



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy Families Division

TO:	Mayor and Members Public Health Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 8, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Healthy Babies Healthy Child Program Budget 2023-2024 (BOH23028) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Bonnie King (905) 546-2424 Ext. 1587
SUBMITTED BY:	Jennifer Vickers-Manzin, CNO Director, Healthy Families Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the 2023-2024 Healthy Babies Healthy Children program budget be approved;
- (b) That Council approve funding of \$205,194 to allow the continuation of the program with the current Public Health Nurse complement until March 31, 2024, to be funded first from any Public Health Division surplus, then from any Healthy and Safe Communities Departmental Surplus and lastly from any Corporate Surplus or any source deemed appropriate by the General Manager of Corporate Services;
- (c) That staff be directed to refer the annualized estimated cost for the program pressure resulting from capped Ministry funding and annual cost increases of staff salaries and benefits to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget; and,
- (d) That the Medical Officer of Health or delegate be authorized and directed to execute all agreements, contracts, extensions and documents, including submission of budgets and reports required to give effect to all the 2023-2024 Healthy Babies Health Children Program budget approved in Report BOH23028.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program is a mandatory program under the Ontario Public Health, Healthy Growth and Development Standard for all Boards of

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Health. While mostly funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, financial support is also provided to the program through the Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton (levy). As the Province has indicated that their funding for 2023-2024 will be capped, program pressures will continue. To maintain within those provincial funding levels, the number of front-line staff (Public Health Nurses) who deliver the program would need to be reduced and would result in significant wait times and reduced service delivery levels

Healthy Babies Healthy Children provides home visiting interventions to vulnerable families at risk of poor health and developmental outcomes, largely due to adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress during pregnancy and in the early years. Long term health outcomes associated with adverse childhood experiences include injury, poor mental health, poor health during pregnancy/postpartum, infectious disease, chronic disease (e.g. heart disease, cancer and stroke), risk taking behaviour (e.g. alcohol, drugs, and opiate misuse) and lack of opportunity (education, employment, income and life expectancy).^{1,2} Through the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, Public Health Nurses support parents and caregivers to strengthen protective factors needed for healthy child development and resiliency. Home visiting Public Health Nurses are highly trained and use a variety of evidence-based nursing interventions that support healthy pregnancy and birth outcomes and build parental knowledge and confidence that strengthen the quality of interactions and relationships between parents and children. These interventions buffer the impact of adverse childhood events which otherwise can be long lasting and multigenerational. Public Health Nurses leverage family strengths and facilitate connections between families and a wide variety of community supports.

According to the World Health Organization, investments in early childhood development produces far-reaching benefits to governments, business, communities, parents/caregivers, and most of all, to babies and young children. Investing in early childhood development is cost effective, as every dollar spent on early childhood development interventions, like home visiting, can generate a return on investment as high as \$13.³ Research demonstrates that the period from pregnancy to age three is a critical period of brain development. For healthy brain development to occur children need a safe, secure, and nurturing environment; access to healthy nutrition; and ongoing stimulation of their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. This

¹ National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control- Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Strategy (September 2020)

² Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering with Families and communities to promote relational health Andrew Garner, MD, PhD, FAAP,a,b Michael Yogman, MD, FAAP

³ World Health Org- Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development- Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform health and Human Potential (ISBN 978-92-4-151406-4)

is a critical window of opportunity to lay the foundation for health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime and can impact future generations.³

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 7

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Healthy Babies Healthy Children is mostly funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Despite yearly advocacy efforts, base funding for staffing and program costs have remained the same since 2015, resulting in reduced staffing and reduced capacity to service high risk families over the years. Healthy Babies Healthy Children receives additional funding from other sources that recognize and value the positive and longstanding impacts that home visiting has on expectant parents and their infants and young children (see Table 1 below).

The preliminary budget (April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024) was submitted to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services including a pressure of \$205,194. A letter accompanied the submission requesting increased funding to cover the budget shortfall, including the impact of continued capped funding. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has responded to the preliminary budget submission with a letter stating “The ministry is continuing efforts to improve the quality and sustainability of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program to adapt to a changing community context. The budget concerns outlined in your letter provide us with insights that will assist in this process. For 2023-24 the City of Hamilton will need to identify additional offsetting revenue from other sources in the amount of \$205,194 or we can adjust your budget submission to remove that amount which will balance the budget submission within the allocation.”

Table 1

Budget	April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023	April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024	Status
Staffing & Operating Costs	\$4,073,527	\$4,334,446	\$230,919 increase
Ministry of Children, Community and Social	\$3,533,913	\$3,533,913	No change to funding

**SUBJECT: Healthy Babies Healthy Child Program Budget 2023-2024 (BOH23028)
(City Wide) - Page 4 of 8**

Services Funding			
Levy- Cost allocations ⁴	\$339,785	\$347,524	Approved through 2023 budget process
Levy- Staffing	\$199,830	\$217,816	Approved through 2023 budget process
Hamilton Community Foundation	\$30,000	\$30,000	Supports the Nurse Family Partnership program (licensing, professional fees, clinical lead role, community events and incentives.)
2023/2024 Pressure	\$0	(\$205,194)	Due to increases in staffing costs and program costs.

Staffing: Recommendations will maintain current Public Health Nurse FTE and preserve service delivery.

Legal: Public Health Services is mandated to provide all components of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program. A Service agreement is signed between the Province and the City of Hamilton Public Health Services annually that includes budget approvals and program targets.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Adverse childhood experiences are preventable, potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood such as physical/emotional neglect, witnessing or experiencing violence, or loss of a parent. Adverse childhood experiences include negative aspects of a child’s environment which may impact their sense of safety, security and relationship stability such as poor parental mental health, substance misuse, intimate partner violence, separation from parent due to separation/divorce and incarceration,⁵ and/or chronic hardships such as poverty, housing insecurity, racism, and social isolation.⁶ In Hamilton, approximately 43% of families screened at birth every year have at least one adverse childhood experiences-like risk factor with an average of 100 families having four or

⁴ Cost allocations have never been funded by MCCSS

⁵ National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control- Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Strategy (September 2020)

⁶ Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering with Families and communities to promote relational health Andrew Garner, MD, PhD, FAAP,a,b Michael Yogman, MD, FAAP

more which is indicative of higher risk for poor health outcomes.⁷ While stress and adversity are a normal part of human development, frequent and/or persistent exposure during childhood in the absence of protective factors can result in toxic stress which harms the nervous, endocrine and immune systems and can alter the physical structure of DNA (known as Epigenetics). Changes that occur in a child's brain from toxic stress can affect attention, impulsive behaviour, decision-making, learning, emotion and response to stress.^{6,8} Long term health outcomes associated with adverse childhood experiences include injury, poor mental health, poor health during pregnancy/postpartum, infectious disease, chronic disease (e.g. heart disease, cancer and stroke), risk taking behaviour (e.g. alcohol, drugs, and opiate misuse) and lack of opportunity (education, employment, income and life expectancy).^{6,8}

While the negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences are well known, research has shown that when certain protective factors are present, children build resilience which can diminish the consequences of exposure. Protective factors include:

- Development of safe, stable, nurturing relationships with parents/caregivers also known as “early relational health”. These buffer the negative impacts of adversity and toxic stress and are the primary way to build resiliency in children;⁶
- Opportunities for positive social interactions/social connections;⁶
- Basic needs of nutrition, shelter, safety, and access to primary care;⁶
- Parent employment/education;⁶
- Parental support, positive social networks and healthy relationships;⁶ and,
- Parent/child interactions that are positive and fun.⁶

Healthy Babies Healthy Children is well positioned to support parents and caregivers to strengthen protective factors needed for healthy child development and resiliency. Home visiting Public Health Nurses are highly trained and use a variety of evidence-based nursing interventions that support healthy pregnancy and birth outcomes, build parental knowledge and confidence, and strengthen the quality of interactions and relationships between parents and children.

The following are examples of how Healthy Babies Healthy Children partners with the community to increase opportunities for screening/early identification of children and families at risk and to facilitate access to community-based supports and services:

1. The time between conception and birth provides the foundation of a child's well-being. Identifying families with risk during pregnancy is particularly important. Healthy Babies Healthy Children has built strong collaborative partnerships with health professionals and community service providers to offer Healthy Babies

⁷ What You Need to Know About Aces. InfoGraphic_Final (City of Hamilton, Public Health Services)

⁸ National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control- Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Strategy (September 2020)

Healthy Children screening for the individuals with whom they have contact. In 2022, 900 pregnant individuals were screened with 57% receiving home visiting support;

2. At the end of 2022, the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program was recognized as the first point of contact in a new community pathway designed to make it easy for families to access support for early mental health concerns. Families referred to Healthy Babies Healthy Children are offered screening for early social and emotional development, assessment to identify family strengths and risks, and access to supports including home visiting and/or referrals to a wide range of services that promote social and emotional development (mental health) and family well-being; and,
3. Healthy Babies Healthy Children has partnered with a variety of city programs including Ontario Works, Child Care Subsidy, Recreation, and Housing to pilot and evaluate a service delivery model of “Coordinated Supports for Families” which facilitates wrap-around access to City services for one-parent families receiving Healthy Babies Healthy Children and Ontario Works income support. Cost barriers are reduced for families by providing free recreation passes, free bus passes and help with childcare fee subsidy applications. The evaluation of the pilot demonstrated many positive client outcomes, including: increased families’ connections to programs and services; positive changes to social and mental health of parents; improvements in child development; and, high levels of satisfaction with the program. The program was provided within existing resources.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability are published by the Ministry of Health under the authority of Section 7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* to specify the mandatory health programs and services provided by Boards of Health. Healthy Babies Healthy Children is a mandatory program under the Healthy Growth and Development Standard and the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program protocol provides the minimum expectations for service delivery.

In 2022, the City of Hamilton sent a letter to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services requesting “the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services review base-funding needs for the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program to ensure this essential program is sufficiently resourced to meet the current and growing needs of children and a healthy start in life.” A follow up letter was also submitted with the draft 2023/2024 budget submission.

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In February 2023, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies flagged the issue of underfunding of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program in their 2023 pre-budget submission regarding public health programs and services. The Association of Local Public Health Agencies requested that the province effectively meet the requirements of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program for 2023 by providing an estimated \$12.5M in total additional funding, representing an average increase of 13.8% across health units.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Finance and Administration was consulted in preparation of the budget and supports the recommendations in this report.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program pressure cannot be mitigated without negatively impacting direct service staff. At a time (post-pandemic) when the need for Healthy Babies Healthy Children is greater than ever, reducing front line Public Health Nurses will result in families having to wait much longer for an initial assessment and referral to home visiting intervention will be triaged to the highest risk families. Approximately 50 high risk children and their families may not receive home visiting services.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

The alternative to Recommendation (b) would be that Council not approve the 2023-2024 funding pressure of \$205,194 to allow for the continuation of the program with the current Public Health Nurse complement until March 31, 2024. This alternative will impact service delivery levels. Temporary contract positions will be terminated to stay within the budget cap. Families referred to Healthy Babies Healthy Children will be subject to longer wait times for an initial assessment, and those at highest risk will be prioritized for home visiting services.

As an alternative to Recommendation (c), Council may choose not to refer the annualized estimated cost for the program pressure to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget. This alternative will impact service delivery levels. Staffing levels will decrease to stay

**SUBJECT: Healthy Babies Healthy Child Program Budget 2023-2024 (BOH23028)
(City Wide) - Page 8 of 8**

within the budget cap. Wait times for an initial assessment will continue to increase and fewer families will be prioritized for home visiting services.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.