



Office of the Commissioner
Community and Health Services Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Board of Health

From: Dr. Karim Kurji
Medical Officer of Health

Date: August 29, 2019

Re: Provincial Vision Screening Program

[On June 20, 2019](#), the Board of Health authorized the Medical Officer of Health to request the Minister of Health and Long Term Care to waive the requirement to implement the provincial Vision Screening program as set out in the Ontario Public Health Standard, and to cease implementation of the program should the Minister waive the requirement.

The request for a waiver was in response to the offer from the Ministry that upon request, it would consider waiving its requirements to support public health units to find savings in view of the province's decision to reduce its funding. If the vision screening waiver was approved, savings were estimated at \$321,312 gross annually beginning in 2019. For 2019 budget, 26.9% of Public Health programs are funded by tax levy and the balance of the funding is provided by the Province.

The Medical Officer of Health requested a waiver because children in York Region already have good access to vision care

In York Region, vision screening is currently being conducted in schools by community agencies and partners resulting in a 39% screening rate and, in 2016, 49% of children up to five years of age had an oculo-visual assessment by a general physician, ophthalmologist or optometrist. From birth, Ontario children are already eligible through OHIP for routine vision screening during well-baby and child visits by primary care providers, as well as annual comprehensive eye exams from optometrists. Throughout York Region there is easy access to optometrist's offices, with the concentration in the south of the Region which mirrors our population density. According to the College of Optometrists website (2018) there were 116 optometrists and 25 ophthalmologists in York Region with over 200 office locations.

Additionally, evidence for the effectiveness of universal vision screening programs for children up to the age of six years is not strongly supported in research. Therefore the Medical Officer of Health concluded that this program is unnecessary and represents a costly duplication of services already available at no cost to families in the community.

The Ministry of Health will not waive the requirement

The Medical Officer of Health received a letter from the Director, Health Promotion and Prevention Policy and Programs Branch within the Ministry of Health on July 23, 2019 (see Attachment 1). The letter notified the Medical Officer of Health that the waiver request had been rejected and reiterated that public health units are required to meet the Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol, 2018.

In follow-up, staff are looking at options for reducing the cost to deliver this program, while meeting minimum Ministry requirements. Options include further leveraging of community volunteers, and targeting service provision to areas of the Region where screening rates are low.

Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Dr. Karim Kurji
Medical Officer of Health

Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment (1)