



Hamilton Board of Health Report for Consideration

To: Chair and Members
Hamilton Board of Health

Date: February 26, 2026

Report No: BOH26010

Subject/Title: 2026 Annual Service Plan

Ward(s) Affected: (City Wide)

Recommendations

- 1) That the Chair of the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health **BE AUTHORIZED** and **BE DIRECTED** to submit the 2026 Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health, in keeping with the information outlined in Report BOH26010.

Key Facts

- The purpose of Report BOH26010 and its accompanying presentation is to seek approval to submit the 2026 Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health;
- Under the Ontario Public Health Standards, boards of health are required to submit an Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health to receive Provincial funding to support the delivery of mandatory public health programs and services;
- The Annual Service Plan is informed by Hamilton Public Health Services' multi-year priorities; and,
- Report BOH26010 and its accompanying presentation provide a strategic overview of Hamilton Public Health's multi-year priorities, which have been informed by feedback from members of the Board of Health, local population health needs, and evidence.

Financial Considerations

Hamilton Public Health delivers a wide range of programs and services to meet the requirements set out in the Ontario Public Health Standards. Most programs are funded using a provincial/municipal cost-shared model, except for the Ontario Seniors Dental

Care Program, which is 100% provincially funded. Hamilton Public Health also provides additional services beyond those required under the Ontario Public Health Standards to address local needs, including Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Services, the Municipal Dental Treatment Program, and Child and Adolescent Services. These services are not included in the Annual Service Plan. If the Board of Health determines that additional public health services are needed beyond those under the Ontario Public Health Standards, an associated funding source would need to be sought and approved by the Board of Health.

The financial components of the 2026 Annual Service Plan were addressed within the overall Hamilton Public Health budget, as initially approved by the Board of Health on December 1, 2026 (Report BOH25028) and amended at its meeting of January 26, 2026.

The total 2026 Annual Service Plan expenditures are \$51.7 M (or 82.1%) of the total \$65.5 M Hamilton Public Health gross budget. This reflects a 2.1% increase in gross Annual Service Plan expenditures compared to 2025. The anticipated provincial subsidies and fees for the 2026 Annual Service Plan total \$34.5 M, which is a \$0.3 M increase over 2025 or 1%. The net City levy contribution related to the 2026 Service Plan is \$17.2 M, a 4.9% increase over 2025.

In the 2026 Annual Service Plan the total staffing is 338.1 FTE, which represents a decrease of 1.0 FTE compared to the 339.1 FTE in 2025. The reduction in 1.0 FTE is due to clarification of assignment between the Annual Service Plan and Healthy Babies Healthy Children programs. Overall, there is no change in Hamilton Public Health complement from 2025.

Background

Boards of health are required to approve and submit an Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health each year in order to receiving provincial funding for the delivery of mandatory public health programs and services. The Annual Service Plan outlines how Ministry funded programs and resources will be allocated in the coming year and includes multi-year priorities. These priorities are established by the Public Health Leadership Team through a process that considers multiple inputs including data, local need, and evidence.

Following Board approval, Hamilton Public Health will submit the 2026 Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health. This submission concludes the 2026 planning process.

Analysis

Development of the Multi-Year Priorities

The multi-year priorities represent the most significant public health issues facing the community. Drawing on feedback from members of the Board of Health, Hamilton Public Health reviews the Annual Service Plan and Budget priorities on an annual basis to guide program planning and resource allocation for the coming year. This review ensures Hamilton Public Health programs and services remain relevant and responsive

to evolving community needs based on updated community health status information as well as evolving best practices and research.

In feedback from members of the Board of Health received in July 2025, members highlighted the continued relevance of the current multi-year priorities for 2026 planning. The 2026 priorities balance the need for continuity in addressing persistent public health challenges and refinement in response to emerging trends and system pressures, including discussions resulting from the release of the draft Ontario Public Health Standards.

Based on the feedback from members of the Board, a new framework has been introduced with foundational principles that underpin all multi-year priorities and the daily work of teams. These foundational principles ensure services are planned and delivered with consistency, integrity, and accountability.

The following sections give an overview of each of the multi-year priority areas and foundational principles that are in the 2026 Annual Service Plan and Budget, including relevant data and context, planned efforts to impact these areas in 2026, and select highlights of 2025 initiatives. A detailed performance report related to work completed in 2025 will be shared with the Board of Health in Q2 2026.

Priority: Child and Youth Healthy Growth and Development

Healthy growth and development in the early years lays the foundation for lifelong health and well-being; however, not all children in Hamilton have the best start to life. Maternal mental health concerns continue to rise, with increasing rates of anxiety and depression among residents who have recently given birth. Many children entering kindergarten are vulnerable in at least one area of early development, with the highest levels of vulnerability related to physical health and well-being. Secondary school students report declining mental and emotional health, along with a reduced sense of school belonging. In addition, many children and youth experience barriers to receiving regular dental care, with significant inequities in oral health needs among children in priority populations.

In response to these trends, this priority aims to foster equitable and culturally safe healthy growth and development among children and youth and build the foundations for lifelong health and well-being.

The Annual Service Plan for 2026 focuses on both universal and targeted interventions across the early life course with an emphasis on strengthening safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships and environments, and enhancing timely and equitable access to preventive services that build a strong foundation for healthy growth and development. Specific public health action areas include:

- Building resiliency for pregnant people, infants, children, youth, and families;
- Improving the oral health of children and youth who belong to priority populations; and,
- Increasing vaccine coverage rates for all routine immunizations among children and youth.

This direction builds on progress made in 2025 where the Vaccine Program successfully carried out the first year of the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* enforcement post COVID-19 pandemic and saw Hamilton students in compliance with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* increase from 61.7% to 98.9% by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. Strengthening routine childhood immunization reflects the dual focus on population-level protection and targeted supports for families and children facing barriers to accessing routine preventive care.

Priority: Climate-Related Environmental Health Risks

Climate change continues to impact the health of our community through rising temperatures, air pollution, and a wider spread of vector-borne diseases. As the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events such as wildfires and heatwaves increase due to climate change, public health emergency preparedness must consider climate risks to build community resilience.

The goal of this priority is to promote healthy built and natural environments that support health and mitigate existing and emerging risks, including the impacts of a changing climate, and to enable consistent and effective management of emergency situations.

In the 2026 Service Plan, work related to this priority strengthens surveillance, preparedness, and targeted interventions to protect populations most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change, including rising vector-borne disease risks and increasing exposure to extreme heat. There will be a particular focus in 2026 on strengthening communication with the public to share information on how they can protect their health. One example of this work is the roll-out of a multi-channel communications plan focused on increasing the public's awareness of preventative strategies against tick-borne illnesses. Other action areas include:

- Conducting environmental monitoring, surveillance, and public awareness to reduce the incidence of climate sensitive vector-borne diseases;
- Implementing activities aimed at reducing heat-related impacts;
- Responding to health impacts resulting from poor ambient air quality;
- Enabling the public to take precautions against poor ambient air quality through monitoring and communications; and,
- Increasing preparedness and public awareness to respond to threats related to climate change.

This work is a continuation of successful efforts in 2025 when 500 cool kits were distributed to heat-vulnerable and unhoused residents using vulnerability mapping. To build preparedness for more frequent and intense extreme weather events Hamilton Public Health also partnered with the City's Emergency Management Program to conduct an extreme heat tabletop emergency exercise.

Priority: Substance Use Prevention

Substance use is a major driver of preventable and premature deaths in Hamilton. The majority of substance use morbidity and mortality is due to alcohol, tobacco and opioids, which account for over 1,000 deaths within Hamilton annually. Alcohol is the most used substance and causes approximately 1,073 hospitalizations and 9,123 emergency department visits each year. Tobacco use is declining but it is still common, and

concerns remain among youth due to their use of other nicotine products (e.g., vapes, pouches). While opioid-related deaths have decreased since peaking in 2021, they remain a top cause of premature death in Hamilton. However, non-medical opioid use (i.e., reported use without a prescription) more than doubled between 2019 and 2023 (9.5% to 21.7%) among Hamilton youth underscoring the need for upstream prevention approaches.

Informed by this context, the goal of this priority is to prevent substance use-related health and social harms in Hamilton by addressing risks and strengthening supports for individuals and communities.

In the 2026 Service Plan, work related to this priority highlights Hamilton Public Health's unique role in addressing upstream factors that influence substance use and related harms. Specific action areas include:

- Increasing safety and accessibility in services by embedding trauma, violence and gender informed approaches, and implementing effective screening for substance use;
- Improving health outcomes for individuals at increased risk of harms associated with substance use;
- Collaborating with youth and community partners to implement strategies to reduce substance use and related harms in youth and young adults; and,
- Increasing collaboration and information sharing to advance a community-based response to substance use.

This 2026 priority builds on work undertaken in previous years to support a system-wide response to substance use, particularly efforts to strengthen cross-sector collaboration, coordination, and information sharing to prevent substance use-related harms. One example of this from 2025, is the Mass Drug Poisoning Emergency Exercise. This event was facilitated by Hamilton Public Health in October 2025 and brought together City staff and 14 community partners to increase preparedness and capacity to respond to potential surges in drug poisoning events in Hamilton.

Foundational Principle: Equity-Driven Public Health and Upholding Indigenous Inherent Rights

Hamilton is home to a diverse population, shaped by many cultures, identities, and lived experiences. This diversity strengthens our community, yet also means residents experience social and structural conditions in different ways. These conditions, such as income, education, colonization, racialization, family structure, and housing, shape the circumstances of daily life, influence access to resources, and create uneven opportunities for health and well-being across communities. Collectively, these forces contribute to persistent health inequities in Hamilton which are evident across nearly all health outcomes. For example, Hamiltonians living in areas with the lowest household incomes were nearly three times more likely to die from diabetes, nearly five-times more likely to self-harm, and nearly six times more likely to be assaulted.

This foundational principle is integrated across all priorities and programs with a focus on two goals: advancing health equity with the community by mitigating the harmful impacts and enhancing the supportive aspects of the social and structural determinants

of health; and, supporting Indigenous communities in exercising their Inherent Rights, through allyship and sustained support. Specific action areas in 2026 include:

- Embedding equity and Indigenous inherent rights as foundational values of Hamilton Public Health to foster ownership, sustainability, and meaningful action on the social and structural determinants of health;
- Enhancing the collection and use of social determinants of health data to deepen the understanding of local health inequities, identify root causes, support informed decisions, and drive collective action; and,
- Engaging with priority populations to shape public health practices using culturally safe, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches, with tailored strategies that uphold Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-determination.

Ongoing commitment to meaningful community engagement can be seen in the establishment of the Indigenous Well-Being Advisory Circle in 2025. The Circle serves as a resource for Hamilton Public Health and other community organizations, providing cultural perspectives and expertise to advance self-determination and ensure health initiatives and programs are inclusive, culturally safe for Indigenous people, and respectful of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis knowledges and practices. This important work directly responds to the Board of Health's interest in having more clear, accessible communication to build public trust, especially with key populations.

"Through its ongoing work, the Circle embodies the principle of "Nothing for Us; Without Us" by honouring Indigenous self-determination and ensuring that Indigenous people are drivers in shaping the policies and services that impact their health and well-being. I thank Hamilton Public Health Services and the Hamilton Board of Health for their continued commitment to Indigenous-led governance and accountability, and we look forward to continued collaboration in support of Indigenous health equity and community-driven solutions."

– Kelly Gordon, Indigenous Well-Being Advisory Circle member

Foundational Principle: Organizational Capacity

The organizational capacity principle is a new addition for 2026. It focuses on strengthening the systems, workforce, and infrastructure that support all public health programs. The primary means of delivering public health services to the community is through the expertise and hard work of public health staff. At the same time, all public health services are supported in some way by technology, whether through electronic record-keeping, analysis of data or communication of important health information. As technology quickly evolves and pressures on services expand within tight resources, the capacity of our people and technology are key to efficient, effective, client-centred programs and services.

The goals of this principle are to ensure that Hamilton Public Health Services has the necessary organizational capacity required to effectively respond to surges in operational demand, such as seasonal service level demands, emerging public health priorities, outbreaks, pandemics, and other emergencies, while maintaining essential public health services and to enhance public health

practice, productivity, efficiency, and client experience through strategic use of technology.

Public health is a dynamic field that continues to evolve, and an adaptable, responsive workforce supported by the right technology is essential to address the increasingly complex and acute health concerns in the community. In 2026, efforts focus on:

- Ensuring Hamilton Public Health has workforce recruitment and retention, performance management, and operational and occupational health and safety policies, procedures and practices that support a flexible public health workforce model;
- Ensuring Hamilton Public Health's workforce is:
 - (a) Cross trained in public health core competencies; and,
 - (b) Has adaptable skills to respond to surge capacity scenarios, outbreaks, and pandemics as well as other emergencies, while maintaining essential public health services;
- Strengthening a culture where continuous quality improvement is a shared mindset and everyday practice, along with performance measurement and evaluation to enhance effective and efficient service delivery;
- Advancing the maturity of Hamilton Public Health Services' Information Governance; and,
- Achieving the strategic use of existing and new technology.

These action areas build upon successes from 2025 which included using technology to improve client experience while safeguarding privacy in the Dental Program, as well as enhancing the flexibility and adaptability of our workforce by applying lessons learned from internal staff deployments for the measles response in 2025. These lessons are applicable across several other programs and will inform the continuous improvement approach to service delivery.

2027 Planning Process

The 2027 planning process begins in Q2 2026. The first step is engaging with Board of Health members to once again gather their insights regarding Hamilton Public Health's multi-year priorities and other strategic considerations for 2027. In 2026, the intention is to conduct these feedback meetings with Board members earlier in the planning process. Invitations will be sent to all Board of Health members in March 2026 to schedule meetings with the Office of the Medical Officer of Health in April 2026. The participation of each Board of Health member in this process contributes to the development of a robust and thoughtful Annual Service Plan.

Alternatives

As noted above, submission of the 2026 Annual Service Plan to the Ministry of Health is tied to funding. If the document is not submitted in accordance with Ministry deadlines, Hamilton Public Health's programs and services, including priority work, may not be

resourced appropriately, and may lead to further direction from the Province regarding reporting or programming.

Previous Reports Submitted

- [BOH25028](#) – Public Health Services' 2026 Proposed Budget
Outlines Hamilton Public Health's 2026 proposed budget, including key contextual factors, funding models, and cost drivers.

Consultation

- Finance & Administration, Healthy and Safe Communities Department

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Not Applicable.

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