

## Client and Community Support Team

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**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

**Meeting Date:** June 4, 2025

**Report No.** **BH.01.JUN0425.R17**, Pages: 9

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**Medical Officer of Health & CEO**

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## Recommendations

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

## Key Points

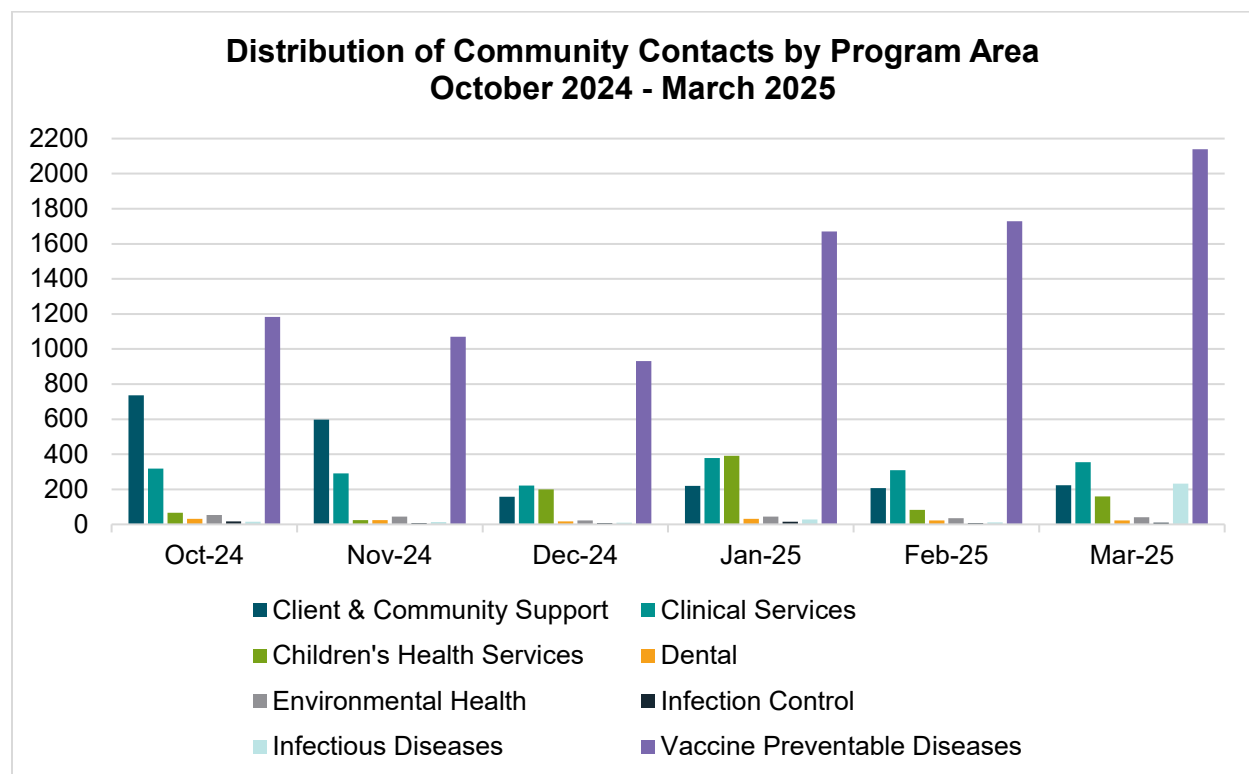
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- The Client and Community Support (CCS) Team has expanded services to enhance support for children's health in alignment with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's (WDGPH) [2024–2028 Strategic Plan](#).<sup>1</sup>
- Innovative use of technology, including the launch of a Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Chatbot, has improved service accessibility for parents and community members.
- Strategic partnerships with schools, childcare providers and community organizations have strengthened efforts to address systemic challenges affecting children's health.
- Data indicates a significant community demand for children's health services, with immunization and growth and development being the top areas of inquiry.
- The Parent Insight Survey is underway to further understand parenting needs and inform health promotion strategies.

## Background

The CCS Team provides an essential link between public health services and the community, with a particular focus on supporting the health and development of children. This multidisciplinary team coordinates and streamlines services across all program areas, ensuring that individuals and families receive timely, accurate and equitable access to health information and resources. Figure 1 outlines the community contacts managed by the CCS Team, demonstrating the extensive reach of their efforts.

**Figure 1:** Distribution of Community Contacts by Program Area October 2024 to March 2025



Public Health Nurses (PHNs) on the agency's Health Line play a crucial role in providing essential health education and resources and community navigation. These nurses engage with the community through various communication channels, including telephone, email, chatbot, in-person visits, faxes, and collaboration with internal programs. These interactions facilitate the delivery of evidence-based health information that encourages clients to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Between October 2024 and March 2025, CCS strategically expanded its outreach capacity to address the growing needs of the community, particularly those expressed by parents, educational institutions, and healthcare providers.

During this period of growth, CCS adhered to the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) and aligned with the strategic priorities outlined in WDGPB's [2024–2028 Strategic Plan](#), specifically: *Focusing on Children's Health, Innovating Programs and Services, and Building Strong Partnerships*.<sup>2,1</sup>

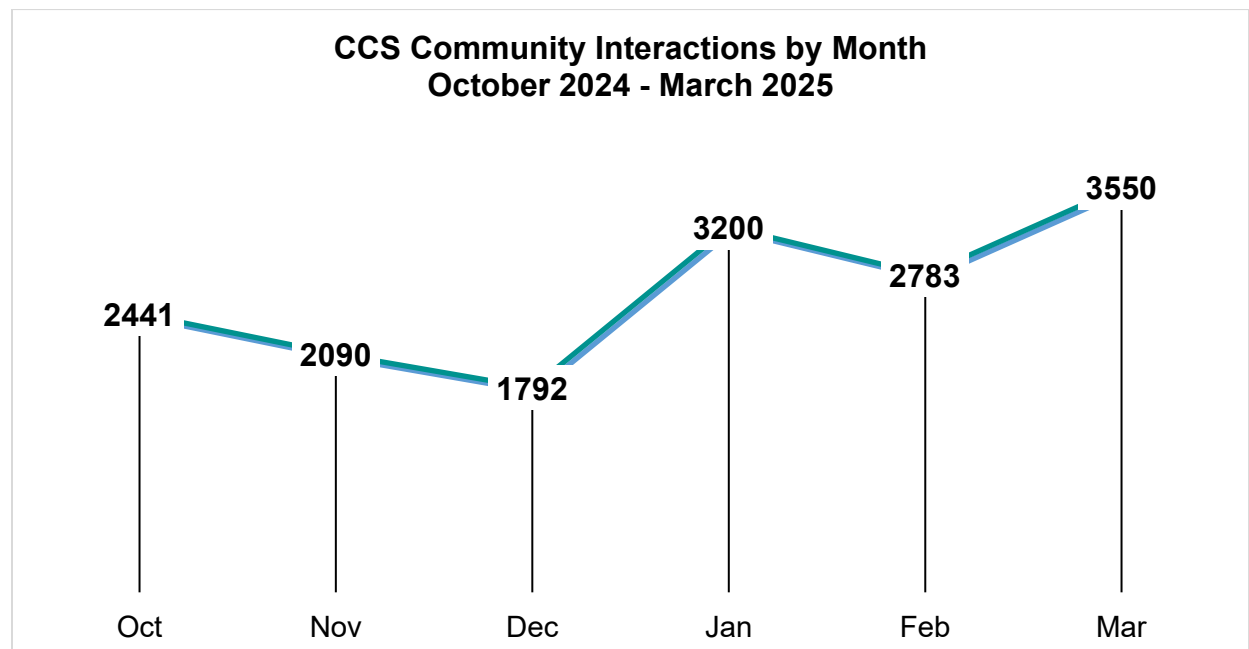
The evolving community landscape, marked by the re-emergence of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and a rising demand for parenting support, underscored the urgency to strengthen public communication and health literacy. In turn, CCS leveraged innovative technologies, expanded partnerships and launched targeted engagement strategies to enhance the accessibility and responsiveness of public health services.

## Discussion

### Service Delivery and Community Demand

The CCS Team is the main contact within WDGPB for guiding clients to internal and external health resources in the community. Between October 2024 and March 2025, the CCS Team sustained a strong operational presence, managing over 15,000 interactions across all program areas (Figure 2). Surges in call volume align with targeted community outreach efforts and public health campaigns, demonstrating the CCS Team's integral role in supporting timely and responsive engagement with the public.

**Figure 2:** CCS Interactions with the Community by Month from October 2024 to March 2025



## **Strategic Priority: Promoting Parental Support for Children's Health**

### **Enhancing Immunization Access for Young Children**

During the Fall 2024 COVID-19 and influenza vaccination campaign, WDGPB delivered clinics open to the public, with a strategic focus on improving access for young children. Appointment availability was intentionally prioritized for children aged 6 months to 5 years, especially those facing barriers to routine immunization and children with special needs. This targeted approach reflected a commitment to equity in vaccine delivery and reinforced WDGPB's ongoing dedication to protecting vulnerable pediatric populations.

### **Strengthening Immunization Compliance: The ISPA Campaign**

In parallel, the CCS Team played an essential role in the successful implementation of the Fall 2024 Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) campaign. Their efforts were focused on helping students meet provincially mandated immunization requirements, while also working to advance the broader public health initiative of reducing vaccine-preventable diseases among children.

In conjunction with the Vaccine Preventable Diseases team, key activities included comprehensive reviews of immunization records to identify students who were due or overdue for vaccinations. These assessments informed targeted outreach and enabled the team to provide personalized follow-up with families. Health teaching was provided to parents and guardians to address concerns, clarify vaccine schedules, and promote the safety and efficacy of childhood immunizations, which are critical components in fostering vaccine confidence.

For families needing extra support, the CCS team offered navigation assistance to help them access vaccination services, understand documentation requirements, and complete immunization updates in a timely manner. As illustrated in Figure 2, CCS interactions peaked in January and March 2025, aligning with key phases of the ISPA campaign. These coordinated efforts contributed to improved compliance, supported the achievement of immunization coverage targets, and strengthened protections for school-aged children.

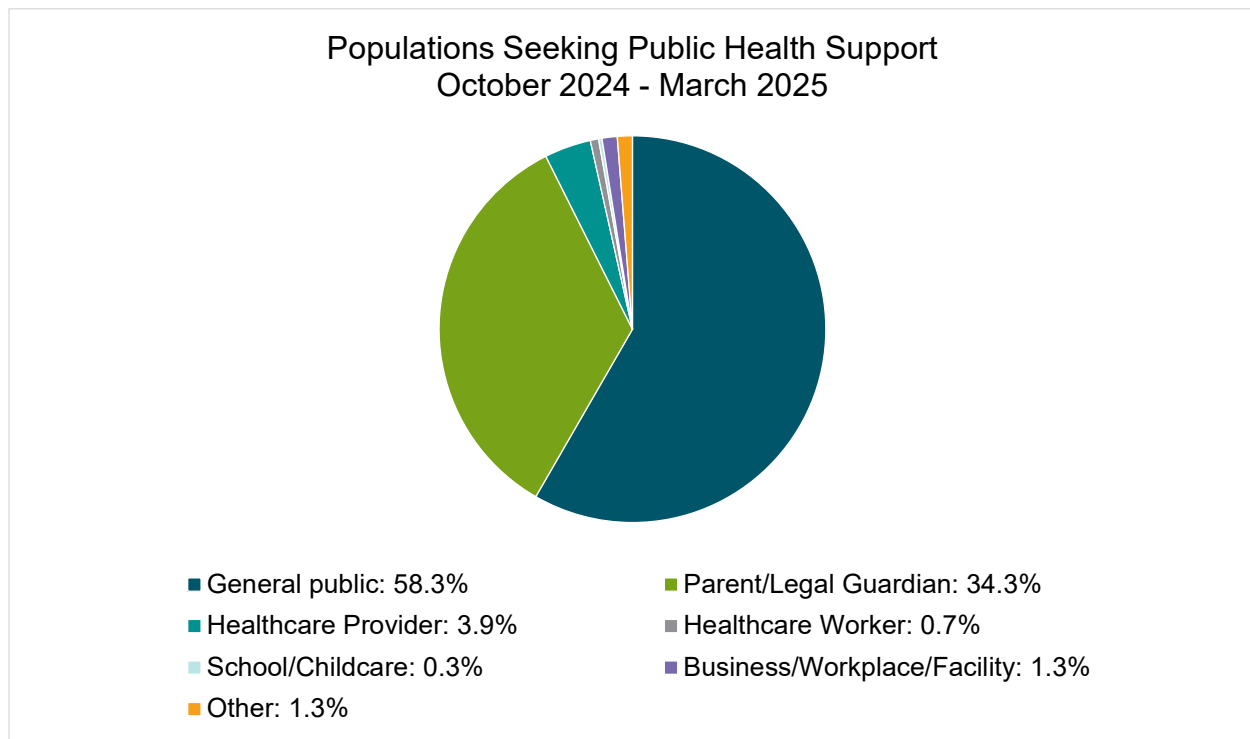
### **Supporting Parents Through the Health Line**

Between October 2024 and March 2025, the CCS Team responded to a total of 4,697 contacts from parents/legal guardians and 7,994 contacts from the public, representing 34.3% and 58.3% of the contacts seeking support from WDGPB (Figure 3). The most common inquiries were related to immunizations, child development, and communicable disease concerns.

This data underscores the critical role of the HL as an accessible and responsive intake channel for families. Representing the first point of contact for many, the HL ensured that parents and caregivers had timely access to reliable, evidence-based information to support informed decision-making. In particular, the HL played an essential role in guiding families through next steps for due or overdue childhood immunizations.

By prioritizing clear and compassionate communication with parents, the HL helped bridge gaps in health literacy, reduce barriers to access and reinforced the importance of preventive health measures. Its role in promoting children’s health through proactive engagement demonstrates how responsive public health services can directly support families and enhance health outcomes across the community.

**Figure 3:** Populations Seeking Public Health Support from October 2024 to March 2025



### Strengthening Community Collaborations to Support Children and Families

WDGPH has continued to prioritize meaningful collaboration with a wide network of community partners to promote the health and well-being of children and families. Strong working relationships with schools, early years programs, childcare providers, health care professionals and social service agencies have enabled a coordinated approach to service delivery. Through regular communication updates, co-developed resources and aligned outreach strategies, partners were kept informed of public health initiatives and empowered to guide parents and caregivers in accessing services. These efforts helped ensure that families received consistent messaging and timely support, particularly in navigating immunization services and child health resources. This integrated, cross-sector approach improved service access, enhanced system navigation and contributed to more equitable health outcomes for children across the region.

A key component of this collaboration has been WDGPH's active participation in local Early Years Planning Tables, which bring together representatives from across the early years and child health sectors. These forums provided opportunities to share information, identify emerging needs, coordinate responses, and explore innovative strategies to better serve families. Through this engagement, WDGPH helped shape collaborative responses to community health priorities while strengthening its relationships with frontline service providers.

To further support these partnerships, WDGPH also hosted and participated in annual Early Years events that brought together key partners to exchange resources, maintain sector connections, and identify new opportunities for collaboration. These events fostered dialogue on best practices, highlighted emerging tools and initiatives and reinforced a shared commitment to improving outcomes for young children and their families.

## **Parent Insight Survey**

In 2024, WDGPH launched the Parent Insight Survey targeting parents and caregivers of children aged 0 to 6 years. The goal of the survey is to: 1) Identify the most popular parenting topics for which parents seek support and 2) Understand preferred methods and trusted sources for receiving parenting information.

With a strategic focus on children's health, the survey is instrumental in providing a clearer understanding of community needs and parental perspectives. Collecting this information is essential to inform and guide program planning, ensuring that future public health initiatives effectively support children's growth, development and overall, wellbeing.

Recognizing the importance of evidence-based service design, WDGPH is actively promoting the survey to achieve a sample size of 1,700 respondents, representing the diverse population of parents and caregivers across the region. The survey takes approximately 10–15 minutes to complete and is available at [wdgpublichealth.ca/parent-survey](https://wdgpublichealth.ca/parent-survey).<sup>3</sup> Insights gathered through the Parent Insight Survey will play a critical role in ensuring that health promotion programs are responsive, community-driven and aligned with the developmental needs of children and families in the region. To help achieve the target sample size and ensure data validity, the survey deadline has been extended to the end of June 2025.

## **Collaboration and Artificial Intelligence**

In 2023, WDGPH introduced an online chatbot to improve accessibility of health-related information and public health services. The chatbot expands public health's reach, allowing community members to receive answers to questions in real-time and outside of regular business hours.

Community members frequently used the chatbot for information on: 1) Immunizations and appointment bookings; 2) Vaccination records for babies, toddlers, and school-aged children and 3) Pregnancy, postpartum support, and infant health. See Figure 4 for chatbot engagement and performance statistics.

**Figure 4:** Chatbot Performance and Engagement Statistics from October 2024 to March 2025.

Parameter	Average Number of Encounters per Month
Opened (Clicked on the Chatbot icon)	274
Engaged (Client typed in the Chatbot)	207
Parameter	Average Percent of Encounters per Month (%)
Recognition Rate (Conversations where the Chatbot correctly understood the client's question)	89
Conversations Outside of Business Hours (Outside of 8 AM - 5PM, Monday to Friday)	54

The first iteration of the chatbot used scripted question and answer pathways called “flows” to respond to a curated list of commonly asked questions. More than 120 conversation flows were routinely written and revised by public health staff. In 2024, WDGPH partnered with Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) and Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) to explore the next iteration of the chatbot – a chatbot that uses Generative AI to respond to questions. Instead of relying on a limited list of scripted flows, the AI-based chatbot can answer complex open-ended questions by scanning all the information found on WDGPH’s website. The AI-based chatbot officially launched on WDGPH’s website in late March of 2025. Clients can interact with the chatbot and be directed to the information they need, relevant resources, webpages or WDGPH’s HL to speak to a nurse. Public health staff continue to provide guidance and coaching to improve the format and precision of the chatbot’s responses. The launch of the latest chatbot underscores WDGPH’s dedication to innovative service delivery by utilizing AI to broaden its outreach and provide more responsive, resource-efficient support to the community. The introduction of the GenAI Chatbot version has facilitated accessible health information and guidance, assisting community members in understanding the risks associated with measles, obtaining vaccinations, and ensuring the protection of their children and families. Community use of the Chatbot has risen by nearly 15% since the AI version was launched.

## Health Equity Implications

As the first point of access for many, the CCS Team strives to close gaps in service accessibility and promote equitable health outcomes for children and families.<sup>4</sup> The team's initiatives reflect a strong commitment to health equity and inclusion through a 24/7 AI-based chatbot that is AODA-compliant and offers multilingual support. This service enhances accessibility for newcomers, individuals with disabilities, rural residents, and those requiring flexible access outside of regular business hours. The Parent Insight Survey seeks diverse representation, enabling WDGPH to tailor services that close gaps and promote equitable health outcomes for children and families. Through various year-round initiatives, the CCS Team addresses health inequities by improving access to information and services for diverse populations.

## Conclusion

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The CCS Team has played a pivotal role in advancing WDGPH's strategic priorities through innovative service delivery, strengthened community engagement and cross-sector collaboration. By implementing responsive, equity-focused initiatives, such as the multilingual Generative AI Chatbot and the Parent Insight Survey, CCS has significantly expanded access to critical health information and services for families and caregivers across the region.

These efforts reflect WDGPH's proactive approach to addressing emerging public health needs, particularly in supporting children's health and development. Through data-informed decision-making, partnership-building and the integration of advanced technology, CCS continues to demonstrate leadership in delivering modern, efficient, and inclusive public health services.

## Ontario Public Health Standards

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### 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

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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

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