

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 18 August 1998

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **RESPONSE TO MOTION CSC 04(98): SEXUAL HEALTH
EDUCATION FOR GRADES 7 TO 9**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

This report is in response to a motion carried at the Community Service Committee meeting of 16 April 1998 that:

The report entitled, *Sexual Health Education for Grades 7-9*, be circulated to community agencies involved in this area to solicit their input and comments on how best to achieve the Mandatory Provincial Public Health Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

The Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines, released in February 1998, require as a minimum that students in grades 7, 8 and 9 receive three hours of sexual health and three hours of AIDS and STD-related instruction annually. The topics identified within the standards suggest a complete and comprehensive approach to sexual health education. There is also provision for parents to increase their knowledge and skills and for other community based sexual health strategies to occur. The Ottawa-Carleton Health Department, in collaboration with community partners, will assist in curriculum development, implementation and health promotion activities.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

As a follow up to the submission of the report entitled *Sexual Health Education for Grades 7-9* presented to Community Services Committee on April 16, 1998, several Ottawa-Carleton community agencies involved in the area of sexual health and youth were sent the report for their input and comments. The above mentioned report was distributed with an accompanying letter (see ANNEX A) and an excerpt of the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines relating to the requirements in the Sexual Health areas. The youth serving agencies consulted were the following:

Youth Services Bureau, AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Planned Parenthood Ottawa-Carleton, Pink Triangle Youth, Youth Net (CHEO), Maison des Jeunes (Vanier) and Rainbow Youth Coalition.

Partner agencies were asked to provide feedback regarding suggestions or strategies to achieve the standards and share their possible contribution in assisting schools with sexual health education or health promotion activities. A response was expected before June 5th, 1998.

DISCUSSION

The response from the agencies which have replied is very positive. They have provided suggestions for the Department and have listed some of the complementary services that they will offer to youth and parents in the community. Initially, one partner agency responded, but follow-up contacts were made to community agencies that had not yet responded, with significant input.

Suggestions for strategies encourage the Health Department to continue to :

- seek full participation from youth in the planning and implementing of programs
- recognize and involve principals and school authorities as key to implementing sexual health strategies which tend to be value-laden
- deliver messages about violence in relationships to gender specific groups
- encourage the use of innovative programming like theatre performances created by and for youth
- address the full range of sexual health issues including self-esteem, communication, values, positive peer groups, addressing loss issues and
- challenge homophobia in ways that encourage youth to understand and look for the roots of their homophobia so that all young people feel capable and deserving of a healthy relationship.

Feedback received relating to agency capacity to assist with sexual health education included the following:

- CHEO's Youth Net could provide resources developed by youth for youth on sexual health topics (Youth Fax), share data collected and expertise around focus groups
- Youth Services Bureau can offer some resources regarding violence in relationships and sexual orientation
- Planned Parenthood of Ottawa-Carleton will accept referrals for school presentations, pre-natal classes and counseling and continue to offer workshops and resources to youth and parents.
- Pink Triangle Services will continue to offer GLBTQ (Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or questioning) youth support groups. They suggest resources for use with youth in schools and

offer assistance with education around the issue of sexual orientation at workshops for providers and teachers. They emphasize their reliance on public health educators and teachers to promote their services and programs in schools.

CONCLUSION

Generally community colleagues felt that the guidelines appeared comprehensive regarding the transition years and supported the direction to continue to provide service for younger children and older teens. All offered to be involved regarding collaborative partnerships in strategies and service assistance to schools, as much as resources allowed. Involving youth in strategy development and implementation was mentioned as being crucial to program success. This continues to be a philosophy which is adhered to by the Department. The Ottawa Carleton Health Department welcomes and appreciates partner agency feedback and will proceed with program and services planning and implementation that will include intersectoral co-operation and co-ordination within the context of the community as a whole.

*Approved by
Robert Cushman, MD MBA FRCPC*

ANNEX A**May 19, 1998**

Re: Strategies to Achieve New Ministry of Health Guidelines in Respect to Sexual Health Education for Grades 7 to 9 in Ottawa-Carleton

In February of this year the Ministry of Health released its new provincial standards for public health programs outlined in the *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines**. This document represents the culmination of collaborative efforts between the Ministry, the public health community and municipalities and other interest groups. The purpose of the standards is to set out the minimum requirements for fundamental public health programs and services targeted at prevention of disease, health promotion and health protection.

While the goals and objectives formulated for these standards fall within the sphere of public health activities, their achievement will depend largely on broad community participation and support. The implementation of the programs and services needs to include intersectoral cooperation and coordination within the context of the community as a whole. This is why we would like to consult your agency at this time, especially in respect to requirements relating to the Sexual Health areas of the Guidelines.

The Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines require as a minimum that students in grades 7,8 and 9 receive three hours of sexual health and three hours of AIDS and STD related education annually. The topics identified within the standard suggest a complete and comprehensive approach to sexual health education. There is also provision for parents to increase their knowledge and skills, and for other community based sexual health strategies to occur, (see attached excerpt from Guidelines).

Our role, as stipulated in the Standards, is one of support to the schools. The primary responsibility for curriculum implementation lies with the person or organization that operates the school. The Ottawa-Carleton Health Department, in conjunction with community partners, will assist in curriculum development, implementation and health promotion activities.

In March 1998, Community Services Committee was presented with a report regarding the adequacy of the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (attached).

The Health Department recognizes that there are many community partners interested in ensuring that children and youth are provided with “good” healthy sexuality education/information.

In an effort to integrate our services and programs with those provided by other agencies that also address similar topic areas, we would appreciate input from your agency on:

- suggestions or strategies that might be utilized to achieve the mandatory standards
- your agency's capacity and/or interest in collaborating with the Health Department in assisting schools with sexual health education or health promotion activities

We would appreciate a response by Friday, June 5, 1998. Comments can be forwarded by fax, electronic mail or by mail to:

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Your collaboration in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Claudette Nadon, B.ScN, M.H.A.
Director
Child and Adolescent Health Division

Attach. (2)

**This document is available on the MOH Website at <http://www.gov.on.ca/health>*