Survey questions included candidate views on municipalities' role in poverty reduction, affordable housing, food access, and early childhood supports.

The candidate survey was endorsed by London Community Foundation, London's Poverty Research Centre and United Way London & Middlesex.

Key Results

- 92/176 (52%) municipal candidates completed the survey.
 - 60/87 (69%) City of London candidates completed the survey.
 - 32/89 (36%) Middlesex County candidates completed the survey.
- Survey responses were posted on www.healthunit.com/hungry-for-action.
 - The webpage was viewed 1 774 times during 1 388 sessions (Sept 12 - Dec 31, 2014).
 - The average time spent on the webpage was 10 minutes and 29 seconds, compared to 1 minute and 20 seconds on average for the entire Health Unit site (Sept 12 - Dec 31, 2014).
 - Ninety out of ninety-two candidate response PDFs were downloaded at least once with a total of 2 133 downloads overall during 750 webpage views (Sept 12 - Dec 31, 2014).

Middlesex-London Poverty Simulation

The second phase of the project is coordinated, local poverty simulation events occurring across Ontario from November 2014 to March 2015. Local decision makers and influencers, including City and County Councilors, Members of Provincial Parliament and Members of Parliament will be invited to attend a Middlesex-London 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.

The poverty simulation will be pilot tested with King's College social work students in February. The Health Unit has partnered with King's College, London's Poverty Research Centre, the Child and Youth Network and United Way London & Middlesex to conduct local research related to the February and March poverty simulations. The purpose of the research is to investigate the short and long-term impacts of participating in this locally designed and implemented poverty simulation.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitian, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team.



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