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To be listed on the Community Services
Committee Agenda 4 June 1998

DATE 19 May 1998

TO/DEST. The Chair and Members of Regional Council

FROM/EXP. Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **HEALTHY BABIES, HEALTHY CHILDREN - FAMILY
VISITOR PROGRAM UPDATE, MAY 1998**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide members of Committee with an update relating to the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children - Family Visitor Program.

BACKGROUND

Early childhood experiences make a critical and long-term difference in children's health and well-being during childhood and as adults. In May of 1997, the Minister of Health announced start up funds (10 million dollars for Ontario) for its new Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program. On May 12, 1998 the Minister announced funding of a further \$10 million province-wide for this program. The mechanism and criteria for apportionment of this new funding has not yet been announced. However, it is assumed the program in Ottawa-Carleton will be expanded to some degree with further expansion likely over the next few years.

This is a prevention/early intervention program designed to give children a better start in life. It is a joint Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) initiative under the direction of the Office of Integrated Services for Children. Healthy Babies, Healthy Children is intended to augment and strengthen existing services for families and children in the province of Ontario. The revised Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines for Boards of Health include the goals, objectives and program requirements of Healthy Babies, Healthy Children.

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children involves both a focus on developing and maintaining an integrated network of health and social services and a home visiting component for at risk children from the prenatal period through the first two years of life. The Health Department is working with MCSS and a number of other community agencies on the integration of services. In our Region, the home visiting component of Healthy Babies, Healthy Children is based in

Community Health and Community Resource Centres and ensures that an average of 13 home visits are provided to approximately 600 families over a two-year period by a paid Family Visitor supervised by a Public Health Nurse.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- ◇ Three Public Health Nurses and 14 (part-time) Family Visitors have been hired for the program. The family visitors are able to provide services in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Somali. One visitor provides services to the aboriginal community.
- ◇ The Family Visitors are employees of the RMOC, but located in CHCs/CRCs across the Region.
- ◇ In February 1998 the Family Visitors completed their five-week orientation, and the five local maternity care hospitals began screening mothers of new-borns for the program.
- ◇ In March 1998 the Public Health Nurses began assessing families who were referred to the program, and assigned families to a Family Visitor.
- ◇ Approximately 200 families have been assessed for the program, and 120 families across the Region are receiving home visits by a Family Visitor.
- ◇ The Steering Committee of Healthy Babies, Healthy Children has started to work on the integration of services for children and their families across the Region.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This is a 100% provincially funded program in an area of recognized need. A broadly based community committee was involved in planning the program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Annual funding of \$621,060 has been dedicated to Healthy Babies, Healthy Children in Ottawa-Carleton by the Ministry of Health. This amount will vary from year to year based on the annual number of deliveries.

CONCLUSION

Early identification and subsequent intervention with young children who are at risk of poor social, emotional, cognitive and physical health has been shown to improve their life prospects. In many cases, severe problems can be prevented if professionals and other service providers who have contact with children and families intervene early to provide supports.

Home visits by Family Visitors, supported by PHNs, has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the healthy growth and development of children. Basing this program in the community will offer additional benefits across the Region.

*Approved by
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