

Report to/Rapport au:

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa**

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CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE	Ref N°: ACS2013-OPH-HPDP-0004
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**SUBJECT: YOUTH SPEAK, LET'S LISTEN, THEN ACT: ENGAGING YOUTH IN
OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMMING**

**OBJET : NOS JEUNES PARLENT; ÉCOUTONS-LES, PUIS AGISSONS :
INCITER LES JEUNES À PARTICIPER AUX PROGRAMMES DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit approve that Ottawa Public Health:

- 1. Collaborate with the Youth Summit Action Plan committee to respond to issues identified by Ottawa youth; and**
- 2. Continue to integrate youth engagement across programs and services.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la Ville d'Ottawa approuve que Santé publique Ottawa :

- 1. collabore avec le comité responsable du Plan d'action issu du Sommet du maire pour les jeunes en vue de réagir aux problèmes mis de l'avant par les jeunes d'Ottawa;**
- 2. continue d'intégrer l'engagement des jeunes à ses programmes et services.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adolescence is a period of transition marked by rapid physical and emotional growth. This presents increased health risks as youth cope with changing bodies, increased societal expectations and progressive freedom. It is also a period when youth begin defining themselves through behaviours that include establishing personal health habits, creating their own social networks and working on academic and employment success.

Ottawa youth face health issues as they transition to adulthood that impact both their physical and mental well being. The 2011 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey highlighted that, although over a quarter of Ottawa students in grades 7 to 12 reported their mental health as excellent (28 per cent), more than a third (34 per cent) reported elevated levels of psychological distress. Also, in 2012, youth aged 15 to 29 have accounted for 79 per cent of chlamydia and gonorrhoea cases in Ottawa. Over one quarter of sexually active 15 to 19 year olds in Ottawa did not use a condom last time they had sex.

In an effort to improve both the physical and mental health of youth, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) uses principles and practices of youth engagement. OPH programs such as exposé, Healthy Transitions and health campaigns such as Why Drive High? are examples of how OPH has embedded youth engagement into school activities to address health issues related to, respectively, tobacco use, mental health and cannabis misuse. Specifically OPH implements youth engagement by:

- implementing peer to peer health promotion through youth-led, adult-guided activities
- facilitating developmental opportunities for youth as our future health professionals and leaders
- involving youth to inform program planning

Youth engagement is defined as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity...” that is characterized by stimulating and meaningful activities created from a youth perspective and that give youth a sense of connection. Youth engagement has been documented as a best practice approach with organizations across Ottawa adopting this practise. Youth that are actively engaged in activities experience many significant benefits, including improved decision making, promotion of learning, reduced risky behaviour and acquiring skills necessary to be productive adults. In addition, dialogue and participation are essential for the development of critical autonomy, which enables youth to make informed decisions and become engaged citizens. Other benefits to being engaged include decreased alcohol and marijuana use, and lower rates of depression.

OPH intends to strengthen its efforts at youth engagement in these areas to enhance current programming and respond to emerging priorities. In particular OPH has identified the following areas for attention: ensure the youth voice is a driving force on all health issues related to youth, optimize the use of social media and new technology, and continue expansion of youth engagement to include young adults up to 24 years of age where they play, work and learn. OPH is also integrating these initiatives within the Mayor's Youth Summit Action Plan, which will be presented to the Community and Protective Services Committee.

RÉSUMÉ

L'adolescence est une période de transition marquée par une rapide croissance physique et émotionnelle. Les changements vécus par les jeunes – la transformation du corps, l'augmentation des attentes sociétales ainsi que l'acquisition graduelle d'une certaine liberté – sont associés à une augmentation des risques pour la santé. C'est également durant cette période que les jeunes se forgent une identité par divers comportements, notamment l'adoption d'habitudes de vie personnelles, la création de leurs propres réseaux sociaux et les efforts visant la réussite scolaire et professionnelle.

Au moment du passage à la vie adulte, les jeunes d'Ottawa font face à certains problèmes de santé qui auront des répercussions sur leur bien-être physique et mental. Le Sondage 2011 sur la santé et la consommation de drogue des élèves de l'Ontario indique que plus du quart (28 %) des élèves de la 7^e à la 12^e année qualifient leur santé mentale d'excellente, mais que plus du tiers (34 %) ont admis souffrir de détresse psychologique élevée. En outre, 79 % des cas de chlamydia et de gonorrhée survenus cette année à Ottawa touchaient des jeunes de 15 à 29 ans, et plus du quart des jeunes de 15 à 19 ans d'Ottawa actifs sexuellement n'ont pas utilisé de condom lors de leur dernière relation sexuelle.

Dans le but d'améliorer la santé mentale et physique des jeunes, Santé publique Ottawa (SPO) se sert de principes et de pratiques de mobilisation des jeunes pour promouvoir l'état de santé des jeunes d'Ottawa. Les programmes de SPO comme *exposé* et *Transitions saines* ainsi que les campagnes de santé comme *Pourquoi conduire en étant « high »?* illustrent bien de quelle façon SPO a intégré l'engagement des jeunes à des activités scolaires permettant d'aborder des problèmes de santé liés respectivement à l'usage du tabac, à la santé mentale et à l'abus de cannabis. Plus précisément, SPO fait participer les jeunes des façons suivantes :

- Participation des jeunes à l'orientation de la conception des programmes;
- Mise en œuvre de la promotion de la santé par les pairs au moyen d'activités guidées par les adultes et dirigées par les jeunes;

- Promotion des possibilités de perfectionnement destinées aux jeunes, qui seront un jour nos professionnels de la santé et nos dirigeants.

L'engagement des jeunes se définit comme « la participation significative et soutenue d'une jeune personne à une activité [...] », caractérisée par des activités stimulantes et significatives créées du point de vue des jeunes et qui leur donnent un sentiment de contribution. L'engagement des jeunes représente désormais une approche de pratiques exemplaires, et de nombreux organismes d'Ottawa et d'ailleurs l'ont adoptée. Les jeunes qui participent activement aux activités en tirent d'importants avantages, notamment l'amélioration de la prise de décisions et de l'apprentissage, la diminution des comportements à risque et l'acquisition des compétences nécessaires pour devenir des adultes productifs. En outre, le dialogue et la participation sont essentiels au développement de l'autonomie de pensée, laquelle permet aux jeunes de prendre des décisions éclairées et de devenir des résidents engagés. Enfin, la mobilisation des jeunes entraîne une diminution de la consommation d'alcool et de marijuana ainsi que des taux de dépression.

SPO a l'intention d'accentuer ses efforts de promotion de l'engagement des jeunes dans ces domaines en vue d'améliorer ses programmes actuels et de réagir aux nouvelles priorités. Plus précisément, SPO a ciblé les éléments suivants : veiller à ce que la voix des jeunes joue un rôle central dans l'étude des problèmes de santé relatifs aux jeunes, optimiser l'utilisation des médias sociaux et des nouvelles technologies et continuer la mobilisation des jeunes en vue de faire participer les jeunes adultes jusqu'à l'âge de 24 ans à leur lieu de loisirs, de travail et d'études. SPO inscrit également ces initiatives dans le cadre du Plan d'action issu du Sommet du maire pour les jeunes, qui sera présenté au Comité des services communautaires et de protection.

BACKGROUND

Adolescence is a critical period of change and is also a period where new behaviours and habits are established and can carry over into adulthood. This period presents increased health risks as youth cope with changing bodies, increased societal expectations and progressive freedom. It is also a period of opportunity when youth begin defining themselves, through behaviours that include establishing personal health habits, creating their own social networks and working on academic and employment success. This is why Ottawa Public Health (OPH) looks to work with youth in program planning and implementation.

There are approximately 175,000, 10 to 24 year olds currently living in Ottawa.¹ The language most spoken in their households is English with 78 per cent of Ottawa families speaking it the most often at home; ten per cent speaking French most at home and 11 per cent speaking a language other than French and English.² High numbers of youth are found in both the east and west suburbs in Ottawa, with the neighbourhoods of

Orleans Avalon, Notting Gate, Fallingbrook, Gardenway South, New Barrhaven and Stonebridge having the highest number of youth.³ There are significant health issues, however, facing these communities and all youth in Ottawa.

The 2011 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey reported that 21 per cent of Ottawa students, grade 7 to 12, were classified as overweight or obese based on their self-reported height and weight. Although over a quarter of Ottawa students in grades 7 to 12 reported their mental health as excellent (28 per cent), more than a third (34 per cent) reported elevated levels of psychological distress. The survey also noted that 58 per cent of students report drinking alcohol in the past year and 17 per cent report using prescription drugs non-medically. Also, in 2012, youth aged 15 to 29 have accounted for 79 per cent of chlamydia and gonorrhoea cases in Ottawa.⁴ In 2009/2010, 30 per cent of 15- to 29-year-olds who have had sex reported that they had more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months. Furthermore, over one quarter of sexually active 15 to 19 year olds in Ottawa did not use a condom last time they had sex.⁵

Evidence shows that getting youth involved in activities that affect them leads to significant benefits. Youth who are involved and participate in extracurricular activities have higher levels of academic achievement, positive school attachment, decreased alcohol use and marijuana use, and lower rates of depression. Engaged youth are more likely to develop positive coping skills and be better equipped to adapt to changing circumstances and stresses.

Youth engagement is defined as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity...” that is characterized by stimulating and meaningful activities created from a youth perspective and that give youth a sense of connection.⁶ Youth engagement has become a health promotion approach used worldwide, and in Canada, youth engagement is an integral component of Health Canada’s Federal Tobacco Control Strategy. Additionally, in 2011, the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport’s Youth Engagement Advisory Group developed 11 Youth Engagement Principles. The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario has also published a Best Practice Guidance document on Adolescent Development that promotes youth engagement as does the Ontario Public Health Standards.

OPH has long included a youth engagement approach to health promotion programming. More recently, it has been a core component of several Board of Health’s strategic priorities: [Addressing Substance Misuse in Ottawa](#); [Update on the Head Injury Prevention Strategy](#); [OPH’s Renewed Strategy for a Smoke-Free Ottawa](#), [Mental Health Strategy for Children and Youth](#); [Future Directions for Ottawa Public Health’s Sexual Health Program](#); and [Healthy Eating, Active Living Strategy](#).

OPH refers to youth engagement as interventions that actively involve youth in the 10 to 24 years of age population. There are several success factors to youth engagement that need to be considered. For example, programming may vary significantly depending on the age of the target population. Programming works best if youth are reached where they learn, play, and work. Additionally, youth engagement is more successful when there are staff who value youth-led approaches, can access to resources such as, funds, space, food and incentives, shared responsibility for decision-making and the presence of interested and available youth. Youth engagement at OPH has three focus areas:

- Education and skill building through youth-to-youth programs
- Capacity building through development and training of youth
- Program planning that is informed by youth

1. YOUTH-TO-YOUTH HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAMMING

There is significant evidence that youth relate and engage with peers more quickly and more deeply than with adults in authority. OPH has embraced youth-to youth health promotion through youth-led, adult-guided activities. Examples include Playground Activity Leaders in Schools which trains older students in elementary schools to encourage active play and reduce bullying during recess and lunch hours on the playground.

OPH has been a leader in bringing tobacco prevention and control programming to youth. After seeing success with tobacco prevention, OPH now hires 39 university and college students every year as youth facilitators. Youth facilitators serve as OPH ambassadors and health promoters in local schools and community houses. Working with a public health nurse, youth facilitators are involved in topics ranging from mental health promotion to active transportation to substance misuse prevention.

Youth facilitators are instrumental in guiding high school health committees. These committees self identify school specific-issues and develop action plans for the school. So far, during the 2012-13 year, youth in the high schools participated in planning and implementing 73 school-wide events on various health topics reaching 6,675 students. Furthermore, over 5,200 high school youth were engaged in activities to reduce tobacco use.

2. SUPPORTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

While youth engagement has benefits for youth recipients of OPH services, there is substantial evidence that youth engagement is also beneficial to the youth who are leading and participating in the implementation of the projects. These activities provide educational and skill building opportunities for youth which strengthen their personal abilities in communication, critical thinking, organization and leadership. For example, since 2007, OPH has hosted the Active Ideas Workshop for the local school boards. The workshop encourages collaborative planning by youth, teachers and OPH staff. It engages youth to network, share ideas and obtain knowledge on physical activity and healthy eating. The outcomes of the workshop are used to plan school activities for the current school year.

In 2010, OPH began working with four Ottawa Community Houses to implement a youth-led health promotion project called the Comprehensive Youth Pilot Project (CYPP). Youth aged 12 to 18 years worked with staff to identify priority health issues in their community house and/or neighbourhood. CYPP groups were encouraged to undertake action-oriented activities on a health issue and were included in the assessment, planning, application, and evaluation of their community health project. Outcomes from CYPP included reports of empowerment at both the individual and group level. Individuals reported that they gained new leadership and interpersonal skills, and many had increased confidence to speak out. They also learned health-related information. Examples of the youth-led projects that developed from the CYPP include a basketball court that was built in the fall of 2012 at Britannia Community Housing.

OPH also participates in other learning opportunities for youth: summer student positions, Take Your Kid to Work Day, and opportunities for volunteer hours. In 2012, high school students spent over 800 hours volunteering with OPH. OPH also works closely with the health science faculties in Ottawa to support field work for future health professionals. In 2012, 348 post secondary students had a placement at OPH.

The youth facilitator approach mentioned previously has proven to be an excellent method to support youth in their skill development and aid in their employability. Many youth facilitators have gone on to succeed in fields related to their experience with OPH. In fact, many youth facilitators recruited from leadership positions on school health committees continue to advance their capabilities and then enter medicine, education, communications, health sciences and nursing. Also, many youth facilitators have chosen careers in the field of public health and several are currently employed at OPH.

Youth engagement has proven to be a strategy that builds future leaders and health professionals.

3. INFORMING PROGRAM PLANNING

Youth engagement facilitates communication. Consultations are critical to ensuring that programs and services are responding to youth needs in a way that is relevant, accessible and meaningful. OPH has used the Photovoice contest as a tool to encourage youth to highlight issues in their community that are important to them. Photovoice campaigns have provided OPH with a better understanding of how our youth view the world and what is important to them. During the 2012 PhotoVoice contest, 200 Ottawa youth participated in the project and 170 photo entries illustrated topics such as physical activity, the environment, tobacco, mental health, healthy eating, injury prevention and substance misuse.

OPH also utilizes youth engagement to inform programming through focus groups and school-based health committees that identify health priorities, inform program design and provide feedback on resources. Youth have indicated that this approach has been rewarding and has left them with a sense of accomplishment and ownership.

This approach has worked well in planning large OPH projects, such as the mental health strategy and a school-based physical activity and healthy eating program called *Live it Up...J'vis ma vie...* (LIU/JMV). Furthermore, youth in high school committees provide fresh new ideas. For example, OPH's mental health display, Stress Busters, was an idea that was first introduced by a youth committee in LIU/JMV. Youth also played an advisory role in both the *Sex It Smart* and the *Get Tested Why, Why Not?* sexual health campaigns. Both campaigns had youth advisory groups aiding with the design of health promotion resources and materials and helped develop the web content and logos for the campaigns.

OPH has engaged youth in the development of youth friendly products such as the resources used for the "Adopt a Helmet" campaign, which was developed as part of the City's Brain Injury Prevention initiative. Youth were involved in the needs assessment, design and promotion of the project through multiple channels, including social media. Subsequently, this campaign has won a national award from the Brain Injury Association for its creativity in reaching young people. Youth have also contributed to the design of health promotion resources such as the graphics for *Sex It Smart* and the Healthy Eating, Active Living strategy. Ottawa youth artwork for tobacco prevention has been used extensively for mass media campaigns.

DISCUSSION

Youth engagement is one of the most valuable strategies OPH has to address health issues in youth and promote optimal growth and development. It complements other interventions and activities for parents, health providers and educators. Ottawa is fortunate to have many youth-serving agencies that also embrace youth engagement and support OPH's activities. The four Ottawa school boards, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Youth Services Bureau, the Ottawa Police Service and the community health and resource centres are examples of the partners that OPH works with on youth programming.

Collaboration with partners affords OPH an opportunity to connect with existing youth advisory committees and other youth groups within the city. Increased consultation with youth groups and members of diverse sub-populations will ensure OPH hears the voices of youth, plans programming that is relevant and meaningful, and responds to what youth identify as priorities.

The City of Ottawa is also committed to a youth engagement approach and OPH is working actively with other municipal departments on the Youth Summit Action Plan. Details will be discussed in a report to Council's Community and Protective Services Committee, which will describe how issues identified at the Mayor's Youth Summit last fall will be addressed, including the need for more services on mental health, cyber bullying, sexual health, general health information, and for increased use of social media. OPH has aligned its next steps to integrate with other departments in the Youth Summit Action Plan and has embraced the directions voiced by youth.

For example, feedback from previous evaluations, the Mayor's Summit and OPH's own consultations with youth, recognizes the value of addressing technical and financial barriers in developing programming. This includes access to resources, such as space, food and incentives. It is consistent with the success factors OPH has seen in administering school-based grants and funding community-based programs. OPH will work with youth to address some of these barriers. The intention is to empower and enable youth to design initiatives to address their health issues in a way that is desirable and effective for youth. OPH will aim to include youth from across Ottawa, including those in rural locations low-income youth, street-involved youth, newcomers, Aboriginal, Francophone and GLBTTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer and Questioning) youth.

Another area for expansion is to move the youth engagement approach beyond high schools to post-secondary campuses. There are significant issues with alcohol and tobacco misuse in youth at post secondary institutions and other community settings. Efforts to reduce tobacco use have expanded to all four post-secondary campuses in

Ottawa and also to local construction sites. In 2012, the successful Get worn t-shirt design contest targeting the tobacco industry on campuses received over 20 submissions and engaged 3,000 post-secondary students through the Facebook voting process. Currently, a new coalition of youth and service providers called Safer Ottawa Drinking Alliance is looking to reduce alcohol misuse on post-secondary campuses.

OPH will also optimize social media to share information and expand reach to youth in the City. Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and Memes offer education and information sharing, and can be used to engage different sub-populations. For example, OPH is building on the success of *Get Tested* campaign that provided downloadable laboratory requisitions for testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI) with the newly launched sexitsmart.ca website, a mobile device friendly site featuring an Ottawa condom finder, STI prevention messaging and information on proper condom use. Youth appreciate the instant access that social media provides. Increased use of social media was also a suggestion from youth who attended the Mayor's Youth Summit, where participants shared ideas and discussed their experience in real time during the day. OPH will continue to integrate social media and technology in interventions for youth by youth.

Although OPH has a proud tradition of youth engagement, emerging health issues, changing demographics and new technologies will continue to provide both challenges and opportunities. OPH remains committed to creating opportunities for youth to have a voice and to supporting youth in designing and implementing health promotion interventions. OPH will also continue to build youth-friendly environments to reduce the burden of disease and injury, and to help youth in Ottawa achieve their optimal potential.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

Collaborating with community developers from Nepean, Rideau, & Osgoode Community Resource Centre; Orleans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre; Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre and Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre to incorporate rural youth's input into our programming. OPH has also identified specific activities to enhance service delivery to rural youth as part of the Youth Summit Action Plan.

CONSULTATION

OPH has been in consultation with staff coordinating the Youth Summit Action Plan in order to align services and programs. Over 180 youth participated in the Mayor's Youth Summit on October 12, 2012.

In March 2013, OPH conducted focus groups with 50 youth from various backgrounds, linguistic communities and geographical locations to identify strategies that will reach youth. Youth from Britannia Woods Community House, Youth Net, Osgoode Youth Association, and Ottawa Police Youth Action Committee participated in the focus groups. Some of the strategies youth identified included developing a youth version of the “Ottawa logo,” having a link of credible health sites on their school websites, using sporting events to reach youth and having guest speakers who can share real life stories. In addition, youth identified the importance of involving youth in program planning and reducing barriers to implementing projects. Motivators such as food, prizes and volunteer hours would encourage youth to get involved. In terms of barriers to being engaged, transportation is the biggest barrier for rural youth. Other youth identified lack of motivators, not knowing what is available, and an environment that is not welcoming for youth as barriers. A summary is provided in Document 1. Input from youth will determine how OPH develops future youth programs and campaigns.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the report recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technological implications related to this report.

BOARD OF HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support Strategic Priorities set by the Board of Health (2011-2014) to increase community participation and engagement, advance mental health promotion services for children and youth and leverage technology to extend our services and make better connections with our citizens.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support the 2010-2014 Term of Council Priorities under Healthy and Caring Communities.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

[Document 1](#) - Youth Focus Group Consultations

DISPOSITION

That Ottawa Public Health work with the Youth Summit Action Plan Committee to establish new youth programming.

REFERENCES

¹ Population Projections 2013, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, IntelliHEALTH Ontario, Date Extracted: April 11, 2013

² Statistics Canada. 2012. Census Profile. 2011 Census.

³ The Ottawa Neighbourhood Study. Available from: <http://neighbourhoodstudy.ca>

⁴ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, integrated Public Health Information System, extracted by Ottawa Public Health April 18, 2013.

⁵ Canadian Community Health Survey 2009/2010, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

⁶ Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being: (2012). [What is youth engagement?](http://www.tgmag.ca/aorg/pdf/Whatis_WEB_e.pdf)
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