



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Gayane Hovhannisyanyan, Acting Medical Officer of Health
Laura Di Cesare, Acting Chief Executive Officer

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DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS HIV EPIDEMIC AND RELATED ISSUES IN LONDON

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 021-17 re: Development and Implementation of a Strategy to Address HIV Epidemic and Related Issues in London be received for information.

Key Points

- Since February 2016, the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) has been investigating increases in new cases of HIV, Hepatitis C, invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease and infective endocarditis affecting the local persons who inject drugs (PWID).
- MLHU has been leading a stakeholder group to identify and address gaps or oversights in the community's response to the problem, as well as the development and implementation of a multi-pronged strategy to address the epidemic of HIV and other infectious diseases in this population.

HIV AND OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN PERSONS WHO INJECT DRUGS (PWID)

In June 2016, the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) declared a public health emergency related to increases in new cases of HIV, Hepatitis C, invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease and infective endocarditis in persons who inject drugs (PWID). The investigation, which began in February 2016, determined the issues to be unique in terms of their magnitude and in comparison to other, similar regions in the province. Over the past year, more than fifty provincial and national experts and other stakeholders have been consulted, and a local HIV Leadership Team was created, with representation from St. Joseph's Infectious Diseases Care Program (IDCP), the London InterCommunity Health Centre (LIHC), the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC), local infectious disease physicians and South West Local Integrated Health Network (SWLHIN).

Some of the strategies implemented are summarized here. The full report is attached as [Appendix A](#).

Adaptation of the STOP HIV/AIDS Model

The STOP HIV/AIDS outreach model is aimed at steering people living with HIV, who are disconnected from care, into care. The model is based on interdisciplinary "pods," each containing an outreach nurse, an outreach worker and a social worker. Based on extensive consultations and review of evidence, the MLHU internally reallocated \$270,000 toward adapting the STOP HIV/AIDS model to London, and hired an HIV lead/outreach team supervisor position, an outreach nurse and an outreach worker. The HIV lead/outreach position is filled, and we are currently in the process of recruiting an outreach nurse and an outreach worker.

Increased HIV Testing

A lack of point-of-care (POC) testing sites in London was identified as a gap in the community, particularly in areas of the city with large numbers of new HIV cases. To enhance the capacity for testing in the community

setting, all Sexual Health Public Health Nurses at MLHU have been trained to provide POC testing. LIHC and MLHU will continue to work collaboratively on targeted screening of PWID in the community.

Elgin Middlesex-Detention Centre (EMDC)

In a review of the fifty-eight HIV cases reported to the MLHU in 2016, eleven were diagnosed at the EMDC. Several meetings were held with EMDC, and with healthcare programs and services linked to EMDC, to identify gaps in services and opportunities for enhancement, such as increased testing, discharge planning and initiation of opioid replacement therapy.

Campaign to Increase Awareness Among PWID

With the increase in HIV and other infectious diseases among PWID, a health promotion campaign was developed to educate and promote harm reduction practices for this local population. RHAC and MLHU worked together to develop harm reduction messages and strategies to promote the use of clean injection equipment. Feedback collected from pilot testing with needle exchange clients indicated a preference for using stickers affixed to the needle exchange equipment kits handed out at the needle exchange sites.

Harm Reduction Services in London

RHAC's Counterpoint Needle Syringe Program (CNSP) is funded by the Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU) and the AIDS Bureau, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program (OHRDP) acknowledges CNSP as one of the largest needle exchange programs in Ontario. Currently, MLHU and RHAC are working together to enhance harm reduction services and increase the availability of supplies through small, fixed satellite sites, as well as by increasing service hours and availability of harm reduction supplies during the weekend.

Enhanced Surveillance

Recognizing that existing surveillance methods may not be collecting the necessary information to assess potential causes of increased HIV and other infectious diseases among PWID, enhanced surveillance methods are currently being developed and implemented.

Public Health Agency of Canada Grant

The alliance of stakeholders in London, which includes MLHU, has applied for this grant with a plan to leverage existing resources and work toward adapting the STOP HIV/AIDS model to a coordinated multi-agency response.

Advocacy for Provincial Support

The Board of Health Chair, Acting MOH and Acting CEO met with the Honourable Deb Matthews, Deputy Premier, in February 2017 to discuss the local context of, and issues arising from, substance use in our community. Upon a request for further information from the Deputy Premier, a proposal is being developed with strategies to respond to the growing HIV rate and related issues in London, and to identify areas for provincial support.

This report was submitted by the Sexual Health Team, Environmental Health and Infectious Disease Division and Foundational Standard Division.



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