

REPORT

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Regional Council

For Information

DATE:

February 16, 2012

REPORT TITLE: UPDATE ON REGION OF PEEL ACTIVITIES TO REDUCE BED BUGS

FROM:

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#### **OBJECTIVE**

To provide a summary of the use of one-time provincial funding to enhance community capacity to prevent and manage bed bug infestations in Peel Region, particularly where vulnerable populations are concerned.

# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In April, 2011 the Region of Peel received \$439,989 in one-time funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to address bed bugs.
- This report follows a June 23, 2011 report to Council entitled, "One-Time Funding for Bed Bug Response" which outlined plans to utilize the funding.
- Health Services and Human Services staff have worked collaboratively to increase awareness of the issue and enhance community capacity to deal with bed bugs, particularly in vulnerable populations.

#### DISCUSSION

### 1. Background

In recent years, bed bugs have become an increasing problem in urban areas, both in Canada and abroad. The volume of bed bug complaints in Peel is much lower than in the City of Toronto, but calls to Peel Public Health and complaints to Peel Living have increased. Data are not available regarding the prevalence of infestations in private dwellings.

Calls about bed bugs to the Peel Public Health, Environmental Health Division tier 2 customer contact centre increased from 136 in 2009 to 210 in 2010. Last year, 196 calls were received. Since bed bugs are not regarded as a public health hazard the majority of these calls were responded to with information and advice. Inspections are not generally conducted. Consequently, these numbers are an indication of community concern rather than verified bed bug infestations.

In 2010, Peel Living buildings and Regional shelters averaged 31 complaints about bed bugs per month. In 2011, these same facilities averaged 46 complaints per month.

### **UPDATE ON REGION OF PEEL ACTIVITIES TO REDUCE BED BUGS**

In April 2011, Peel Public Health received \$439,989 in one-time funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to address bed bugs. The funding is available until March 31, 2012. As was outlined in the June 23, 2011 report to Council entitled, "One-Time Funding for Bed Bug Response", the funds are being used for education, outreach, and the enhancement of community capacity to deal with bed bugs. While anyone's home can be infested with bed bugs, the focus has been on Peel residents who are particularly vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals include people with physical disabilities, mental illness or addiction issues, people living on low income, and individuals who are under-housed or are frail and/or elderly.

Bed bugs are not regarded as a public health hazard under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* as they are not associated with the transmission of disease. However, bed bugs do impact the most vulnerable in our society disproportionately. Reliance on second-hand furniture and clothing, lack of access to affordable, quality housing, and lack of control over maintenance of rental units are some of the factors that make low-income residents more vulnerable to bed bug infestations. Individuals who are living with bed bugs may experience skin rashes and allergic reactions, but also social isolation, stress, anxiety, lack of sleep and a host of other issues.

The social impacts of bed bugs can be especially devastating for those in our community who are vulnerable due to advanced age, disability or other pre-existing physical and mental health conditions, or low income. Eliminating bed bugs requires multiple pest control treatments. The cost of treatment and management can be overwhelming for those with limited financial resources.

# 2. Findings

Staff from Peel Public Health and Human Services met through the fall of 2011 to plan an education forum, and met with external stakeholders to discuss how best to use the available funding to reach those most impacted by bed bugs. Regularly scheduled meetings included representatives from social housing, shelters, rent supplement housing providers, and non-profit housing providers. The collaboration and open communication contributed to a deeper understanding of the scope of the bed bug problem and influenced how funds were used to support vulnerable populations. The focus was on prevention measures, followed by strategies to eliminate or reduce existing infestations.

# a) Educational Activities

Recognizing bed bugs, understanding their life cycle, and knowing how to treat infestations are key to controlling bed bugs.

On October 26, 2011 a training session was held for Peel Public Health inspectors and municipal by-law enforcement staff. The topics covered in the session included bed bug identification and treatment, occupational health and safety matters, and lessons learned from the experiences of Toronto Public Health.

On November 1, 2011 the Region of Peel hosted a Bed Bug Symposium at the Pearson Convention Centre. A news release highlighting the Symposium was issued. Two hundred and ten (210) participants attended, including landlords, case workers, long-term care staff, property maintenance staff, support workers, regional and municipal staff and others. Agenda topics included identifying bed bugs and understanding their life cycle, preventing infestations, hoarding and bed bugs, landlord and tenant rights, and a

#### **UPDATE ON REGION OF PEEL ACTIVITIES TO REDUCE BED BUGS**

canine scent detection demonstration. The presentations have been posted on the Region of Peel website (www.peelregion.ca/health/commhlth/parov1yr/bedbug-fact.htm).

One of the desired outcomes of the Symposium was to create resources to assist the community in dealing with bed bugs. In response to participant feedback, an on-line information and discussion forum has been created. Participation in the discussion forum is by invitation only and allows landlords and others to discreetly discuss issues related to bed bugs and their treatment.

The Region of Peel web page on bed bugs has also been enhanced to provide additional information. Annual bed bug web page views increased by 68 per cent from 5,870 in 2010 to 9,743 in 2011.

# b) Other Supports for Vulnerable Populations

Peel Health has contracted License 2 Clean, a social enterprise associated with St. Leonard's Place Peel, to provide much needed support to the most vulnerable. License 2 Clean staff will assist people who are unable to prepare their dwelling unit before and after pest control measures (e.g. those with physical disabilities, mental illness or addictions, low income, under-housed, or frail and/or elderly). Proper preparation of a dwelling unit before pest control treatment is necessary for the treatment to be successful. Pesticides licensed in Canada for bed bug treatment have very little residual efficacy; it is therefore necessary for the pesticide to reach bed bugs that are hiding behind baseboards or other difficult-to-reach areas. Clutter reduces the likelihood of successful treatment.

License 2 Clean will also place mattress encasements on beds and bed bug monitors under the legs of a bed to prevent further infestation. This support is above and beyond that provided by traditional pest management companies. Peel Public Health has trained License 2 Clean staff and has provided them with commercial cleaning equipment to ensure that this program is sustainable after March, 2012.

As an added benefit, License 2 Clean provides employment to individuals who are on social assistance. The mission of this business is to help individuals become independent, contributing members of the community and attain a sustainable livelihood.

Peel Public Health has established a Bed Bug Identification Service to assist the public in confirming infestations. If Peel residents are not sure if the insect in their residence is a bed bug, they can bring it to the 7120 Hurontario Regional building to be identified by a public health inspector.

Bed bug prevention and monitoring supplies for housing settings such as emergency shelters, transitional housing and homes for special care where vulnerable residents reside are being purchased. These include special mattress encasements and insect interceptors for bed posts.

### 3. On-going Service Level Implications

As mentioned previously, bed bugs are not regarded as a public health hazard under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. As such, it is not expected that the province will provide ongoing funding for bed bug programming. While most of the activities listed above have focused on building community capacity to prevent and manage bed bug infestations, some could create resident expectations that cannot be sustained. Public Health and

February 16, 2012

#### **UPDATE ON REGION OF PEEL ACTIVITIES TO REDUCE BED BUGS**

Human Services staff continue to work together to mitigate this risk by exploring programs that assist the community in coping with bed bug problems. One such initiative that has been implemented is an online bed bug discussion board for landlords, property managers and other community workers.

The Region incurs costs related to bed bugs in Regionally-owned buildings. These costs are embedded in the pest management contracts with pest control treatment companies. On a per unit basis, bed bug infestation control costs are higher than other pest control services, likely because multiple treatments of infested units are required. In an effort to control these costs, Human Services staff recently introduced an Integrated Pest Control Management Program that incorporates proactive and in-depth tenant and staff education. This new, preventative approach includes a committee to deal with increased attention to bed bugs and the health and environmental risks they present to Peel Living and Region of Peel residents.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The total bed bug funding provided to Peel Region was \$439,989. As of the date of this report, approximately \$117,000 had been spent, with another \$251,000 allocated for services or goods anticipated to be received by March 31, 2012. Efforts will be made to utilize the remaining \$72,000 to offset the cost of bed bug pest control services for providers that house vulnerable populations.

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# February 16, 2012

### **UPDATE ON REGION OF PEEL ACTIVITIES TO REDUCE BED BUGS**

#### CONCLUSION

The one-time provincial funding for the bed bug support program has enabled a number of initiatives to raise awareness and implement services which increase community capacity to prevent or manage bed bug infestations.

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**Approved for Submission:** 

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