



June 3, 2010

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier
Legislative Building, Rm 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty,

On behalf of the Board of Health, Peterborough County-City Health Unit, I am writing to express concern regarding insufficient funding of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC) program and, as a consequence, an adverse impact on service delivery. We urge you to maintain this as a 100 percent provincially-funded program; and grant a sufficient increase to the annual budget, according to size of the annual cohort, to keep pace with demands from client families, partner agencies, and the community, and on the Health Unit itself as an employer.

HBHC is a prevention and early intervention program designed to help pregnant women and families with children from birth to six years of age. It is delivered by Public Health Nurses and Family Home Visitors (providing peer support) through telephone consultation and home visiting. The program gives families in Ontario the information and support they need to give their children a healthy start in life; and also to provide more intensive services and supports for families with children who may not reach their full potential due to identified risk factors. From a health, education, and economic standpoint - is there no better investment in our future?

Introduced in 1998 by the Government of Ontario, HBHC is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS); mandated under the Ontario Public Health Standards of the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care; and managed and coordinated by local Boards of Health (Public Health Unit or Health Department depending on the community). The 2010 budget allocation of \$828,413 from MCYS for Peterborough's program, represented a zero percent increase from 2009, coupled with a less than one percent (approximately \$8,000) increase to 2008's base budget. Each HBHC program must set projected achievements based on performance targets established by MCYS. However, inadequate funding has diminished the capacity of our Health Unit to achieve these targets and to provide necessary services. Measures taken to date have included the discontinuation of weekend telephone assessment and support services to new parents; a waitlist for families in high risk situations (e.g., families

experiencing: inadequate coping skills, parenting concerns, mental health issues, social isolation, limited formal education, unemployment, no or limited finances, inadequate housing, substance abuse, intimate partner violence, physical health challenges); gapping of public health nurse positions, with a resultant increase in workload, stress, and personal safety concerns; and increased pressure on limited community services such as breastfeeding support, prenatal education and support for pregnant teens, and support for perinatal mood disorders.

HBHC has established itself as a valuable program in the community and has worked hard to build relationships with the Children's Aid Society, Ontario Early Years Centre, local hospital, Family Health Teams, addictions and mental health agencies, housing and social services agencies, and adult education and pre-employment agencies. However, with diminished resources, one is only to be reminded of the 2001 Coroner's Report regarding the death of infant Jordan Heikamp as evidence of a system breakdown. In the recommendations, HBHC was identified in playing a role to ensure the provision of health education; routine health assessments, and feeding and care of baby; and effective linkages and referrals with other medical professionals.

Therefore, our Board of Health urges MCYS to fund the actual costs associated with delivering HBHC, in order to achieve HBHC's goals and objectives, and to set the foundation for our future.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Jim Embrey
Chair, Board of Health
for the Peterborough County-City Health Unit

- c. The Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services
The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Jeff Leal, MPP, Peterborough
Andrea Horwath, MPP, Critic, Children and Youth Services
Sylvia Jones, MPP, Critic, Children and Youth Services
Ontario Boards of Health