

For Information

DATE: March 14, 2011

REPORT TITLE: **PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE**
 FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services
 Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
 David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health
OBJECTIVE

To update Regional Council on the 2010 Annual Report of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2009, the Province of Ontario created a poverty reduction strategy that commits to reducing child poverty by 25 per cent in five years and annual reporting on progress.
- The provincial report card uses eight indicators to measure progress; these eight provincial indicators, as well as several local proxy indicators, were used to measure trends and progress on poverty in Peel.
- In 2009, Regional Council made several recommendations related to poverty reduction through resolutions GC-18-2009, GC-19-2009 and GC-26-2009, and requested staff to provide annual updates on provincial and local efforts aimed at poverty reduction.
- The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee (PPRSC), led by the Region of Peel and United Way Peel Region, was formed in 2007 to respond to the growing and critical issue of poverty in Peel.
- Several provincial consultations connected to the poverty reduction strategy may significantly impact people living in poverty in the short and long term through the Social Assistance Review and the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

DISCUSSION**1. Breaking the Cycle The Second Progress Report**

In 2009, the Province of Ontario passed *Bill 152, An Act Respecting a Long-Term Strategy to Reduce Poverty in Ontario*. This Bill sets into law the creation of mandatory targets every five years, annual reporting of progress and regular community consultation prior to developing strategies. The provincial strategy, "*Breaking the Cycle*", focuses on reducing the rate of child poverty in Ontario by 25 per cent, or 103,000 children, in five years by investing an initial \$1.4 billion in poverty reduction initiatives. The Region of Peel welcomed the Poverty Reduction Strategy in light of Peel's higher than average increase in low income. Between 2001 and 2006, the rate of low income for children 0-17 years of age was 4.7 times higher than Ontario's (see Appendix I). Council requested annual updates from staff on the progress of this strategy both locally and at the Provincial level.

March 14, 2011

PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

The 2010 Provincial Report Card acknowledges that while the economic downturn has had a significant impact on moving the key poverty indicators forward, several milestones were reached in 2010:

- Investments in employment standards officers, child care stabilization, career retraining programs and increased access to post secondary education.
- Minimum wage increased to \$10.25 in 2010, from \$9.50 in 2009.
- Implementation of full-day kindergarten program in almost 600 schools across the province.
- Healthy Smiles Ontario was introduced in 2010, providing up to 130,000 children with access to free dental care.
- Release of the Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy.
- Announcement of a review of social assistance, led by the Honourable Frances Lankin and Dr. Munir Sheikh, aimed at improving employment outcomes, reducing complexity, increasing opportunity, improving fairness and removing barriers.

One area not addressed in the 2010 report card was investments in community hubs. In the provincial poverty reduction strategy, the Province committed to investing \$5 million annually to a Community Opportunities Fund, to encourage neighbourhood revitalization through partnerships between local business, governments, volunteers, community agencies and most importantly, local residents. The Region of Peel and community partners have been actively advocating for a portion of these provincial dollars to establish community hubs in two high need neighbourhoods. It is unclear what direction the Province will take with respect to this commitment.

a) Provincial Indicators to Measure Progress on Poverty

As part of the commitment to reducing poverty in the Province of Ontario, the government selected eight indicators they felt provide a reliable measure of the strategy's impact. Greater clarification of the indicator definitions was provided by the Province in 2010; however, access to the data required to replicate the data locally is limited.

The eight indicators are:

1. School Readiness – the Early Development Instrument (EDI) administered in senior kindergarten to assess a child's readiness to learn;
2. High School Graduation Rates – the percentage of students who graduated within five years of having started Grade 9 together;
3. Educational Progress - EQAO Provincial assessment of student achievement in grades three and six;
4. Birth Weights – the percentage of newborns born at a healthy weight for their gestational age;
5. Low Income Measure (LIM) – the percentage of children under 18 living in a household with an income less than 50 per cent of the median adjusted household income;
6. Depth of Poverty (LIM 40) – the percentage of children under 18 living in a household with an income less than 40 per cent of the median adjusted household income;
7. Standard of Living – the percentage of children in a household that cannot afford two or more out of ten items in the Ontario Deprivation Index.

March 14, 2011

PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

8. Ontario Housing Measure – the percentage of households with children under 18 that have incomes below 40 per cent of the median household income (LIM 40) and spend more than forty per cent of their income on housing.

b) Social Assistance Review

In January 2010, Ontario appointed the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council to provide advice on a proposed scope for the review. The Council's June 2010 report recommended a review of the whole income security system, including, but not limited to, social assistance. This includes a comprehensive review of income security, employment supports and related services for working-age adults. The review, expected to be completed by June 2012, will be led by the former Chief Executive Officer of United Way Toronto and Member of Provincial Parliament, Francis Lankin, and former Chief Statistician of Canada, Dr. Munir Sheikh.

c) Provincial Next Steps

As the strategy moves into year three, the Government is communicating that it remains committed to the original targets. To accomplish this, they will move forward on the following initiatives that began in 2010:

- expansion of full-day kindergarten;
- as part of the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, work with municipalities to deliver results tailored to the needs of local communities and consolidate the fragmented housing system;
- consultations on the Social Assistance Review;
- development of a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

2. Poverty Indicators in Peel

As part of the commitment to gain a greater understanding of poverty in Peel and its impact on families, staff and the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee have attempted to replicate the eight provincial indicators, along with three additional indicators that include (low-income dental programs and food bank usage).

Several challenges arose when attempting to replicate the Provincial indicators, most notably access to the same baseline data that the province uses. Of the eight indicators, only two, School Readiness using the EDI instrument and Healthy Birth Weight are readily available. As a result, it is not possible to paint a complete picture, or compare Peel to the provincial rates based on the indicators identified in the Annual Report Card. Due to these limitations, additional indicators were selected that illustrate that poverty in Peel is a growing problem.

a) Provincial Indicators

- i) **School Readiness** – In 2010, 30.3 per cent of Peel's Senior Kindergarten children were not ready, compared to 28.5 per cent of Ontario children. This figure is a slight improvement from 2007, when 31.8 per cent of Peel's Senior Kindergarten children were vulnerable. This measure uses five domains to determine school readiness: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and general knowledge and communication skills.

March 14, 2011

PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

- ii) **Healthy Birth Weight** – The percentage of infants born in Peel in 2007 and 2008 at a healthy weight is the same as the provincial rate of 80 per cent from 2007 to 2009. While Canadian research has been able to associate individual and neighbourhood income levels with low birth weight and infants being small for their gestational age 1-3, the association may not be direct. Women with lower incomes or living in lower income neighbourhoods may be more likely to have unhealthy behaviours, which result in unhealthy birth weights (e.g., smoking during pregnancy, unhealthy eating habits). The birth weight of infants born in Peel has been significantly impacted by the high proportion of immigrant mothers in our population. For more information about birth weight in Peel, please refer to Peel Health's recent technical report "Low Birth Weight and Still Birth Investigation 2010", available on Peel Public Health's website at www.peelregion.ca/health/resources/reports.htm.

b) Peel Specific Indicators

- i) **Low-Income Cut-off (LICO)** – In 2006, 19.1 per cent of children in Peel 0-17 years of age were living below LICO, compared to 18.0 per cent of children across Ontario. Unlike the provincial figure which showed only a 1 per cent increase from 2001, there was a 4.7 per cent increase in Peel between 2001 and 2006 (See Appendix I).
- ii) **Income Changes** – Between 2001 and 2006, an increase in the number of Dissemination Areas with low or very low incomes is evident in various areas of Peel. Many of these areas were previously middle income areas, continuing a trend where Peel is increasingly represented less by the middle class.
- iii) **Low-Income Dental Programs** – Affording dental services for people with low incomes remain a challenge in Peel. According to the 2003 Children's Dental Report, approximately 26,390 Peel children aged 5–17 years who are low income will experience an urgent dental condition. Regarding seniors, the need for oral care persists as the population of Peel seniors continues to grow (from 105,000 in 2006 to 132,500 in 2010). Low income seniors in the Region represent approximately 13.4 per cent, or 17,800 seniors. According to the Health Services report to Regional Council (HE-C2-5), and the 2006 Seniors' Health Report, 64 per cent of seniors 65 years of age and older in Peel do not have dental insurance, and only 58 per cent consulted a dentist in the past 12 months.
- iv) **Childcare for Low Income Families** – Although Peel Region has seen an improvement in the provision of childcare services as a whole, access to subsidized childcare for low income families is an increasing challenge. According to Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI), Peel had 123.2 subsidized child care spaces for every 1,000 children living in low income in 2006. That figure dropped to 98.3 in 2009.
- v) **Food Bank Usage** – Food banks across Canada voluntarily gather and provide statistics during the month of March for Food Banks Canada's annual HungerCount survey. From 2009 to 2010, there was a 7.4 per cent increase in the number of people assisted by food banks across Ontario. In Peel, comprehensive data on food bank usage has been difficult to obtain; however, in 2010 more food banks conducted the HungerCount survey than in previous years. Consistent with the rest of the Province, food banks in Peel report increasing demand. Just in March of 2010, over 14,500 separate individuals were assisted.

March 14, 2011

PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

- vi) **Households in Core Housing Need** - While Toronto has the highest percentage of population in core housing need in the GTA (24 per cent), Peel has the second highest percentage at 15.6 per cent. From 2001-2006, among all GTA municipalities, Peel is also notable for having the highest percentage increase of households in core housing need. (see Appendix II)

3. Addressing Poverty in Peel

Since a review of poverty in Peel in 2005, the Region of Peel along with community stakeholders have been working to create awareness and develop strategies to address the growing issue of poverty in Peel, particularly among specific populations, such as newcomers, families with young children and single senior women.

A presentation by the Peel Children's Aid Society in February 2009, presented startling evidence that child poverty, particularly in racialized communities in Peel and the GTA, has become an urgent issue. Regional Council has requested annual updates on the provincial and regional efforts to reduce child poverty. In addition, Regional Council resolved to ask the Office of the Premier for an audience to discuss the issue of child poverty (Resolutions 2009-179 and 2009-180). As follow-up actions to these resolutions, senior staff and the Regional Chair met with former Minister of Children and Youth Services, Deb Matthews, to improve the understanding of poverty in Peel. Additionally, in 2010, Regional delegations met with Minister Meilleur and Minister Broten to discuss issues related to poverty in Peel.

4. The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee

This Committee is co-chaired by the Region of Peel and United Way of Peel and was formed in response to the provincial government's commitment to addressing poverty in Ontario and to work with all stakeholders and the community to create a strategy that addresses poverty in the region. The Committee is comprised of key Regional collaboratives, such as the Fair Share Peel, Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) and Success by Six Peel, as well as advocacy organizations and other stakeholders and is working to increase awareness of poverty in Peel among residents and local politicians.

The Committee has built alliances with several provincial networks including the Housing Network of Ontario, 25 in 5 Poverty Reduction Network, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, Colour of Poverty and Campaign 2000. Recently, the Committee was invited by Tamarack, the Institute for Community Engagement to become one of ten cities across Canada to spend the next two to three years working together in more deliberate ways to address poverty in Canada.

As part of the awareness raising, in 2010, the Committee created a speakers series that featured Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute for Social Policy to discuss the Ontario Deprivation Index; John Stapleton of the Metcalfe Foundation, Pedro Barata of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and Mary Marrone of the Income Security Advocacy Centre to discuss the work of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council Committee. In addition, the cities of Mississauga and Brampton provided advertising space in their respective 2011 Spring/Summer Parks and Recreation guides to bring greater attention to poverty in Peel.

March 14, 2011

PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee is working in alignment with other Peel Region collaboratives addressing poverty and supporting vulnerable population groups. The Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) is an outcome of the 2005 Strategic Review of Poverty, and focuses on assisting one of the most vulnerable groups to poverty. The Committee is also working closely with the Community Investment Strategy (CIS), a joint effort by Region of Peel and United Way of Peel, to help strengthen and build resilience in Peel's neighborhoods and communities. Both initiatives are planning and implementing supports to address poverty and the Committee is leveraging and building capacity on these initiatives.

The Region of Peel is strongly committed to poverty reduction and has a demonstrated track-record in working to address poverty. This is why, under Council's direction, the Region of Peel hired 61 youth in support of youth employment in the summer of 2010. Participants reported a high-level of satisfaction in their employment and said the experience benefited their future careers.

5. Proposed Direction

- Staff along with the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee will continue to build on the research and findings from the Community Investment Strategy Impact Cafés and the Homelessness and Community Engagement Forum, to select and monitor local indicators that reflect progress on poverty in Peel.
- The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee will launch a Regional Poverty Strategy in the fall of 2011.
- The Committee will also continue to work with other collaboratives and stakeholders in Peel Region, to advocate for increased investments by the federal and provincial governments.
- Staff and the community will monitor the progress of the Social Assistance Review and provide input.
- Staff will continue to update Regional Council on provincial and local progress on poverty.

March 14, 2011

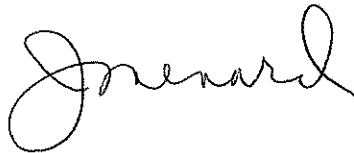
PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY UPDATE

CONCLUSION

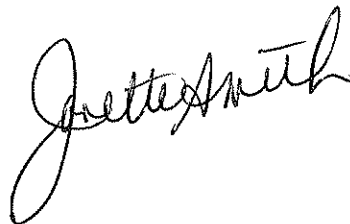
In spite of the economic downturn, the commitment to reducing poverty in the Province and Peel Region remains high. The indicators highlighted in this report illustrate that poverty in the Region is a growing problem that, if not addressed, will have a negative impact on Peel's future prosperity. Addressing complex issues such as poverty requires time, resources, stakeholders, residents and all levels of government working together.



David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health



Janet Menard
Commissioner of Human Services



Janette Smith
Commissioner of Health Services

Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

For further information regarding this report, please contact Gurpreet Malhotra at extension 4862 or via email at gurpreet.malhotra@peelregion.ca.

Authored By: Adaoma Patterson and Craig Orrell

c. Legislative Services