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Study shows families left with only \$3.50/month Region will ask province to review assistance levels

Paying rent and eating healthy is nearly impossible for people working at minimum wage jobs or receiving social assistance, Halton's health and social services committee heard Tuesday.

In response to reports outlining the difficulties facing area residents, committee members endorsed a motion Tuesday asking the province to review the current minimum wage and social assistance levels.

"We all need to work together to assist those in need," said regional chair Joyce Savoline.

"It is simply not acceptable that there are families in Halton struggling to pay their rent who end up sacrificing food as a result."

The committee's request to review the minimum wage is further supported by the results of a recent Halton Nutritious Food Basket survey, explained the report.

Using the current minimum wage (\$6.85) as a base mark for a family of four, with one full-time income and Canada Child Tax Benefits, the family would be left with \$3.50 per month after paying for only rent and food.

No other amenities such as phone, hydro, toiletries, etc. have been calculated as paid for within the calculations.

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If the hat fits...

Acton High School held its seventh annual craft show Saturday and more than 100 vendors were on hand to offer a wide variety of items. Tom Wilson, 17, tries on a hat with the help of Rheanna Leckie, 18, while Linda Inglis, who was manning her booth, Linda's Mitts and Hats, holds the mirror. All proceeds from the event go directly to equipment and athletic teams at the school.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney

Health committee hears plan needed to fight flu outbreak

If a pandemic flu strikes, Halton Region wants to be prepared. Regional staff are currently in the midst of preparing a plan to ensure delivery of essential services during such an outbreak.

Pandemic flu is a worldwide outbreak of flu and is different from regular flu because it is a new virus strain not seen previously. It happened three times in the 20th century and scientists predict it will happen again. Vaccines for a new strain take about six months to prepare.

"Pandemic flu could have consequences for families in Halton and for our economy," said Regional Chair Joyce Savoline. "I encourage all local employers to begin planning now, as to how they will handle

the impact of high absenteeism rates due to pandemic flu."

Once an essential services delivery plan is complete—expected in April—the plan will be made available to all area businesses as a guideline for creating their own plans.

According to a staff report presented to the Halton health and social services committee for information Tuesday, a pandemic flu would likely result in a 30 per cent employee absentee rate.

"Staff in all our departments are working together to ensure that Halton Region continues to provide a high level of service to the community," said Regional CAO Brent Marshall.

"We are taking a pro-active approach

and developing our essential services plan now so that we are not facing difficult challenges for both services and staff should the pandemic flu affect Halton."

The Region's plan will look at monitoring outbreaks, vaccine supply, communication and ensuring all essential services (police, ambulance, water, etc.) are delivered.

The report to committee also indicated a pandemic flu would likely see 250,000 Halton residents infected.

Of those infected, 13,000 would become clinically ill, 60,000 would require patient care, 1,000 would require hospitalization and 300-400 people would die, the report read.

—By Richard Vivian, special

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