

Client & Community Support – 2025 Year in Review

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

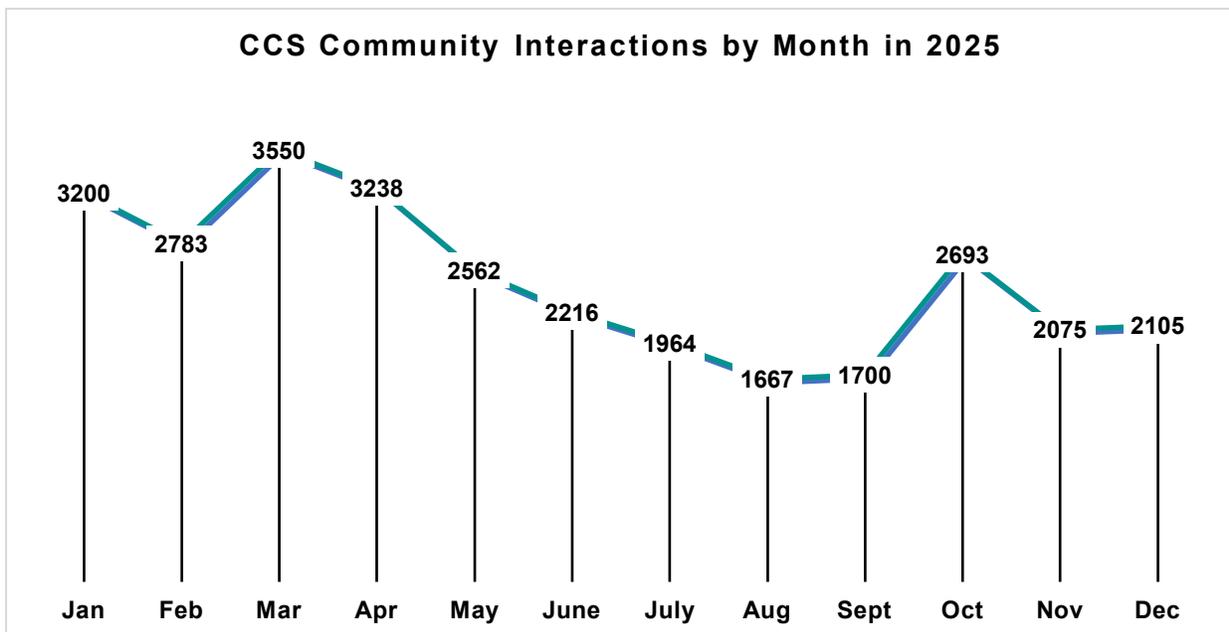
- Client and Community Support (CCS) is a multidisciplinary team focused on helping community members navigate internal services and external resources.
- In 2025, CCS engaged with the community over 29,000 times. The most common inquiries were related to immunizations, service navigation or clinical services.
- As community needs evolved throughout the year, CCS prioritized program expansion to better support internal teams, community members and partners across the system.
- Noteworthy initiatives included leveraging AI tools, launching a direct line for healthcare providers, enhancing office nurse presence, processing Healthy Babies Healthy Children program referrals, and engaging with the community to advance healthy growth and development goals.
- In 2026, CCS will continue to explore innovative initiatives that enhance equity-focused client and community support.

Background

Client and Community Support (CCS) is a multidisciplinary team focused on helping community members navigate internal public health services and external resources. The team is comprised of public health nurses and receptionists that engage with the community through various channels including by telephone, in-person, email, fax and chatbot. These interactions facilitate the delivery of evidence-based health information that encourage clients to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. In addition to responding to community inquiries, the CCS's work contributes to both Healthy Growth and Development and Vision Health as outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS).¹

In 2025, the CCS Team managed over 29,000 client interactions across all public health program areas, averaging 2,479 monthly interactions (Figure 1). As community needs evolved throughout the year, opportunities emerged to enhance client and community support. CCS prioritized program expansion by introducing innovative technologies and new initiatives to better serve internal teams, community members and partners across the system.

Figure 1: CCS interactions with the community by month from January 1 to December 31, 2025.

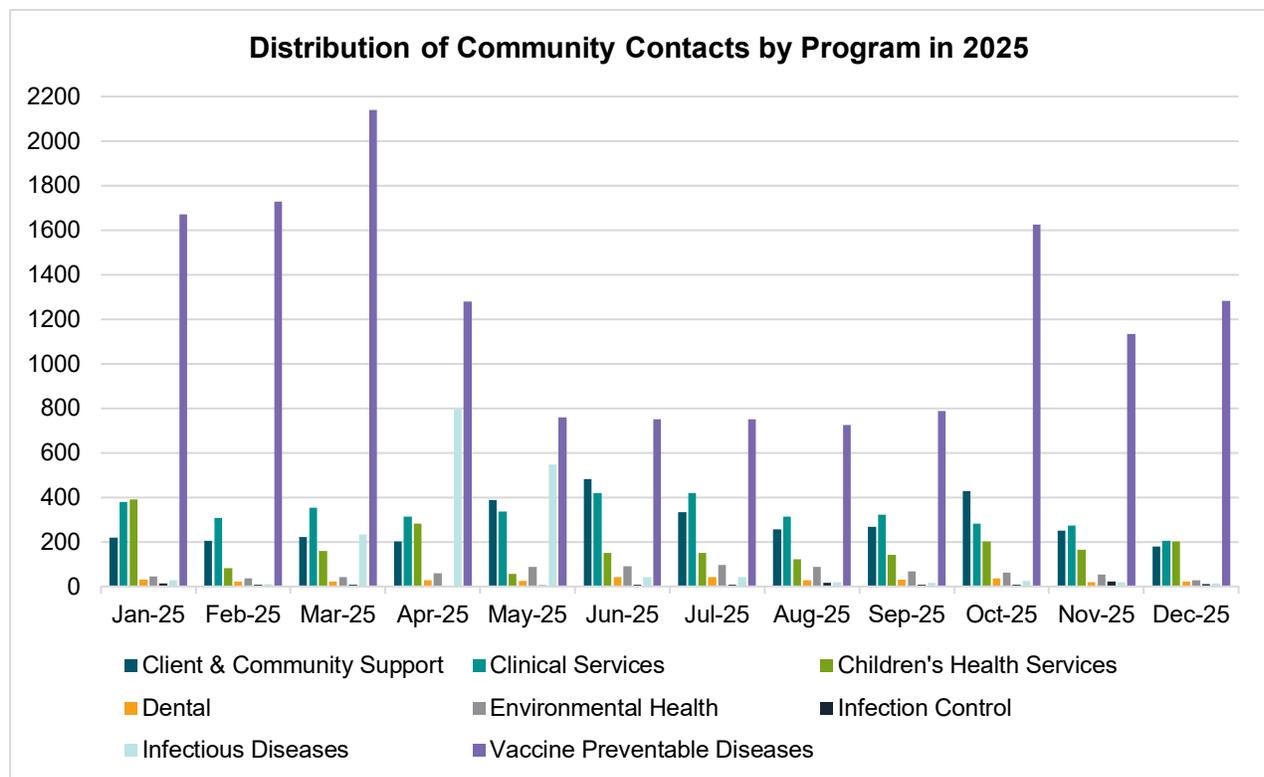


Discussion

Community Demand & Program Expansion

As the community’s first point of contact, CCS can identify client needs and provide timely assistance with health education, appointment booking, call transfers or community resources. Most calls placed to the Health Line in 2025 were about immunizations, service navigation or clinical services (Figure 2). Call volume and common inquiries are dynamic, often aligned with current public health topics and significant community events. For example, between March and May 2025, inquiries related to Infectious Diseases rose as a provincial outbreak of measles occurred. Similarly, between June and August, inquiries related to Environmental Health peaked with warmer temperatures and greater outdoor activity.

Figure 2: Distribution of community contacts by program area from January 1 to December 31, 2025.



Leveraging Innovative Technologies

This year, CCS worked with the Data and Analytics Team to leverage an artificial intelligence (AI) tool for quicker voicemail processing. The AI tool transcribes the voicemails CCS receives, pulls out key information and provides a summary of the call. It also codes a subject line to match pre-defined topics staff use to prioritize and triage callbacks. This tool makes it easier for CCS to manage, prioritize and respond to client inquiries in times of high demand.

The AI chatbot is another tool available to the public for timely support. Introduced in 2024, the original chatbot used scripted question-and-answer “flows” to respond to a set of common questions. In 2025, a generative AI version was launched to understand and answer more complex, open-ended questions using information from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health’s website and reputable sources provided by CCS. There were nearly 2,000 chatbot conversations opened throughout the year, with a monthly average of 220 conversations and 160 involving active back-and-forth engagement. Automated resolution rate is a parameter used to monitor the chatbot’s performance, representing the percentage of conversations the chatbot can automatically resolve in a way that is accurate and relevant. The automated resolution rate remained consistently high year-round at an average of 88 percent. The chatbot expands Public Health’s reach and accessibility, allowing community members to get answers in real-time and outside of regular business hours, with over half of conversations occurring on weekends and after hours.

Supporting Healthcare Providers: Launching a Direct Line

CCS monitors the types of populations seeking public health support. In 2025, most clients reaching out were either general public (59%) or parents and caregivers (35%). However, WDG Public Health also recognizes the importance of providing timely support for local healthcare providers. In October 2025, CCS launched a direct phone line to answer questions from healthcare providers about public health programs, client inquiries or service delivery. To date, CCS has received calls from 18 unique providers, and most calls are answered in real-time. Public Health will continue to share this dedicated phone extension with healthcare providers through various channels.

Supporting Walk-ins: Increased Office Nurse Presence

In 2025, WDG Public Health coordinated scheduling across all nursing teams to ensure a public health nurse was available on-site at each of the agency’s locations five days per week. This approach was used to accommodate people facing obstacles with regular appointment booking and service pathways, and to create surge-ready capacity for unplanned public health events. This coordinated approach expands responsive care while maintaining appropriate use of clinical resources across the organization.

Supporting the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program: Acquiring Triage

In July 2025, processing of referrals for the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program transitioned from the Children’s Health Services Team to CCS. HBHC is a free and voluntary parenting support service that provides home visits to pregnant individuals and parents/caregivers with young children. People can be referred to the program in various ways (e.g., by hospital after giving birth, by healthcare provider or agency, self-referral, etc.). All referrals to WDG Public Health are followed up with a call from CCS nurses within 48 hours to check on the family, complete assessments, provide initial resources and guidance, and offer a home visit with a public health nurse. During postpartum calls, CCS can identify health concerns, mental health needs or parenting challenges early, allowing for timely referrals to programs like HBHC and other community supports. This transition has expanded the CCS team’s parenting support expertise while giving Children’s Health Services more capacity for in-person family support.

Focus on Children’s Health and System Impact

In addition to directly supporting families, CCS participates in community planning tables for young children. Public Health’s participation and leadership at these tables helps identify needs, align priorities and develop coordinated strategies to support children and families through a community health lens. In 2025, these tables hosted two interprofessional events in Dufferin and Guelph-Wellington to create opportunities for cross-sector learning. This work helps ensure early years initiatives are informed by evidence, responsive to community needs and grounded in collaboration.

Surveying the Community for Parenting Insights

To inform planning for early years initiatives, WDG Public Health launched a Parenting Insights Survey across the region in 2024 to understand the topics parents of children aged 0–6 need support with and how they prefer to receive information. The survey closed in August 2025 and generated 1,118 valid responses for analysis. Most respondents were from the City of Guelph (52%), followed by Wellington County (33%) and Dufferin County (16%), and the majority were between 30 to 39 years old (70%). Over the past year, parents reported needing a lot of information and support in 10 key areas, including mental health and well-being, behaviour and positive discipline, parenting stress and self-care, illnesses and infections, sleep, social and emotional development, food and nutrition, postpartum health, speech and language development, and breastfeeding. Parents most often sought this information from family and friends, online sources such as social media and apps, and primary care providers. When asked how they prefer to receive parenting information and support, parents most commonly chose social media and other online formats, in-person classes, virtual classes, and one-on-one support.

Cost, convenient location, age-appropriateness, and timing influenced whether parents would participate in a parenting program. WDG Public Health will share a full summary with the Board of Health and planning table partners in early 2026 to help turn these findings into community action.

Overseeing the Sight for Success Vision Health Program

A previous initiative called the Sight for Success program was reinstated in 2025 in anticipation of updates to the OPHS Vision Protocol. Delivered in partnership with local optometrists, the program provides a financial subsidy of up to \$160 toward prescription eyewear for eligible students in Grades 1–12 who have completed an OHIP-covered eye exam and meet established financial criteria. Since the program’s reinstatement, Public Health has received commitments from over 20 optometrists across the region and shared promotional materials with all school boards, including French-language resources. By reducing financial barriers and raising awareness of OHIP-covered eye exams, Sight for Success aims to improve vision health which can impact academic achievement. This initiative reinforces WDG Public Health’s commitment to advancing equitable access to vision care for school-aged children and youth across the region.

Health Equity Implications

As many people’s first point of contact, CCS plays a key role in reducing barriers to information and public health services. In their interactions, the team prioritizes client experience and is well-versed in equity, diversity and inclusion principles. CCS initiatives reflect a strong commitment to health equity with a special interest in outcomes for children and families. Examples include a 24/7 AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005) compliant chatbot, multilingual supports, person-centred navigation through multiple channels and early outreach to families for programs like HBHC and Sight for Success. Through various year-round initiatives, CCS addresses health inequities by improving access to information and services for diverse populations while contributing to system impact.

Conclusion

In 2025, CCS prioritized program expansion by introducing innovative technologies and new initiatives to better support internal teams, community members and partners across the system. Their work enhanced client and community support, while advancing WDG Public Health’s strategic priorities and remaining accountable to the OPHS. In 2026, CCS will continue to respond to community needs through three planned initiatives:

1. Partner with Children’s Health Services to launch a prenatal care access program in support of pregnant individuals in Guelph without a primary care provider.
2. Introduce a live chat hand-off option for the chatbot to allow real-time online interaction with a nurse for complex inquiries; and
3. Optimize use of virtual reception screens at the Orangeville and Fergus locations to provide timely support when an attendant is not available.

Through innovative strategies and cross-sector collaboration, CCS continues to demonstrate leadership in delivering timely and inclusive public health service.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- Improve health outcomes
- Focus on children's health
- Build strong partnerships
- Innovate our programs and services
- Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability. [Internet]. 2021 June [2026 Jan 16]. Available from: <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf>