



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy Living Division

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 18, 2014
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Good 2 Go Food Box Pilot Project Evaluation - BOH13039(a) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Ellen Pezzetta (905) 546-2424, Ext. 3536 Mary Ellen Prange (905) 546-2424, Ext. 3484
SUBMITTED BY: SIGNATURE:	Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC Medical Officer of Health Public Health Services Department

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Good 2 Go Food Box Pilot Project be terminated;
- (b) That the remaining funds for the Good 2 Go Food Box pilot project be reallocated to monthly purchasing of fresh vegetables and fruit by Hamilton Food Share for distribution to food banks until March 2015;
- (c) That a one-time 15-month extension to July 2016, under the title Healthy Food Supplement Pilot Program in the amount of \$83,000 (\$5,000/month for food x 15 months + \$8,000 for administration) for the provision of fresh vegetables and fruit to food banks via Hamilton Food Share, be referred to the 2015 budget process;
- (d) That any future requests for funding of food assistance projects be referred to the Interdepartmental Food Strategy Steering Team for review and recommendations to ensure alignment with Hamilton's Food Strategy. The Strategy is targeted for completion by March 2016;
- (e) That item "B" respecting the Good 2 Go Food Box Program (formerly known as the Easy Food Box Program) be removed from the PHS Outstanding Business List.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012, the Board of Health approved a one-year pilot project, the Good 2 Go Food Box Program (G2GFB) to distribute fresh vegetables and fruit to single Ontario Works (OW) recipients. The initiative was developed and delivered as a partnership between City of Hamilton's Public Health Services (PHS) and Community & Emergency Services (CES) departments and Environment Hamilton (EH) in an attempt to address the significant income shortfall experienced by this population. Annual Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) reports have illustrated a shortfall in income compared to the cost of rent and food for single OW recipients ranging from \$12/month in the year 2000 to a high of \$144/month in 2012.

Evaluation was one of the requirements of the project to help inform future strategic directions. Despite implementing revised processes to improve pick up rates, overall reach of the program continued to not meet the original intended results and more than half of the G2GFBs were redistributed via food banks. In addition, a significantly higher than anticipated amount of staff resources was required to assist with administration and operations throughout the project period. It is for these reasons that PHS recommends the termination of the G2GFB Pilot Project. Furthermore, the service provider, EH does not wish to further extend the contract for the G2GFB.

Staff have explored the feasibility of alternative distribution sites, such as food banks, with Food Share to utilize the remaining unspent funds and to implement a bridging fresh vegetable and fruit program, until the release of the comprehensive Food Strategy. Distribution via food banks would require less additional administrative systems and reach an audience that is accessing services at those sites already. In July 2014, 1,400 single OW households used food banks. Seventy percent of G2GFB Pilot Project recipients who were surveyed in March 2014 identified that they would access the G2GFB at a food bank.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 10

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (for recommendation(s) only)

Financial: By re-allocating unspent funds from the G2GFB Pilot Project, there is no financial impact of the fresh vegetable and fruit supplement program through March 2015.

A total of \$83,000 is required to extend the fresh vegetable and fruit supplement program from April 2015 to July 2016.

Staffing: The remainder of the budget will be administered by Gillian Hendry, Director of Housing Services Division, who administers the Social Services Reserve Fund.

Oversight of the fresh vegetable and fruit supplement program through food banks will be provided primarily by a Public Health Dietitian with support from a Manager in PHS,

Healthy Living Division. It is estimated that 0.4 FTE of the Public Health Dietitian's time will be required for data collection, report writing and consultation with Food Share and food banks to address areas of continuous improvement.

Legal: A service agreement between the City and Hamilton Food Share will be required.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Chronology of events)

Annual NFB BOH reports have highlighted the challenges that low income individuals and families have in meeting basic food, shelter, transportation and personal care needs. Single OW recipients have continued to demonstrate the most significant shortfall among all groups, ranging from \$12/month in the year 2000 to a high of \$144/month in 2012. Lack of adequate income to purchase sufficient nutritious food predisposes them to obesity and chronic disease.

In 2011, in response to BOH and Council's earlier direction, staff explored the feasibility of implementing a model program for nutritious food access for single OW recipients. A one-year pilot farmers' market gift certificate program for single OW recipients was recommended but not endorsed. The main concern expressed by the BOH was inconsistent geographic and seasonal access to farmers' markets across the City.

On October 15, 2012, Nutritious Food Basket report (BOH12025) continued to highlight the significant shortfall in funds to purchase healthy food for low-income Hamiltonians, in particular single people receiving OW benefits. Delegations urged the BOH to consider a one-year pilot Good Food Box program for single OW recipients. The BOH approved the following:

- “(a) That the Easy Food Box one year pilot project, to provide fresh food to 500 single Ontario Works recipients be supported and funded to an amount of \$65,000 to cover the pilot project, administrative costs, public education pamphlet, evaluation, and be funded as follows:
 - (i) \$55,000 from the Social Services Initiatives Reserve, and;
 - (ii) \$10,000 from the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable;
- (b) That the pilot project evaluation be conducted by Public Health Services;
- (c) That the pilot project be carried out through Environment Hamilton and Environment Hamilton be authorized to report back;
- (d) That the City assist in investigating whether the Easy Food Box project can be assisted through the use of City arenas, facilities and through local Food Banks.”

Implementation of the Good 2 Go Food Box Pilot Project began in March 2013. A status update on the first six months of the pilot was presented in a report to the BOH on October 21, 2013, Progress Update on Good 2 Go Food Box Pilot Project

(BOH13039). In response to the main challenges of low pick-up rates by participants and redistribution of unclaimed boxes, a Motion was carried, “that staff engage in dialogue with Hamilton Food Share in conjunction with Environment Hamilton and other stakeholders to improve the distribution of the Good 2 Go Food Box pilot project and bridge any gaps that exist.”

CES over-enrolled participants for the remainder of the one-year pilot from November 2013 to February 2014 in an effort to improve pick up rates. Although the average number of individuals who picked up boxes increased, the numbers never reached the incremental targets set out in the initial contract, leaving unspent funds at the end of the G2GFB pilot.

At the February 12, 2014 Council Meeting, the following motion was carried to extend the G2GFB pilot:

- “(a) That the Good to Go Food Box one year pilot project, to provide fresh food to 500 single Ontario Works recipients, be continued until August 2014 and/or until the allocated budget for the pilot is exhausted;
- (b) That the unspent allocated funding for this project from the Social Services Initiatives Reserve and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction be utilized to continue funding until August 2014 or until the budget is exhausted;
- (c) That Environment Hamilton continue to supply and deliver the Good to Go Food Boxes for the duration of this pilot;
- (d) That Public Health Services staff be directed to present the evaluation to the Board of Health in August 2014 based on the one year pilot period from March 2013 to the end of the pilot project.”

A G2GFB phone line was set up to implement a self-registration enrollment model for the duration of this pilot extension from March to August 2014. Although monthly pick up rates increased by an average of 32%, the actual number of individuals who received the G2GFB monthly did not increase.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Not applicable

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

EH has confirmed they do not wish to pursue future contracts with the City to pack and deliver G2GFB for single OW clients.

CES, Employment and Income Support Division, and Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) agree with reallocation of unspent G2GFB pilot project funds to

purchase fresh vegetables and fruit by Hamilton Food Share for distribution via food banks.

Hamilton Food Share has confirmed their ability and willingness to procure and distribute fresh vegetables and fruit via their member agencies operating food banks. This can be done through existing procedures with little added administration. Food banks are already distributing some fresh vegetables and fruit and have the ability to expand. Currently, Food Share supplies food to 11 food banks. In July 2014, there were approximately 1,400 single OW households among 4,400 total monthly households that used food banks. Fresh produce would be made available monthly to all food bank users at those sites during the latter half of each month. Although not specifically targeting single OW recipients, this has been identified as the time when OW recipients typically use a food bank.

The Nutritious Food Plan Committee supports the continuation of a fresh fruit and vegetable supplement program for single OW recipients only, to be delivered by food banks.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Food Box Programs (FBP) and Reach among Priority Populations

FBPs were originally developed in the mid 1990's to support increased access to fresh vegetables and fruit among priority populations. The concept has spread across Canada and currently there are over 90 such programs operating in Canada and at least 37 in Ontario. A provincial environmental scan¹ completed in 2011 revealed that:

- The majority of programs are promoted to the general population. Close to 40% are promoted specifically to individuals and families on lower incomes, and people with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes.
- No programs specifically target single OW recipients, although two target strictly individuals and families living on low incomes.
- A considerable level of support is provided by volunteers in addition to the administrative support provided by sponsoring organizations.
- Almost all FBPs involve participants paying for the food box; programs providing low-income individuals and families with reduced cost or no-cost food boxes are able to do this through private (from individuals), charitable or faith group donations and/or subsidies available through grant funding or from municipal funding.

A more recent scan of programs by Hamilton PHS revealed that one FBP, Halton Fresh Food Box (HFFB), includes a component specifically targeting OW recipients. HFFB has

¹ Environmental Scan Report: The Future of the Good Food Box Project. Community Voices Consulting, March 2011. Accessible at: <http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/the-future-of-the-good-food-box-program>.

also implemented a variety of strategies to address challenges with low pick up rates, particularly for populations who receive a subsidy for the program.

Results of G2GFB Pilot Project Evaluation

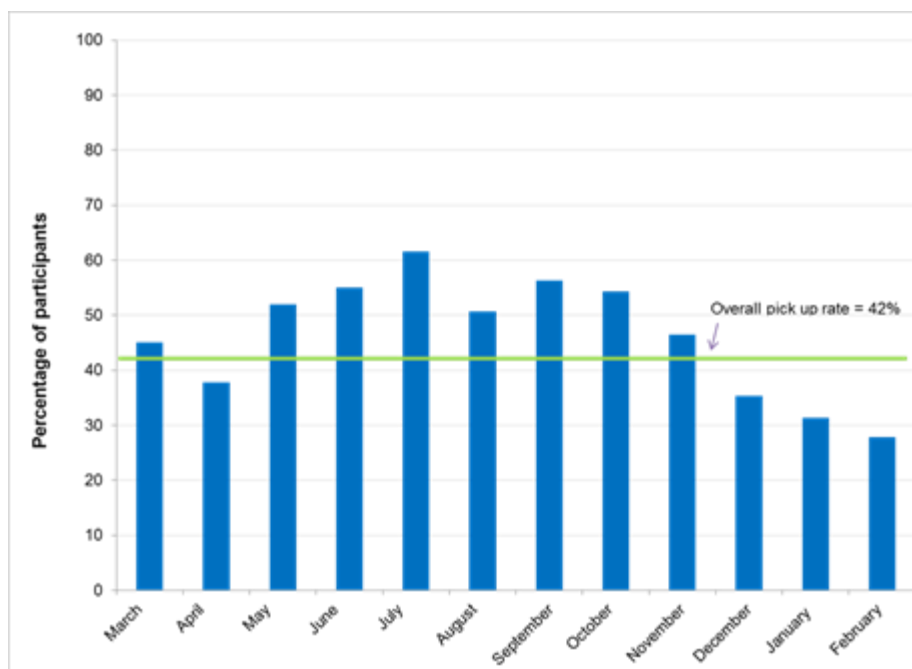
(i) Program Reach – 12-month pilot

- At peak operation, the G2GFB program was intended to reach 600 single OW recipients, approximately 10% of all single OW recipients. The pilot was never able to achieve this. The average monthly enrollment during the 12-month pilot was 243 participants (about 3% of eligible population of 7000), with a range of 98 to 496.
- The number of participants who actually picked up the G2GFB ranged between 37 and 153, averaging 102 per month. Appendix A provides complete statistics on enrollment and pick-up rates for the 12 months of the pilot program.
- A total of 1003 individuals enrolled in the program over the course of the 12-month pilot. The table below indicates the number of times these individuals enrolled in the program. Fifteen percent enrolled six or more months of the 12-month pilot program.

Total Individuals Enrolled	Enrolled once	Enrolled 2-5 times	Enrolled 6-12 times
1003	434 (43%)	421 (42%)	148 (15%)

- As shown in Figure 1, the overall average pick-up rate was 42%, ranging from a high of 62% in July 2013 to a low of 29% in February 2014.

Figure 1: Percent of participants who picked up their G2GFB, March 2013 - February 2014



(ii) Program Reach - Extension of the Pilot

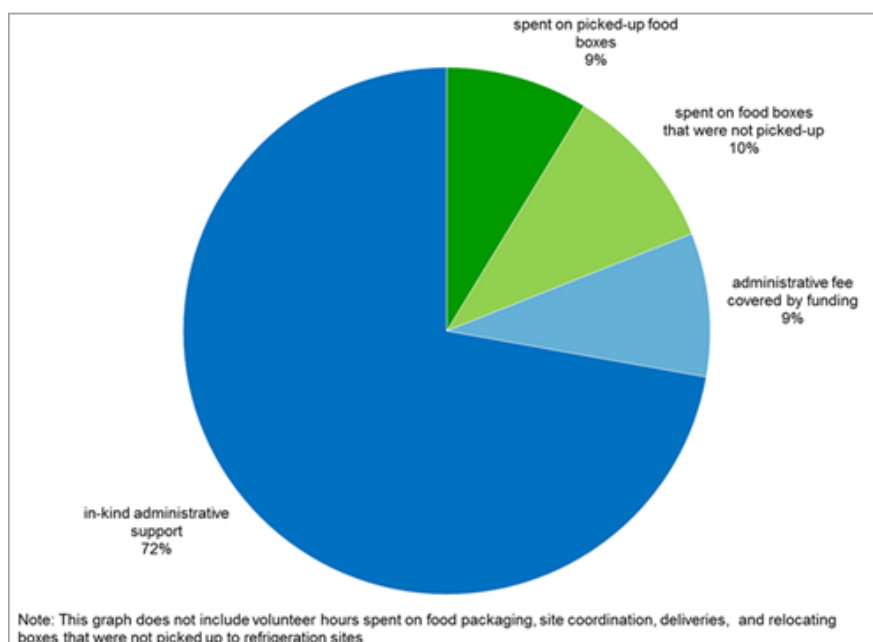
- A revised enrollment procedure was implemented for the extension period (March – July 2014). Although this extension was not formally part of the evaluation, some statistics were collected and are summarized in Appendix B. Participants self-registered by calling into a designated G2GFB phone line administered by an OW Case Manager, who was reassigned from regular duties to coordinate this (5-7 hours per week).
- The average monthly enrollment during the five month extension period was 160 participants (about 2% of eligible population of 7,000), with a range of 110 to 215 participants a month.
- The number of participants who actually picked up the G2GFB ranged between 73 and 155, averaging 103 per month during the extended pilot. Appendix B provides complete statistics on enrollment and pick-up rates for the five month extension of the pilot program.
- A total of 508 individuals enrolled. As shown in the table below, 362 or 71% enrolled once.

<u>Total Individuals Enrolled</u>	<u>Enrolled once</u>	<u>Enrolled 2-3 times</u>	<u>Enrolled 4-5 times</u>
508	362 (71%)	103 (20%)	43 (9%)

(iii) Administration

- The costs to administer the G2GFB Pilot Project were much greater than anticipated by all parties involved. Figure 2 illustrates the results of a cost analysis conducted as part of the pilot evaluation.
- The cost for administration of the program was four times the cost of the food purchased. A breakdown of the actual costs is provided in Appendix C.

Figure 2: Percent of total cost (in-kind resources and funding) spent on administration and food boxes, overall, March 2013 - February 2014



As discussed in the G2GFB progress update report (BOH13039) presented in October 2013, EH experienced challenges with providing \$10.00 of food (wholesale cost) within the \$5,000 annual administration fee as specified in the service agreement. Beginning in December 2014, the City was invoiced an additional \$1.50 per G2GFB and a one-time extra administration charge of \$380 was paid to cover insurance and other program costs.

iv) Participant Feedback

Participant feedback was obtained via a telephone survey and written responses to questions at time of pick up.. Below are highlights of the results.

- The majority of participants walked to the pick up sites, others took the bus or got a ride.
- The change reported most often by those who picked up a G2GFB, was that it helped them to eat more vegetables and fruit. Data collected for the pilot evaluation showed that, on average, the G2GFB supplied 46 Food Guide Servings of vegetables and fruit, or about 5 to 6 days' worth of vegetables and fruit, according to Canada's Food Guide. The majority of program participants reported that they purchased vegetables and fruit less than once per week.
- Less than half of participants picking up a G2GFB indicated that their ability to prepare fresh vegetables and fruit was good while a significant proportion indicated that their ability was poor. Some food banks offer program that could help participants improve their ability.
- Respondents were also asked about willingness to use a food bank to pick up the G2GFB. Seventy percent of recipients who were surveyed said they would.
- The most common reasons given by participants for not picking up their G2GFB were: they forgot, limited pick-up hours, health issues and not having correct pick up information.

Actions to Move Forward

(i) Termination of the G2GFB Pilot

Based on results of the evaluation of the G2GFB Pilot Project, PHS recommends no further extension of the G2GFB Pilot Project based on the low rate of participation and high administrative cost of operating the program.

(ii) Direct the remaining funds from G2GFB Pilot Project to purchase fresh vegetables and fruit for distribution via food banks

A fresh vegetable and fruit supplement program is recommended as a more efficient method for increasing access to healthy food to those who are most vulnerable. Hamilton Food Share is willing to partner on this. The existing infrastructure would require little added administration to provide a fresh vegetable and fruit supplement to those accessing food from food banks. Based on Hunger Report statistics compiled by Hamilton Food Share for July 2014, 1,359 single person households (representing approximately 19% of 7,131 OW singles caseload in July 2014) indicated OW as their primary source of income. If even one-quarter of single OW recipients are able to access the fresh vegetable and fruit supplement via a food bank, this will be more than

double the highest number of G2GFB picked up during the Pilot Project (155), making the case for food banks as distribution sites.

(iii) One-time 15-month extension to July 2016 for the provision of fresh vegetables and fruit to food banks via Hamilton Food Share

Continuing the fresh fruit and vegetable supplement program to July 2016 is recommended until Hamilton's Food Strategy is in place. In order to accomplish this, a capital budget request has been submitted.

The annual NFB survey was conducted in May 2014; the results are provided in Appendix D. Compared to 2013, the cost of the NFB increased by \$16 per month for women and \$24 per month for men. Despite a monthly \$20.00 rate increase for single OW recipients in October 2013, this group still experiences a significant shortfall income to cover basic costs of shelter and food. This extension would continue to offer vegetable and fruit access to single OW recipients, as well as be open to other populations accessing food banks.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

(Include Financial, Staffing, Legal and Policy Implications and Pros and Cons for each alternative)

Option 1: Return outstanding funds to Social Services Initiative Reserve Fund. Funding in the amount of \$18,000 that was allocated to assist single OW clients to receive the G2GFB would be lost and no alternative would be available. This option has no staffing, legal or policy implications.

Option 2: Purchase grocery store gift cards for distribution to G2GFB participants to expend the outstanding funds from the G2GFB pilot. This would allow participants to decide which food to buy and where to buy it, but there would be no way to track whether cards were used, what they were used to buy, or if they were used by those who received them. Grocery store gift cards would need to be purchased up front and funds would be lost for unredeemed cards. It would also be a challenge to identify which participants would be eligible to receive the gift cards.

Financial: There would be no financial impact since the remaining funds could be used to purchase up to 1800 ten dollar grocery gift cards which could be distributed over a six-month period to 300 participants per month.

Staffing: OW would need to provide administrative support of up to one day per month to distribute grocery gift cards.

Legal: No legal implications

Policy: No policy implications

Option 3: Direct the remaining funds from G2GFB Pilot Project to purchase fresh vegetables and fruit for distribution by food banks specifically to single OW recipients as opposed to the recommended program where the program is open to all food bank clients. While some food bank operators have indicated they could introduce changes to accommodate targeting the program, others have stated that providing a vegetable and fruit supplement to only single OW recipients goes against their philosophy of providing food assistance to anyone who qualifies and providing more to one specific group would not be equitable. With this option, PHS will need to identify food banks willing and able to accommodate changes to their programming and/or distribution processes. This will create additional work for food banks to accommodate a new program or changes to existing programs.

Financial: There would be no financial impact for the first six months. Funds remaining from the G2GFB pilot project could be directed to the purchase of fresh vegetables and fruit by Food Share for approximately six additional months. An additional \$83,000 is being requested for bridge funding for this option until July 2016 when the Food Strategy is released.

Staffing: Oversight of the fresh vegetable and fruit supplement program would be provided primarily by a Public Health Dietitian with support from a Manager in PHS, Healthy Living Division. It is estimated that 0.8 FTE of the Public Health Dietitian's time would be required for consultation with Food Share, determining which food banks will participate and working with them on logistics, collecting data and report writing. This does not include the additional staffing/volunteer at food banks to create a separate distribution process targeting single OW recipients only.

Legal: A service agreement between the City and Hamilton Food Share would be required.

Policy: No policy implications

Option 4: Extend G2GFB program using the funds remaining from the G2GFB pilot. While the infrastructure to extend the program is in place, EH does not wish to continue as the service provider. Another vendor would need to be selected, presumably through an RFP process. While the G2GFB directs where fresh vegetables and fruit are provided to attempt to reach a specific population, the results of the pilot evaluation showed there are challenges with accessibility for the clients and considerable administration and staff time required to operate the program.

Financial: There would be no financial impact since the remaining \$18,000 could be used to continue the G2GFB program for approximately six additional months.

Staffing: OW would need to provide coordination to the program at a staffing level of approximately 0.2 FTE of a Case Manager.

Legal: A service agreement between the City and a new vendor will be required.

Policy: No policy implications

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #1

A Prosperous & Healthy Community

WE enhance our image, economy and well-being by demonstrating that Hamilton is a great place to live, work, play and learn.

Strategic Objective

- 1.5 Support the development and implementation of neighbourhood and City wide strategies that will improve the health and well-being of residents.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report BOH13039(a) – Enrollment and pick-up rate of G2GFB in 12-month pilot (March 2013 - February 2014)

Appendix B to Report BOH13039(a) – Monthly enrollment and pick-up rate of the G2GFB in pilot extension (March - July 2014)

Appendix C to Report BOH13039(a) – Overall G2GFB Pilot Program Costs, March 2013 – February 2015

Appendix D to Report BOH13039(a) – How Much Does Healthy Eating Cost in 2014?