



City of Hamilton

Report for Information

To: Mayor and Members
Audit, Finance and Administration Committee

Date: April 16, 2026

Report No: HUR23007(a)

Subject/Title: Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Progress Update

Ward(s) Affected: City Wide

Recommendations

- a) That Report HUR23007(a), respecting Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Progress Update, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- This Report constitutes a progress update on the initiatives and actions within the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2026, HUR23007.

Financial Considerations

Not applicable.

Background

City of Hamilton's first corporate Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was approved in 2016 by the Senior Leadership Team and City Council. The Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was updated in 2019 and again in 2023 to the current iteration.

The goals of the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy include:

1. Raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and reduce stigma associated with mental illness.
2. Provide people leaders with the skills, knowledge, tools and supports they need to create a workplace that supports positive mental health and wellbeing.
3. Provide employees with the skills, knowledge, tools and supports they need to improve personal resilience and achieve optimal mental health and wellbeing.
4. Create a sustainability plan.

The Strategy is also guided by the following principles:

1. The strategy and programs are based on evidence-based best practices.
2. The strategy aligns with our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility work.
3. Employee mental health and wellbeing is a key consideration in decision making.
4. Everyone in the workplace has a role to play in creating and supporting a workplace that promotes mental health and wellbeing.
5. Each employee has responsibility for their health and behaviour.
6. Creating a workplace that supports mental health and wellbeing is only possible if aligned with our Culture Pillars.
7. Sensitive employee health information stays confidential.

Analysis

The Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, approved by Council (May 18, 2023) and (HUR23007) has four (4) key areas of focus with specific initiatives and actions that support the advancement of the strategy. A summary of the four key areas and initiatives are provided in the chart below.

1) Embedding the Strategy into Our Culture

Living this strategy daily is critical for improving the overall health of employees, facilitating healthy and safe returns to work, and ensuring that both physical and psychological health and safety are prioritized.

2) Leadership Support

Leadership is expected to model and support these activities daily through various modalities: team meetings, education, participation, active acknowledgement of mental health and wellbeing being a priority.

3) Employee Accountability

Employees are accountable for taking advantage of supports available to ensure workplace wellness is a key priority for themselves and their coworkers.

4) Facilitating Access to Key Resources

Employees are made aware of resources through regular communication and direct access when needed. Communications include targeted people leader emails, the Human Resources monthly newsletter for People Leaders, and updates through the internal intranet site Howi.

The following elaborates on the initiatives managed through Human Resources for the execution of Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

1) Embedding the Strategy into Our Culture

With support from the Senior Leadership Team, a cross-organization Psychological Health and Safety Action Committee has recently been re-established with a renewed

focus on supporting the advancement of psychological health across the organization.

This Action Committee builds on the work of the previous Mental Health Action Committee and aims to recommend a path forward for the organization as a new strategy is developed. The Action Committee includes people leader and employee representatives from across all departments committed to

- raising awareness of mental and psychological health and reducing stigma associated with mental illness;
- supporting identifying psychosocial hazards and opportunities to mitigate risks;
- providing guidance and support on the implementation and evaluation of the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- supporting alignment with the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety; and
- providing strategic guidance on future healthy workplace strategy development.

Other initiatives supported for the advancement of the Strategy include:

- 1) Updating the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.
 - i. The Policy was reviewed and updated in July 2024 to ensure it continues to meet our organizational objectives.
- 2) Evaluating hybrid work models that allow working from home arrangements.
 - i. Specific questions pertaining to the impact of work from home arrangements were included in the 2025 Our People Survey to meet this directive. Evaluation will occur once the Our People Survey results are available along with associated Action Plans.
- 3) Keeping positive mental health and wellbeing at the top of employees' minds.

- i. Mental health and wellbeing communications are shared regularly through various means such as the internal intranet site Howi, targeted emails, and our People Leader Human Resources newsletter.
- ii. Regular communications include resources, tools, upcoming webinars, and service provider campaigns. Examples include financial health webinars through Manulife, toolkits provided by Homewood Health such as managing uncertainty, and physical stretch break videos through service provider LifeSpeak.
- iii. These communications align with national mental health awareness days, such as Mental Health Awareness Week in May and Suicide Prevention Day in September. Communications involve collaboration with the Diversity and Inclusion team, where appropriate.
- iv. Leaders can book a Wellness Roadshow for their teams that provides an overview of the internal services and resources available to employees and their dependent family members such as our Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), LifeSpeak, Policies, benefits, training, resources on Howi, etc.
- v. Homewood Health, our Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), provides enhanced services through Pathfinder which tailors personalized care plans and service recommendations based on the employee's unique presenting concerns. It includes an assessment of the severity of concerns and combines the optimal clinical solution with unique preferences to create a customized and curated care path. Through Homeweb.ca, Homewood Health's online platform, EFAP members also have access to counsellor assisted online cognitive behaviour therapy (iCBT).

Table 1: EFAP utilization from 2022 to 2025

Utilization	Percentage			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total Service Utilization	12.0	12.0	13.9	12.3
Municipal Sector Average	12.6	11.5	11.7	10.3
Public Administration Average	13.2	8.6	11.0	10.8

Note: EFAP is available to all employee groups including full-time, part-time, permanent and temporary.

A decrease in service utilization from 2024 to 2025 was consistent across municipal and public administration benchmarks. Despite this decrease, utilization rates continue to trend higher than benchmark comparatives.

Table 2: EFAP Utilization by Service Type from 2022 to 2025

Service Type	Percentage			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Counselling Services	78.1	80.4	76.4	71.8
Life Smart Coaching	19.6	18.9	22.7	24.2
Online Services	2.3	0.7	1.0	4.0

Throughout 2025, engagement was seen in areas with lower usage such as online e-Courses and the online Health Risk Self-Assessment.

Table 3: Reasons for EFAP Counselling Services from 2022 to 2025

Reason	Percentage			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Addiction	1.5	3.0	2.8	2.7
Crisis/Trauma	6.3	5.2	4.7	4.7
Culture & Identity	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.2
Family	9.9	7.4	9.1	11.0
Health	1.2	1.2	2.0	2.3
Marital/Relationship	21.3	18.2	18.5	17.3
Psychological	48.8	52.6	52.1	50.3
Social	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.0

Work	10.1	10.8	9.4	10.7
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Psychological related support continues to be the top reason individuals use counselling services. Psychological support includes categories such as anger, anxiety, depression, grief, life transitions, self-esteem, online cognitive behavioural therapy, post trauma outside of work, stress, etc. Within psychological, stress and anxiety remain the top categories individuals are receiving support for.

- vi. Employees and their families have access to LifeSpeak, a confidential web-based service with expert-led content on a wide variety of health and wellness topics. Content is available through videos, articles and monthly live Q&A. Topics include fitness, mental health, nutrition, mindfulness, physical health, personal growth, parenting and caregiving, and addictive behaviours. In Q4 of 2025, LifeSpeak updated their platform to include a greater focus on physical health through thousands of on-demand fitness videos, stretch breaks for the workday, nutrition advice, as well as a more robust library of mindfulness-based resources. With the updated platform, employees and their family members have access to 100+ goal-based programs and can save content on their account for easy access whenever it's most convenient.

Table 4: City-wide LifeSpeak usage by year

	2023	2024	2025
Number of resources accessed	5246	6195	4501

In 2025, there was a decrease in LifeSpeak usage that may be attributed to the platform update as all users are required to create an account, regardless of past use. This new process has been communicated through the Human Resources monthly newsletter for people leaders, on the intranet sites eNet and Howi, and continues to be shared through Wellness Roadshows.

- vii. “Being a Mindful Employee: An Orientation to Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace” learning program, hosted by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), is available to all employees in the Learning Management System.
- 4) Enhancing supports by incorporating Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)
- i. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy has been updated to include the use of accessible format, as well as plain and inclusive language.
 - ii. Homewood Health, the City’s EFAP provider, demonstrates their commitment to IDEA related initiatives through a variety of their services. Accordingly, Homewood Health now provides approximately 60 languages that are spoken within their counselling network, and the ability to use a telephonic translator service is available, including access to ASL translation. Employees and their eligible family members can request a clinician based on culture, language preference and gender. Clinicians with expertise supporting Indigenous People and the LGBTQIA+ community are also available.
 - iii. Our Employee and Family Assistance Program also offers support through their website, homeweb.ca. The website includes numerous articles and resources related to IDEA, such as a webinar on inclusion and belonging in the workplace.
 - iv. Our service provider LifeSpeak has over 75 IDEA related resources available. Examples include:
 - Recognizing unconscious bias at work (video)
 - For leaders: Top 10 tips for an inclusive workplace (article)
 - How does trauma-informed practice fit into the diversity, equity, & inclusion equation? (video)

5) Integrate strategy into a broader Employee Wellness Strategy

- i. A key deliverable of The Psychological Health and Safety Action Committee is to support the development of this broader strategy.

2) Leadership Support

a) Create People Leader training

- i. Previously, leaders had the option of attending the Mental Health Leadership Certificate Program through partnership with LifeWorks and Queen's University, or attending The Working Mind through Opening Minds, Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Working Mind for Managers is an evidence-based program focused on increasing awareness of mental health as a continuum and how to recognize declining mental health in self and others, reducing stigma in the workplace, teaching coping strategies for stress management and resiliency, and empowering leaders with the knowledge and confidence to support their team's mental health. The Working Mind for Managers is required training to help equip leadership with the necessary skills.
- ii. The City now relies on an internal team of certified trainers for The Working Mind to meet the needs of the organization. In Q3 and Q4 of 2025, eight (8) additional Human Resources professionals became certified to facilitate The Working Mind in a response to increase capacity. As of December 31, 2025, 478 active leaders have completed the required mental health training.
- iii. Session feedback is collected through My Learning Connection for The Working Mind for Managers. Leaders that completed the survey indicate a very positive experience averaging a rating of 4.3 out of 5. Resources from the training are available on the intranet site Howi for leaders to access and incorporate into their leadership practices.

- iv. In response to emerging organizational needs, suicide support resources and training have been made available. A resource bulletin has been developed to assist employees and people leaders with how to talk about suicide, actions that can be taken at various risk levels, and the available trainings and resources. A dedicated page has also been developed on Howi with additional toolkits and resources for suicide support.
 - v. Applied Suicide Intervention Training (ASIST) and safeTALK were offered corporately in 2025 through a third party provider for leaders and employees. ASIST is a two-day workshop that teaches individuals how to recognize when someone may be thinking about suicide, how to provide a skilled intervention, and how to connect the individual with further support. safeTALK is a half day workshop that provides individuals with the skills and knowledge to connect someone who is thinking about suicide with the appropriate support. Corporately, 53 employees received ASIST and 24 have been trained in safeTALK.
- b) Develop supports for mental health related action plans arising from Our People Survey.
- i. This deliverable will rely on the 2025 Our People Survey results and related action plans being available which is currently in the process of being finalized. With this information, common challenges and opportunities will be identified to help determine the types of tools and resources needed.
 - ii. In the meantime, psychological health and safety resource bulletins are developed monthly for people leaders to increase knowledge of psychological health and safety practices in the workplace and provide practical actions leaders can implement with their teams.

3) Employee Accountability

- a) Raise awareness of supports available to employees with caregiver responsibilities.
 - i. Caregivers have access to a newly developed dedicated Caregiver page on Howi with associated policies, procedures, and resources. This includes a guide for people leaders when supporting employees with caregiver responsibilities.
 - ii. Our EFAP and LifeSpeak service provide resources related to this topic, such as an elder and childcare locator that helps individuals identify the relevant supports available in their community.
 - iii. Caregiver resources have been highlighted through a variety of campaigns including monthly wellness news, and a dedicated LifeSpeak campaign.
 - iv. Virtual information sessions were provided by Homewood Health to working parents as part of the Healthy Workplace Month campaign in October 2025.

- b) Increase knowledge of de-escalation techniques.
 - i. In June 2025, corporate training transitioned from Non-Violent Crisis Intervention to Verbal Intervention Training to better meet the needs of the organization. The updated training focuses on verbal de-escalation, equipping employees with the skills and strategies needed to respond effectively to individuals in distress, using a person-centered and trauma-informed approach. Since the transition, 17 employees have received the Corporate Verbal Intervention training. From 2023 to June of 2025, 199 employees received corporate Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training. Some departments and divisions host their own training sessions, which are not reflected in the corporate numbers.

- ii. Situational Awareness e-learning is available to all employees in My Learning Connection. Since the launch of this training in 2024, over 775 employees have been trained. This learning is managed by Corporate Safety and Security and has been communicated across the organization.
 - iii. Resource documents have been developed to support knowledge and access of information including:
 - Tips for de-escalation
 - Resources to support violence prevention
- c) Update the existing Zero Tolerance Program.
- i. The RZone Respectful Environments Policy continues to promote safe, positive, and supportive environments and interactions for all members of the public and City employees across City facilities, parks, spaces, programs, and events.
 - ii. Human Resources, in collaboration with Communications, developed and delivered a City wide campaign to promote the implementation of RZone which was launched in September of 2024. A variety of implementation resources are available on eNet and Howi such as procedures, online reporting form, checklists, and signage.
 - iii. An internal working group was established to support leaders and employees with implementing the RZone Policy across all operations and spaces at the City. For example, identifying specific operational needs and resources such as signs or stickers.
 - iv. Over 8500 employees and leaders have received the required training to enable implementation of the policy. Internal RZone reports are maintained by Corporate Safety and Security. People leaders investigate RZone incidents and take appropriate action. External reports made by the public are managed by the operational area impacted.

Table 5: Number of RZone Reports in 2024 and 2025

	September 2024	2025
External (public)	3	24
Internal (supervisor)	32	299

4) Facilitating Access to Key Resources

a) Centralize on-line resources.

- i. Since the transition of Howi to the SharePoint platform in 2024, an abundance of wellness resources have been added to the dedicated Health, Safety and Wellness page, with direct access to some pages from Howi’s homepage. The number of views per page is monitored and provides insight into content and resources employees may be connecting with most.

Table 6: Wellness Resource Pages on Howi

Resource Page	Number of Views
Caregiver Resources	100+
Employee and Family Assistance Program	3200+
Ergonomics	335+
LifeSpeak	800+
Perkopolis	265+
Psychological Health and Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes sub resources related to grief, change and transition, crisis support, suicide support, personal safety, and community resources. 	415+
RZone	3600+
Workplace Violence	390+

- b) Develop guidance documents for stakeholders involved in current employee mental health disability management.

- i. The Canadian Standards Association states that the cost of a workplace disability leave for mental illness is two times higher than a physical illness disability leave. To support this initiative, collaboration with the Return-to-Work Services Team regarding current practices in place to support people leaders, employees, and the Specialists is occurring. A guide for people leaders on how to support employees who are on and returning from a medical leave is in development.
- c) Research application of Peer Support resources into operational areas outside of current programs.
 - i. Critical Incident Peer Support provides peer-to-peer support following events that are overwhelming and outside the range of everyday experience. Peer support members are City employees trained in Critical Incident Stress Management, with interventions designed to reduce physical and emotional symptoms associated with an event, accelerate the recovery process, and provide individuals with further resources as needed.

Table 7: Critical Incident Peer Support Engagements from 2023 to 2025

	2023	2024	2025
Number of engagements	19	23	25

- ii. Hamilton Street Rail (HSR) and Ontario Works (OW) identified a need for their own Peer Support Teams to best support their teams which have unique challenges and stressors. With guidance from the City’s Critical Incident Peer Support Coordinator, HSR and OW have developed, trained, and launched their Peer Support Teams.

Next Steps

With the close of the current strategy on the horizon, Human Resources is now focusing efforts on the development of a new strategy that will guide the organization over the next four years. The new strategy will be informed by key data, outcomes, experiences, and opportunities identified through the implementation of the current strategy, as well as new insights gained through benchmarking, research, environmental scanning, and data analysis.

The strategy development process will engage key stakeholders, particularly the Psychological Health and Safety Action Committee will continue to have an important role ensuring employee perspectives and lived experiences are appropriately represented.

The new strategy is intended to strengthen communication and awareness across the organization, while placing increased focus on preventing psychosocial hazards, mitigating risks, and supporting a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Actions within the current Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy will continue advancing. The 2027 to 2030 strategy is expected to be presented to Council for approval in early 2027.

Alternatives

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This information report contributes to Council's Priorities by supporting Responsiveness and Transparency regarding strategic actions involving the health and wellbeing of employees, contributing to building a higher performing public service.

Previous Reports Submitted

- [Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Report \(HUR23007\)](#)

Consultation

Not applicable.

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A: HUR23007 Maintaining Workplaces that Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

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