
REPORT TITLE: Healthy Babies Healthy Children Funding - Supporting Peel's Vulnerable Families

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Director responsible for the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program be authorized to approve the allocation, payment and transfer of provincial HBHC funding to community not-for-profit organizations to effectively support the Region of Peel's delivery of the HBHC program;

And further, that the Director responsible for the HBHC program be authorized to execute all documents required to complete the allocation, payment and transfer of HBHC funding.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- HBHC is a 100 per cent provincially funded program aimed at improving newborn and children's healthy growth and development and reducing health inequities for families of young children. It has historically been delivered almost exclusively by the Region of Peel.
- Due to COVID-19's impact in Peel, more than 80 per cent of the HBHC workforce has been redeployed to the pandemic response, thus resulting in a funding surplus.
- In response, Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) is giving the Region permission to use this year's projected HBHC funding surplus to fund early-years-focused organizations that provide early intervention services to children and families in Peel, provided those services are consistent with the goals of the HBHC program.
- It is possible MCCSS may allow the Region to make similar short-term funding agreements in the future if and when funds become available.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

a) Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program

The Region of Peel has a longstanding Transfer Payment Agreement with the MCCSS for Peel Public Health to receive annual funding to manage and deliver the required components of the HBHC pursuant to section 7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. Specifically, HBHC is a 100 per cent provincially funded program.

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The goal of HBHC is to optimize newborn and child healthy growth and development (0-6 years old) and reduce health inequities for families. It meets its goal through direct service by Region employees (Public Health Nurses and Family Visitors) as well as through referrals to community organizations that provide services aligned with HBHC's goals (e.g., BridgeWay Family Centre, Malton Neighbourhood Services, and Caledon Parent-Child Centre).

The HBHC program in Peel has historically been delivered exclusively by Region of Peel employees, with the exception that BridgeWay Family Centre has partnered with HBHC to deliver the Teen Prenatal Supper Club.

b) Pandemic's Impact on the HBHC program

Public Health Nurses (PHNs) and Family Visitors – the staff normally dedicated to delivering service directly to vulnerable families – have been unable to provide their usual services because more than 80 per cent of the HBHC workforce has been redeployed to the pandemic response (e.g., mass vaccination; case and contact management). Therefore, there will be significant underspending of the HBHC annual allocation this year.

As a result of significantly reduced HBHC staffing, the Region has only been able to directly support the highest of high-risk clients through a PHN-only service delivery model. Additionally, each client's time in the program is greatly reduced from what it would be in non-pandemic times. Consequently, HBHC has been significantly relying on referrals to a core group of agencies that have long-provided early intervention services to Peel's vulnerable families (BridgeWay Family Centre, Malton Neighbourhood Services, Dixie-Bloor Neighbourhood Centre, Vita Centre and Caledon Parent-Child Centre).

c) Financial Flexibility in the HBHC Annual Service Plan

After HBHC submitted its 2021/22 Annual Service Plan to MCCSS, wherein we identified that the majority of our staff would not return to the program until 2022, we were notified that, in recognition of the pandemic's severe impact on Peel, MCCSS will provide the Region with financial flexibility to use its forecasted surplus to fund not-for-profit organizations that provide early intervention services to children and families in Peel, provided those services are consistent with the goals of the HBHC program.

As such, MCCSS asked the Region to quickly identify third-party programs that could help fill some of pandemic-caused gaps in HBHC service. MCCSS has reviewed and approved the Region's proposal. The Region is responsible for preparing the funding agreements and flowing the proposed amounts of HBHC funds to the organizations to help them build their capacity to deliver services consistent with the goals of the HBHC program.

d) Proposed Use of Surplus HBHC Funds

In communication with HBHC's most frequent referral agencies, the Region learned that because of the pandemic, those agencies have been experiencing demand for their services at levels significantly higher than usual and far beyond what they have been capable of providing. Those agencies indicated that, with additional funding, they could expand their well-established programs and thus serve nearly 23,000 more of Peel's

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most vulnerable children and families. Therefore, HBHC proposed the following programs be funded from its surplus to achieve outcomes consistent with the goals of the HBHC program:

HBHC Target Issue	Program Description
Early Childhood Nutrition	Weekly online group meetings to help prepare nutritious, low-cost meals with families.
Children's Healthy Growth and Development	Online programming designed to increase parents' skill at parenting and decrease the likelihood of family violence; and help parents interact with their babies in ways that promote secure attachment, communication and brain development.
Food Insecurity	Food vouchers for financially vulnerable pregnant women and teens, as well as families with young children.
Financial Insecurity	Teaching financial literacy and budgeting skills to new parents.
Parental Mental Health	Social workers to help address the greater-than-usual demand for mental health services for families.

In addition, MCCSS recommended that the Region dialogue with the New Mom Project, along with our community agencies, to determine how "Baby Bundles" (a package of diapers, baby wipes, baby toiletries, receiving blankets and baby pajamas) could be effectively distributed to Peel's most vulnerable families utilizing a portion of the HBHC funding. With the help of the Region's Community Response Table, 14 Peel agencies requested over 4,200 Baby Bundles be delivered to their vulnerable clients.

In sum, to date the Province has approved the following agencies to receive the following HBHC funding allocations to build their capacity to deliver the programs described above:

BridgeWay Family Centre	\$251,238
Caledon Parent-Child Centre	\$7,260
Dixie-Bloor Neighbourhood Services	\$33,500
Malton Neighbourhood Services	\$66,600
New Mom Project	\$631,800
Vita Centre	\$30,590
	<u>\$1,021,038</u>

e) Future Funding Agreements

MCCSS has approved the Region's allocation of HBHC funding to third-party community organizations in the past. MCCSS has also indicated that the financial flexibility granted to Peel's HBHC program this year may occur, from time to time, in future years.

As such, staff recommends that the Director responsible for the HBHC program be delegated the authority to approve the allocation and transfer of HBHC funding to community organizations as the Director deems advisable and reasonably required to effectively support the Region's delivery of the HBHC program, and to execute any documents required. This will enable HBHC to quickly and effectively respond to such opportunities to collaborate with MCCSS and our community partners to better serve Peel's most vulnerable children and their families.

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RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The risks associated with this recommendation are low. The HBHC funding is 100 per cent provincial funding; the Province is approving the funding allocations based on their alignment with HBHC's goals; and the Director is well positioned to make decisions regarding funding allocations to community organizations that are advisable and reasonably required to effectively support the Region's delivery of the HBHC program. Legal Services has worked with HBHC to develop funding agreements.

Due to the Province's tight timeline for approval, HBHC has reached out to early-years-focused agencies it had longstanding referral and collaborative relationships with. The programs to be funded are well utilized by families with young children. They are run by agencies with proven track records providing service to vulnerable families, and residents in all three municipalities will be receiving support through this funding.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

HBHC is a 100 per cent provincially funded program (frozen at \$6.9 million since 2008). This year's unusual surplus is the result of HBHC staff being redeployed to the pandemic response. As of April 1, 2021, MCCSS advised the surplus cannot be spent on redeployed staff or COVID-19 costs.

Due to the pandemic, many community organizations in Peel are experiencing demand that exceeds the funds available to them. Flowing HBHC's surplus funds to third-party community organizations (as approved by MCCSS) is an opportunity to direct the surplus funds where they can well serve Peel's vulnerable children and families. Unspent HBHC funds at year-end would need to be returned to the Province so there is no net financial impact to the Region resulting from this recommendation.

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