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To: Toronto Public Library Board – May 12, 2003

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Consumer Health Information Service – Service Hour Reductions**

Purpose:

To advise the Toronto Public Library Board of a reduction in service hours of the Consumer Health Information Service as a result of operating grant levels from the Ontario Ministry of Health.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Consumer Health Information Service – Service Hour Reductions* report for information.

Background:

Since its inception in 1992, the Consumer Health Information Service (CHIS) has been a service located at the Toronto Reference Library, but fully funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) to assist Ontario consumers in becoming more informed about their health. CHIS has received an annual grant of \$245,000 from the MOHLTC since 1993. This grant was to provide for a walk-in/local phone service for 24 hours/week and a toll-free service for Ontario residents for 20 hours/week. The intent was that the grant would cover all operating costs, such as salaries, print and electronic resources, telephone, photocopying, supplies, equipment, training and professional development.

By 1998/1999, the annual operating grant was insufficient to cover all of CHIS's service costs. Since that time, there have been ongoing efforts to have the base budget increased to keep pace with rising costs. For example, a librarian's salary has increased 31.5% between 1996 and 2003. With no increase in the base grant, this has meant that CHIS's resources have been stretched very thin for many years.

The financial pressure has been partially relieved by the Canadian Health Network (CHN) contract for which CHIS is the Complementary and Alternative Affiliate. CHN funding covers the cost of 2 FTEs. Those staff resources are dedicated to the CHN deliverables and are not to be

used to staff CHIS front line service delivery. However, a number of expenses that benefit CHIS are charged to the CHN contract, such as: part of the CHIS Manager's salary (14 hours/week), complementary and alternative health books and periodicals, a portion of the supply costs, equipment (network printer, laptop), and some professional development costs.

Comments:

While the MOHLTC has acknowledged that CHIS costs have far outstripped the static annual grant, they have been unable to increase the base grant. The current funding level of \$245,000 covers only 2.7 staff FTEs to deliver both the walk-in, local phone and toll-free information services for a combined total of 36 hours/week. It also does not provide sufficient funds for collection acquisition and professional development. What the MOHLTC has been able to do is to provide some additional funding on an ad hoc basis. In 1998/1999, CHIS received additional funding of \$36,107, and has received additional funding each subsequent year ranging from \$30,000 - \$80,000.

This pattern of additional funding at the end of the provincial government's fiscal year allowed CHIS to maintain its hours of service for the last five years and, in fact, enabled CHIS to increase its walk-in/local phone hours from 24 to 28 in 1999. Early in 2003, CHIS was once again asked to submit a proposal for additional funding for the fiscal year 2002/03, but was notified on March 31, 2003 that, regrettably, no additional funds were available. This announcement put CHIS in the position of only being able to continue its hours of service at a deficit position that would incur unbudgeted costs for TPL.

Conclusion:

Therefore, effective June 2, 2003 CHIS service hours will be reduced to match the current envelope of MOHLTC funding. Total service hours will be 36 per week: 20 hours for walk-in and 16 for toll-free. The new service hours, as set out in the chart below, have been selected to minimize impact on the public. A communications plan has been developed to ensure that this adjustment in service hours is communicated to the appropriate stakeholders.

<b>Walk-in, Local Phone</b>		<b>Toll-free</b>	
<b>Current Hours</b>	<b>New Hours</b>	<b>Current Hours</b>	<b>New Hours</b>
Mon. 12-4	Same	10-12, 2-4	Same
Tues. 12-4	Same	10-12, 2-4	Same
Wed. 12-8	4-8	10-12, 2-4	Same
Thurs. 12-4	Same	10-12, 2-4	Same
Fri. 12-4	CLOSED	10-12, 2-4	CLOSED
Sat. 1-5	Same		
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>

Staff will continue to work with the MOHLTC to secure an increase in the annual grant that would enable a restoration of the service hours.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Not applicable.