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For immediate release

Premier McGuinty: Take Back Public Health Costs Now!

New community campaign pressures province to “upload” costs of public health

OTTAWA – A new community campaign is lobbying the provincial government to take back the costs of health and social programs delivered by municipalities, starting with public health.

“It is time the province take back the cost of services downloaded onto municipalities,” said Dondji Kapalati of CAWI, the City for all Women Initiative & Karibu Canada. “Ontario cities now pay 25 per cent of public health costs. For Ottawa, that means \$9.7 million out of its budget for important public health programs.”

CAWI, People for a Better Ottawa and the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa are teaming up to collect 5000 postcards over the next two weeks before the Ontario Liberal government brings down its next budget. The postcards carry the demand, “Premier McGuinty: Take Back Public Health Costs Now!” They will be delivered personally to the Premier’s Ottawa South constituency office in early March.

“The health of my community depends upon the province taking back the costs of programs it downloaded onto communities in the mid-1990s,” said Phil Robinson of People for a Better Ottawa.

“All of us rely on public health services like public health nurses, health education and disease prevention,” Robinson said. “The City of Ottawa has an important role to play in delivering these services, but it cannot be expected to pay for them.”

Ontario is the only province in Canada where such important social services are paid from local property taxes. The City of Ottawa is asking the province to upload 100 per cent of public health costs and address the funding imbalance in other cost-shared programs, such as child care and long-term care.

“The province downloaded the cost of many social programs onto cities without giving them new ways to raise the funds,” said Aileen Leo of the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa. “It’s now time the province “upload” by paying the full cost of these services.”

Cities deliver 60% of public services but local governments receive only 8 cents from every dollar Canadians pay in taxes, while the federal and provincial governments receive 92 cents. Cities have to choose between raising property

taxes and user fees or cutting important services, while the federal and provincial budgets collect surpluses.

“Uploading public health in the 2008 budget is a big step in the right direction,” said Nubia Cermeno of CAWI. “We can’t rely on property taxes or user fees for public transit and recreation to make ends meet. Let the era of uploading begin!”

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Campaign materials online at:

City for All Women Initiative, www.cawi-ivtf.org