

## **Adequate Provincial Funding for Public Health Programs and Services**

### **Statement**

The Government of Ontario must ensure that all boards of health receive adequate provincial funding such that all boards of health are able to fully deliver the *Mandatory Health and Programs and Services Guidelines* as well as additional programs and services deemed necessary by local boards of health.

### **Background**

The objectives of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)* are to provide for the organization and delivery of public health programs and services, the prevention of the spread of disease, and the protection and promotion of the health of the people of Ontario. The boards of health are to provide or ensure the provision of mandatory health programs and services in accordance with guidelines published by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care may provide grants to boards of health for the purposes of the HPPA to ensure that boards of health are able to fully comply. Recommendation 2 of the Report of the Walkerton Inquiry, Part 1 states, in part, that the Public Health Branch or the Minister's delegate should assess whether resourcing allocations by the Province of Ontario require adjustment to ensure full compliance with the *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines*.

### **Implications**

The HPPA requires obligated municipalities to pay for all the expenses of their respective boards of health and medical officers of health in accordance with the written notice that boards of health are required to submit to its municipality(ies). Those health units that are most in need of public health programs and services often include those municipalities that have the least ability to pay for those services. The Province, however, has a greater ability to pay for public health programs than do municipalities given its wider stream of revenue sources. Therefore, it would make sense for the provincial government to bear more of the costs of funding public health.

Recent developments including the Walkerton Inquiry; new drinking water regulations; the emergence of West Nile virus; bioterrorism threats; new and/or expanded provincial initiatives such as the influenza vaccination program, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, the Early Years program; local public health issues such as local tobacco by-law development, and teenage pregnancy prevention, etc. have resulted in increased requirements and demands being placed on boards of health. Yet, boards of health currently lack the resources – both financial and human – to effectively address these recent developments. Due to underfunding, boards have had to use

funds allocated to other programs, which already do not meet compliance, toward these new developments.

This difficulty in obtaining resources is clearly reflected in the 2000 Mandatory Programs Indicator Questionnaire Results that established no board of health is fully compliant with the *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines*.

The Government of Ontario needs to recognize and affirm that an unwillingness to adequately fund public health programs and services results in further erosion of these essential programs and services. This erosion adversely affects the health of all Ontarians and leads to many preventable hospitalizations and deaths which result in substantial additional costs to the health care system and the overall economy.