



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Epidemiology and Wellness Division

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
COMMITTEE DATE:	February 13, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Substance Use and Addiction Program Funding – Harm Reduction Outreach Project 2022-2025 (BOH23006) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Susan Boyd (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2888
SUBMITTED BY:	Julie Prieto Director, Epidemiology and Wellness Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Health authorize and direct the Medical Officer of Health to:

- (i) Receive, utilize and report on funding from Health Canada’s Substance Use and Addictions Program to fund a collaborative Harm Reduction Outreach Project between Public Health Services’ Mental Health and Street Outreach Program and The AIDS Network;
- (ii) Enter into an agreement between the City of Hamilton, Public Health Services, and Health Canada to receive the funding for the Harm Reduction Outreach Project, satisfactory in form to the City Solicitor; and,
- (iii) Enter into a collaborative agreement with The AIDS Network to provide Harm Reduction Outreach staff to implement services in the Harm Reduction Outreach Project, satisfactory in form to the City Solicitor.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Health Services’ Mental Health and Street Outreach Program provides outreach services to individuals experiencing homelessness, and individuals often also experience addiction and/or mental health issues. The team receives requests to provide assertive outreach to areas in the community where individuals using substances are staying or spending time. Assertive outreach involves outreach staff approaching individuals on the street with the aim of engaging with individuals to offer

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instrumental supports such as hygiene supplies, heat and cold supplies, harm reduction supplies, and connections to other services as needed.

To effectively meet the above needs it was identified that additional staffing positions were required. A proposal was submitted in 2021 to Health Canada for a Harm Reduction Outreach Project. The initial proposal in 2021 was not approved, however an opportunity to reapply became available in September 2022. In December 2022 notification from Health Canada was received that the project was successful for full funding until March 31, 2025.

The project will involve two new full-time Harm Reduction Outreach Worker roles and one new part-time Peer Outreach Worker role to work with the Mental Health and Street Outreach Program providing specific harm reduction outreach services to individuals who use drugs and are experiencing economic insecurity, issues related to housing/homelessness, and lack of connection to health and social services.

This report is to seek approval to receive the funds and enter into the appropriate agreements to be able to move forward with implementing the Harm Reduction Outreach Project.

Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: The Health Canada Substance Use and Addiction Program funding will flow to the City of Hamilton Public Health Services and fully cover the project costs. The funding is for three years, with a pro-rated first year 2022-2023, and will end March 31, 2025. Public Health Services will utilize the funding to reimburse salary and benefits of The AIDS Network staff to provide the services within the project.

Staffing: 2.0 FTE Harm Reduction Outreach Staff and one part-time Peer Outreach Staff will join the Mental Health and Street Outreach Program to provide specific harm reduction outreach services. The staffing will be provided by The AIDS Network.

Legal: A contribution agreement will need to be signed between the City of Hamilton, Public Health Services, and Health Canada to receive the funds, announce the project, and report on outcomes for the project. A collaborative agreement will be negotiated between Public Health Services and The AIDS Network for staffing services.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Public Health Services' Mental Health and Street Outreach Program has seen an increase in individuals being referred who have substance use concerns and are not engaging with site based services which is leading to an increased need to bring services to where individuals are in the community.

Individuals within the City of Hamilton continue to be significantly impacted by the ongoing opioid crisis compounded by a high concentration of urban poverty and local health inequities. Currently many individuals using drugs are experiencing economic insecurity, issues related to housing/homelessness, and lack of connection to health and social services.

The Mental Health and Street Outreach Program has been working to increase the capacity of harm reduction services. An Alcohol, Drug & Gambling Services social work staff provides addiction consultation and the Mental Health and Street Outreach Program Outreach staff have been joining the VAN program, with the Public Health Mental Health and Harm Reduction program, for one shift a week. These have been helpful however cannot meet the needs of individuals being referred and the need for consistent outreach services.

A call for proposals from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addiction Program came in 2021 and appeared to align with the priorities of the funding and the needs of the population serviced by the Mental Health and Street Outreach Program. The AIDS Network was approached due to their experience in providing harm reduction services and peer work to be a partner in the proposal. The initial proposal was not approved, however, with an opportunity in September 2022 to resubmit the proposal the Harm Reduction Outreach Project was approved by Health Canada.

In collaboration with The AIDS Network the Substance Use and Addiction Project will add two Harm Reduction Outreach Workers and one Peer Support Worker to meet the increasing need for services. Harm reduction outreach services, focusing on needs related to substance related harms, will include: connecting with clients; provision of safe supplies; providing information on how to access safe supplies and Consumption Treatment Services in the community; providing information on safer use; and, providing practical support, supportive counselling, education, crisis management, and referrals to other services. The project will also conduct assertive outreach at various locations in the City of Hamilton in a partner model to improve capacity building.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Not Applicable.

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RELEVANT CONSULTATION

In developing the proposal, The AIDS Network was consulted as a project partner. Finance and Administration reviewed the budget submitted in the proposal.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Mental Health Outreach Program has a longstanding history of providing specialized services to individuals experiencing homelessness, income insecurity and who also experience issues with substance use and mental health. The City of Hamilton continues to be challenged by the ongoing opioid crisis compounded by a high concentration of urban poverty and local health inequities.

This Health Canada Substance Use and Addiction Program project would offer a new opportunity to reach individuals through a mobile service that would specifically offer harm reduction outreach services. Outreach has been identified as a promising evidence-based strategy to engage, collaboratively build motivation, retain people in treatment ^{1,2} and increase engagement with social services.³

The AIDS Network has experience in providing harm reduction services and has been a longstanding partner with Public Health Services and the Mental Health and Harm Reduction Program. This new partnership with Mental Health and Street Outreach Program will lead to increased capacity in the area of harm reduction, build on existing services and will take a person directed, harm reduction approach with individuals at the centre of their care.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Not Applicable.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive City where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

¹ Langabeer J et al, Outreach to people who survive opioid overdose: Linkage and retention in treatment, Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment Volume 111 2020.

² Christy K. et al, A community outreach intervention to link individuals with opioid use disorders to medication-assisted treatment, Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment Volume 108 2020.

³ Scott W. et al, Post opioid overdose outreach by public health and public safety agencies: Exploration of emerging programs in Massachusetts International Journal of Drug Policy Volume 54 2018.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.