

Client and Community Support Report

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 is a multidisciplinary team, its primary goal is to ensure the navigation of both internal and external services across the community.
- The team is actively involved in various initiatives including:
 - Healthy Growth and Development Assessment and Programming
 - Vision Health Program
 - Chatbot content curation and collaboration
- From October 2023 to March 2024, this program has interacted with the community over 17,000 times, averaging 2,885 encounters per month. This includes phone calls, emails, social media, Chatbot engagements, walk-ins, and fax.

Background

The Client and Community Support is a program dedicated to assisting clients in navigating both internal and external resources within the community. Comprising a multidisciplinary team, its primary goal is to ensure the seamless efficient delivery of services across all programs and services within the agency. In addition to providing a coordinated access point for public health

services, the team is actively involved in various innovative initiatives aimed at servicing the community while upholding the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS).

Discussion

Central Intake

Client and Community Support (CCS) Team serves as the primary point of contact within Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) for assisting clients in navigating both internal and external health resources within the community. The multidisciplinary team collaborates to support all agency programs. The team interacts with community members (public, parents, community partners, etc.) through various channels, including in-person interactions, live answering services, callbacks via voicemail, email correspondence, fax, and Chatbot support. Figure 1 shows the total number of interactions with the community through all communication channels with the CCS Team.

Figure 1: CCS Interactions with the Community from October 2023-March 2024

Month	Number of Community Interactions	Context
October 2023	2273	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 and influenza vaccination clinics are offered to general population for the Fall Campaign.
November 2023	2246	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 and influenza vaccination clinics ended this month. Initial ISPA letters mailed to high school students with February suspension date.
December 2023	1797	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school clinics are offered to support catch-up of missing vaccines.
January 2024	3090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robocalls sent out to high school students with overdue or missing vaccinations. ISPA letters mailed to elementary students with March suspension date.
February 2024	3783	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robocalls sent out to both high school and elementary students with overdue or missing vaccinations. High school students who were not up to date were suspended on February 14 and 15. Walk-ins available to support students who are suspended.

March 2024	4121	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robocalls sent out to elementary students with overdue or missing vaccinations. • Elementary school students who were not up to date were suspended on March 20. Walk-ins available to support students who are suspended. • Increased awareness of measles in the public due to cases in nearby communities and other countries.
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During this timeframe, it is evident that the notification and suspension process for elementary and high school students with overdue or missing vaccines significantly affected the workload of the program (see **Appendix A**). The activities required by the Client and Community Support team to support the Vaccine Reportable Disease program during the suspension process is illustrated in Figure 2 in the distribution of calls across program areas. The team diligently assisted over 4,000 high school students and more than 7,500 elementary students who faced suspension due to Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) non-compliance. The team achieved this by updating records and facilitating vaccination appointments to ensure the affected students had their immunization records up to date as quickly as possible in the provincial immunization database.

Figure 2: Number of Calls by Program from October 2023 to March 2025

Program	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024
COVID-19	521	379	231	370	151	117
Clinical Services	235	229	182	356	269	274
Dental	0	3	3	4	3	2
Environmental Health	14	16	7	4	1	6
Child Growth and Development	25	14	12	6	18	23
Infection Control	2	7	6	3	1	0
Infectious Diseases	8	7	8	9	8	81
Vaccine Preventable Diseases	880	1199	1057	1846	2755	2119

Chatbot

In September 2023, the Chatbot was launched on the WDGPH website with the aim of improving access to public health information. A core aspect of the Chatbot initiative is to enhance accessibility for clients while increasing staff’s capacity to focus on projects by providing guidance for straightforward inquiries at any time of the day (See Figure 3). Initially, the Chatbot featured 20 question flows crafted by the CCS team in accordance with community needs. Presently, it possesses 94 question flows covering topics on most WDGPH programs and services. The team remains committed to collaborating with various programs within the agency to ensure that the content remains current and effectively addresses community requirements.

Figure 3: Chatbot Statistics from October 2023 to March 2024

Parameter	Average Number of Encounters per Month
Opened (Client clicked on the ChatBot icon)	333
Engaged (Client typed in the Chatbot)	249
Parameter	Average Percentage of Conversations per Month
Recognition Rate (Conversations where the Chatbot correctly understood the client's question)	86.83%
Conversations Outside of Business Hours (Outside of 8am-5pm, Monday to Friday)	56.38%

Collaboration and Artificial Intelligence

Given the significant promise of the Chatbot, the agency is presently engaged in exploring collaborative partnerships with other public health units to integrate the technology within their public health system. The overarching objective of the agency is to advance the Chatbot's functionality by integrating artificial intelligence (AI), with the aim of enhancing service efficiency and promoting financial stewardship within public health operations. WDGPH remains at the forefront of innovation in delivering services to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Healthy Growth and Development

In addition to being the primary point of intake for programs across Wellington-Dufferin- Guelph Public Health, this team is also responsible for the delivery of programs and services pertaining to Healthy Growth and Development

In the summer of 2023, a report was completed on child growth and development support for children aged 0-6 in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) region, based on a survey completed by community partners serving this population. Building on this foundation, Public Health Nurses (PHNs) within the CCS team have conducted an environmental scan of programs and services offered by other Public Health Units (PHUs) in Ontario and are developing a parent survey for this fall.

Environmental Scan

As a subsequent step to gain deeper insights into supporting children's health in the community, the team conducted an environmental scan of PHUs to explore programs and services available for children aged 0-6. This initiative aims to provide the agency with a comprehensive understanding of available programs and services at local PHUs in Ontario. Data from 27 PHUs was collected via survey in March 2024, and analysis is underway. The findings will be presented in a report to relevant community partners, including the Board of Health later in the year.

Parent Survey

In Fall 2024, the team plans to conduct a survey targeting parents and primary caregivers of children aged 0-6. The survey will inquire about parenting and child development topics for which they seek support, as well as their preferences for receiving information and support. This information will be instrumental in guiding program planning and resource allocation to effectively meet the needs of parents and caregivers in the community. Results of the Parent Survey findings will be shared in early 2025.

Breastfeeding Support

In addition to bolstering agency capacity, CCS established partnerships with local service providers to facilitate enrollment in Level 1 and Level 2 breastfeeding training programs offered at WDGPH. This initiative aimed to address a gap in community resources while enhancing both internal and external capacity for breastfeeding support. CCS subsidized the program costs for external providers to broaden access opportunities. Outreach efforts targeted service providers from Early ON centres, local hospitals, and family health teams within the WDG area. As a result, 17 external providers achieved certification in both Level 1 and Level 2 Breastfeeding Support.

Vision Health

In January, CCS launched a new vision health program that focuses on promoting vision health by increasing awareness of the following:

- 1) OHIP covered eye exams for individuals up to age 19.
- 2) Programs that offer financial support for glasses.
- 3) WDGPH's new Sight for Success program that offers a financial subsidy to eligible students.

Sight for Success

This program offers a financial subsidy of up to \$160 dollars to students who are in Grades 1 to 12, attend school full-time in the WDG region, have completed an OHIP-covered eye exam and meet the financial eligibility requirements.¹ This program is offered in partnership with 20 optometrists situated across the WDG region, with eight located in the City of Guelph, six in Dufferin County, and another six in Wellington County.

Individuals who meet the criteria can visit one of the providers to receive the subsidy. The program was launched in January 2024 with the optometrists. The next stage is promoting internally with staff that closely interact with eligible families and sharing with superintendents at the local school boards. Students have already started to receive the subsidy through the collaboration with optometrists.

Health Equity Implications

Health equity means that all individuals can reach their full potential for health and well-being.² They are not disadvantaged by their social position or other socially determined circumstances.^{3,2} WDGPB continues to provide everyone in the community an equal opportunity to access and benefit from all programs and services.⁴ CCS utilizes a range of strategies to ensure that the community has unobstructed access to public health information and services.³

<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of communication methods are offered to the public to increase accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Phone ○ Email ○ Website – Contact Us Info Box ○ Chatbot – a 24/7 service which can assist clients in finding electronic information right away and at any time of day. • Language Services (MCIS Language Solutions) are available to assist with language interpretation over the phone.
<p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with community agencies to ensure access to in-home vaccination for Influenza and COVID-19 for homebound clients. • Continues to support clients with accommodations to receive vaccinations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specialty clinics ○ Provide CARD health teaching to support needle anxiety. ○ Book extended appointment to allow sufficient time for clients with needle phobias. ○ Working with the Mennonite population to complete consents and support VPD with parochial school clinics
<p>Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively connects with high-risk populations to receive vaccinations and public health services. • Screening clients to ensure that any high-risk clients are identified and booked accordingly. • Community outreach with Wellington County’s Indigenous Advisory Committee to build working relationships and sharing of information with the Indigenous community. • Outreach to all area optometrists to promote vision health and develop partnerships to provide vision support program.
<p>Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed training and professional development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mental Health Community Supports ○ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Training ○ Harm Reduction Strategies

Conclusion

WDGPH strives to promote health and well-being for everyone in the community. It is essential that the needs of the community are assessed and addressed in a timely manner. This program was directly aligned with the five priority goals in the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.⁵ These five priorities are reflected in the program through the following strategies:

Improve Health Outcomes

- Provides clients and community partners streamlined access to public health services and support to navigate local resources and help achieve their health goals.

Focus on Children's Health

- Complete an assessment of community needs for healthy growth and development services and support the community's approach to program delivery. Support children's academic success through vision health promotion through innovative strategies that address health equity.

Build Strong Partnerships

- Provide community partners with the resources and support they need to make decisions that impact the health of the community. Building collaborative partnerships with other public health units to integrate the technology within their public health system, with the aim of enhancing service efficiency and promoting financial stewardship within public health operations.

Innovate Our Programs and Services

- Development and continuous quality improvement of the Chatbot content in order to support public access to credible health guidance. Supports new projects (i.e., Chatbot) that continue to establish WDGPH as a leader of change and innovation among public health units in Ontario.

Lead the Way Toward a Sustainable Public Health System

- Building collaborative partnerships with other public health units to integrate the technology within their public health system.
- Supports new projects (i.e., the Chatbot) that continue to establish WDGPH as a leader of change and innovation among public health units in Ontario.

The program will continue to engage in training and professional development to ensure practice is current and evidence based. CCS will continue to collaborate with all the programs within the agency to ensure seamless integration and positive experiences for the community.

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

Related Reports

BH.01.APR0324.R15 – Artificial Intelligence for Enhanced Public Health Outcomes
(https://wdgpublichealth.ca/sites/default/files/bh.01.apr0324.r15_-_ai.pdf)

References

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5. Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health. [Internet]. 2023 Strategic Framework; n.d., [cited 2024 May 6]. Available from: https://wdgpublichealth.ca/sites/default/files/file-attachments/basic-page/wdgph-strategicplan-2024-28-final_web-accessible.pdf

Appendix A

