

APPROVED AT REGIONAL COUNCIL  
OCTOBER 25, 2012

HE-A. PUBLIC HEALTH

HE-A2. New York City's Success in Creating Supportive Environments for Health (For information)

Deferred to November 8, 2012 Regional Council

2012-1220

**DATE:** September 27, 2012

**REPORT TITLE:** **NEW YORK CITY'S SUCCESS IN CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH**

**FROM:** Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services  
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## **OBJECTIVE**

To provide an update, as requested, on New York City's initiatives to reduce childhood obesity.

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Trends in obesity represent a major threat to the health of current and future generations. This trend reflects the massive changes in society over recent decades of what people eat and extent of their activity throughout the day. This trend applies to Peel citizens as well as the region's workforce.
- New York City has responded with a comprehensive set of cross-government, evidence-informed interventions to increase citizens' daily activity and the availability of healthy food choices.
- Positive results are now being seen in New York City with reductions in the intake of sugary drinks, greater intake of fruits and vegetables, and a leveling off of obesity rates in elementary school children.
- As part of the ongoing work on the Term of Council Priority (#18) Supportive Environment for Healthy Weights, the Region of Peel needs to learn from the evidence-informed New York City initiatives and emulate its comprehensive, cross-government approach to improve the living conditions for its citizens and staff.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

On June 14, 2012 Regional Council requested that the Medical Officer of Health report to a future meeting with information related to the New York City physical activity and healthy eating initiatives. This report updates Council on the current status of the New York City obesity prevention initiatives and indicates how New York's success will inform the Term of Council Priority (#18) Supportive Environment for Healthy Weights.

Over the past decade, New York City has proceeded to take action on the many existing recommendations to create supportive environments for healthy eating and physical activity. There are now indications that the City's efforts are achieving the desired outcomes, including:

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- Between 2006 and 2011, obesity rates among young children (kindergarten to grade 8) dropped by 5.5 per cent, with rates among 5 and 6 year olds declining 10 per cent.
- Between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of adults consuming one or more sugary drinks daily/weekly decreased from 36 per cent to 30 per cent.

To make further progress, the Mayor convened a multi-agency obesity task force to address the obesity challenge. Commissioners from 11 city agencies participated. While many of these city agencies had not previously had a programmatic focus on public health or obesity, each was engaged in activities that could improve the health of the public, such as: improving the food environment, making public spaces more amenable to physical activity or active transportation, and promoting building design to support physical activity.

The following outlines some of the New York City interventions that have been implemented or are currently underway (see Appendix I for a more detailed list):

- Activity Environment: playground attendants in city parks to provide free physical activity programs; launch of bike-sharing program.
- Healthy Schools: install salad bars in all city schools; active transportation initiatives in schools; install water jets in schools to increase access to fresh tap water.
- Built Environment: facilitate active stair design in buildings; building 250 bike-lane miles over a three year period; developing active design guidelines for City architects and urban designers; establish a Centre for Active Design.
- Food Environment: establish healthy meal and vending standards for all city agencies and facilities (e.g., schools, hospitals, daycares) including food and beverages served at meetings, trainings and events; increase access to tap water throughout city; expand healthy food access in retail environment.

While NYC's focus is city-wide, they are leading by example with their own workforce via building design (e.g., staircase), food standards and wellness programming.

## 2. Proposed Direction

The positive results of New York City's actions provide insight into Peel Public Health's Term of Council Priority on Healthy Weights. Public Health has worked with municipal and regional stakeholders to create environments that support citizens to have a healthy weight. This work has included participating in land use planning decisions and advocating for policies that support the development of healthy communities. Additionally, previous direction from Council requested Public Health to pursue the establishment of healthy food standards for all food served and sold in all Peel Region buildings (Resolution 2012-716).

As important employers, the Region and Area Municipalities should lead by example through the ongoing creation of a health supporting workplace. This work will include a focus on reducing sedentariness. For example: sitting for longer than one hour because emerging research has revealed that sedentariness increased the risk of chronic disease even if an individual is achieving recommended amounts of physical activity. Initiatives for consideration include: phasing in mobile meetings, limited access to sit stand tables for meetings, some treadmill desks for report reading, and other relevant options such as those developed by New York City.

Many children are passively driven to school. While some programming has been initiated with schools, there are opportunities to increase the number of children who walk or bike to

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school. Peel Public Health will work with staff in transportation, planning, school boards and other relevant parties to increase the number of children who are active going to and from school.

Schoolyards and parks can be more effectively utilized. As demonstrated by NYC, Peel Public Health will work with school boards, municipal parks and recreation, and relevant citizens to implement physical activity programs such as playground attendants to support activity in schoolyards and parks. Involvement of representatives from municipalities will facilitate citizens' interest in developing neighbourhoods to support children and families to be more active.

To leverage the learning and experience being accumulated in NYC, Peel Public Health will engage the services of NYC's Centre for Active Design to inform Peel's policies to advance the creation of healthy built and healthy food environments by providing consultative advice and on-site training.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The resources required to support the implementation of strategies to create supportive environments for healthy living is included in Peel Public Health's approved operating budget for 2012, and will continue to be included as part of ongoing budget planning processes. Some chronic disease prevention initiatives are being delivered through a 100 per cent provincial Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care grant. This funding is available until March 31, 2013. If necessary, additional funds will be sought through the 2013 or 2014 budget process.

### **CONCLUSION**

Trends in obesity represent a major threat to the health of current and future generations of Peel residents. Therefore Peel Public Health will continue to pursue the Term of Council Priority Supportive Environment for Healthy Weights. To inform and strengthen initiatives that create supportive environments for the health of its citizens and staff, Public Health will monitor the progress of other jurisdictions including NYC for innovative approaches that may be applicable

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to the Peel context. Peel Public Health will continue to advocate for provincial policy and programming that supports obesity prevention.

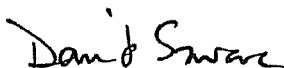


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Initial New York City initiatives included the following:

- establishing healthy meal and vending standards for all City agencies and facilities (e.g., schools, hospitals, daycares) and vending machines;
- mandatory law for calorie labeling in chain restaurants;
- increasing access to and affordability of fresh fruit and vegetables through the *Green Carts* and *Health Bucks* programs;
- creating safe cycling spaces by building 250 bike-lane miles across various parts of the City over a three year period;
- training teachers to help them integrate physical activity into all areas of classroom teaching; and
- creating active design guidelines for City architects and urban designers.

The next wave of interventions includes the following:

[Reversing the Epidemic: The New York City Obesity Task Force Plan to Prevent and Control Obesity (May 31, 2012)]

a) *Initiatives to Prevention Obesity in Children*

1. **Promote and expand on nutrition and wellness efforts in schools** by extending the Department of Education grants and initiatives related to school 'wellness councils', 'wellness coordinators' and health education.
2. **Install water jets in schools** in order to ensure that fresh tap water is easily available and accessible to the majority of students.
3. **Expand on the school gardens 'Grow to Learn' initiative** whereby an additional 50 grants per year will be provided to schools to develop school gardens and educate students about the origin and taste of healthy food.
4. **Install salad bars in all City schools** to build on the existing 800 salad bars so that fresh vegetables are easily available and accessible to students on a daily basis.
5. **Improve the nutritional quality of the meals served at City-licensed children's camps** by ensuring that the food and beverages provided at summer camps align with appropriate nutrition standards.
6. **Increase physical activity for elementary children** by expanding the capacity of the *Move-To-Improve* program which trains kindergarten to grade 5 teachers on how to integrate physical education into their daily teaching schedules.
7. **Add playground attendants in City parks to provide free physical activity programs** by extending the *Kids in Motion* program to encourage outdoor play, fitness and activity among children.
8. **Share play spaces across City programs** in order to increase the number of opportunities and venues for play and exercise throughout the City.
9. **Increase active transportation initiatives in schools** by expanding the *We're Walking Here* program to 200 schools which provides curriculum support and resources on the benefits of active transportation, and by establishing safe drop off points in neighbourhoods for students.

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b) *Initiatives to Encourage Healthy Eating*

10. **Establish a maximum size for sugary drinks in food service establishments** thereby reacquainting New Yorkers with "human size" portions to reduce excessive consumption of sugary drinks.
11. **Continue to implement public education campaigns** to further communicate with the public regarding the health risks of oversized portions and sugary drinks.
12. **Create healthy food environments in hospitals** by extending the *Healthy Hospital Initiative Standards* so that additional hospitals will adopt these healthy standards for food and beverages served in their vending and cafeterias.
13. **Ensure healthy food pantries and soup kitchens** by developing nutrition standards for the *Emergency Food Assistance Programs* throughout the City and establishing a healthy eating and food skills education component for users.
14. **Enhance urban agriculture at NYC Housing Authority developments** by partnering with non-profit organizations to develop five new large-scale urban agriculture sites which may be used as venues for farmers markets, educational programs for youth, seniors programs and more.
15. **Create new community garden sites** in targeted areas of the City to support urban gardeners and farmers and increase access and availability of healthy food options.
16. **Expand healthy food access in the retail environment** by building on existing efforts and developing new initiatives to target neighbourhoods most in need; this includes establishing zoning incentives for supermarkets, supporting food stamp can usage for vegetables and fruit, and further building on the *Shop Healthy NYC* initiative which encourages and supports retailers to offer more fresh produce and healthier choices, particularly in high need neighbourhoods.
17. **Increase access to tap water** throughout the City.

c) *Initiatives to Promote Physical Activity*

18. **Establish a Centre for Active Design** that will be a focal point for continuing research, education and policy in this field and will serve professionals who design, define, construct, and manage the built environment, as well as educators and policy-makers.
19. **Facilitate active stair design in buildings** through potential changes to the City's construction, fire, water, sewer and zoning codes to allow for active design features in buildings. Such changes include increasing the visibility and attractiveness of stairs using stair prompts and open stairway doors.
20. **Expand free citywide fitness programming for adults and seniors** targeting neighbourhoods with high rates of obesity and obesity-related diseases.
21. **Launch a bike-sharing program** thereby extending the reach of transit into areas which do not have great subway/transit coverage.

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d) *Initiatives to Lead by Example*

22. **Evaluate all City construction projects for active design opportunities.** All requests-for-proposals, contracts, standards, and guidelines that regulate new construction and major renovations projects for the City will require a review of the Active Design Guidelines and the incorporation of active design strategies (where appropriate).
23. **Offer wellness programs to NYC employees** through the inclusion of a wellness program in the City's health care plan such as health-risk assessment and screenings, weight management and exercise programs and health education.
24. **Expand food standards for all City agencies** to include food and beverages served at meetings, trainings and events. This will not only contribute to a healthy, balanced diet but it also will promote good health among employees.
25. **Identify and treat obese children and their families in NYC hospitals and schools** through expanded counselling on behaviour change. The Healthy Options and Physical Activity Program in schools will also be expanded to help children in NYC public schools who are struggling with high levels of excess weight.
26. **Examine sidewalk and stairway design improvements** with a goal of creating a set of best practices on sidewalk and stairway design. These best practices will inform how new developments and neighbourhoods are designed and built.