

3.0 HIGHLIGHTS

A few highlights are selected from each section of the report and noted in this section. These highlights were selected in consultation with program delivery staff and in many cases point to other indicators in this report.

Immigrant Populations

Context

Immigrants new to a country often require aid and support to settle and adjust to their new environment. This is a crucial time for them as they try to gain stability and build a secure life. Having access to services which can help orientate them to life in Canada can facilitate their sense of belonging in the community. Feeling a sense of belonging in the community is important in building confidence and self-esteem.

Key Message

- In 2001, the number of recent immigrants living in the City of Hamilton was 18,685. This is approximately 133% of recent immigrants that had declared the City of Hamilton as their intended destination when landing in Canada.

Public Health Implications

The City of Hamilton Public Health and Community Services must be flexible when delivering the select health services it offers. This requires a thorough understanding of the needs and preferences of persons from diverse cultures and communities and race relations training and strategies. Public health will be required to place a greater emphasis on issues of access and equity to health services and programs. Inclusive communication strategies needs to be made to overcome language barriers and ensure wide out-reach to all residents will be increasingly important.

Low Income

Context

Low income affects access to health related necessities such as to shelter, nutritious foods, warm clothing and education. It can also affect the overall well-being of an individual as low income may increase stress, lower self-esteem and limit participation in the community.

Key Message

- Compared to Ontario, a substantially higher proportion of the population in the City of Hamilton live below the low income cut-off (18.8% in the City of Hamilton vs. 13.6% in Ontario). This is true for all age groups, but is worse for those aged 75 years or older.

Public Health Implications

A high proportion of individuals with low income in the City of Hamilton translates into a higher demand for social assistance and subsidized social and health programs. Low income individuals are subject to greater risk of ill-health and hence require more health care services. The City of Hamilton's Public Health and Community Services Department needs to recognize the barriers to good health that low income individuals may face when tailoring services to these individuals. Factors related to the affordability of health care services, medicine or treatment, and transportation issues should all be addressed when planning and implementing health services.



General Health

Context

Access to proper health services is vital to maintaining an individual's health and well-being.

Key Message

- Eleven percent of the population in the City of Hamilton felt they had unmet health care needs. The top reasons provided by these persons as to why their health care needs were not met include long waiting times and unavailability of health care at the time required.

Public Health Implications

The City of Hamilton Public Health and Community Services needs to ensure that the select health services it provides are equally accessible to all individuals. This implies the need to provide services tailored to the needs of the community in accessible locations. Ongoing surveillance of emerging health issues in the community is required to properly inform program planning of current public health services. Effective communication of available services to residents is also a key to successfully providing accessible health care services in response to citizen demand.

Early Development Index

Context

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) assesses children's readiness to learn at school in 5 behavioural and developmental domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge. A 'normative sample', based on 93.3% of the full sample of children, is used as a standard to compare domain scores across communities. A child's readiness to learn affects his or her general health, well being and competence, not only in the early years, but also in later life.

Key message

- In 2005, the average scores of children in Hamilton were as high as that of the normative sample in all domains except two. These were the Language and Cognitive Development domain, in which Hamilton children scored higher, and the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain, in which Hamilton scores were lower.

Public health implications

It is important that children in the early years of schooling are behaviourally and developmentally prepared for the challenges and performance goals of the educational system. Analysis of the 2005 EDI scores has shown that over 12% of senior kindergarten students in Hamilton may be unprepared for the years of schooling ahead. These children had low scores in two or more of the readiness to learn domains. Children with low EDI scores may not be able to benefit fully from the educational environment to which they are exposed, and may therefore be at a higher risk of failure in school. Being aware of how well children are doing when they enter school allows school boards and service providers to make adjustments and provide interventions that will help children immediately and benefit families with young children in the future. The Best Start initiative is an example of how school boards, service providers, parents, government and community can work to increase children's competency and improve the well-being of families in Hamilton.



Physical Activity

Context

Substantial evidence shows that increasing physical activity is important to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, blood pressure, serum cholesterol, and to reduce stress levels. To improve health, it is recommended that a person do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) four days per week, or 60 minutes of light physical activity every day of the week.

Key Message

- Almost half -44%- of the population in the City of Hamilton aged 12 years and older reported that they are physically inactive.

Public Health Implications

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for obesity, type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD). Knowledge and awareness of CVD risk factors are not sufficient to change behaviour. To effectively reduce this risk, all potentially modifiable CVD risk factors such as physical inactivity, smoking and unhealthy eating should be targeted comprehensively. Efforts to increase physical activity in the City of Hamilton can be strengthened if multiple intervention strategies are implemented. Getting active can be enhanced by: (a) schools providing daily physical education for students; (b) recreation centres providing physical activity programs through their pools, arenas and gymnasiums; (c) buildings, including schools and workplaces, be modified to encourage the climbing of stairs and decrease the use of elevators; and (d) employers investing in on-site health promotion programs for employees, with incentives to encourage employers to participate in fitness activities e) designing and building communities to encourage walking and cycling. Health behaviour is a consequence of a complex array of inter-related conditions and underlying causes, many of which are external to individuals. Modifying risk factors for chronic conditions can best be addressed by taking action to create supportive environments, mobilize community action and implement healthy public policy. Motivated by this the department is currently developing an Obesity Prevention Strategy and contributing to the GRIDS process.

Influenza

Context

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that can result in mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Influenza viruses spread from person to person, mainly in respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes. Though much less frequent, influenza can also spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touch their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before hand washing. Each year, influenza affects the health of many people, disrupting their ability to work, attend school and participate in other daily activities.

Key Message

- The emergence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 led to an increase in the number of laboratory tests requested by physicians for cases of influenza-like illness. This is likely to have resulted in an increase in the number of influenza cases detected during the last two influenza seasons, (415 cases in 2003/04 vs. 62 in 2002/03). In the 2003/2004 season the incidence of influenza was significantly higher than in the previous four years, in part because the annual vaccine may have been less effective and not provided to enough people early enough in the influenza season.



Public Health Implications

To reduce the number of individuals who become ill with influenza during the influenza season, the City of Hamilton's Public Health provides free influenza vaccination to the public. To ensure equal access to all residents, multiple dates, times and locations throughout the city are selected for the vaccination clinics each year. Communication and advertisement of these free clinics is done to ensure the public can plan to attend a most convenient clinic.

Partnerships with hospital infection control committees, long term care facilities and schools are critical to our success and integral to our pandemic planning process.

Drinking Water and Boil Water Advisories

Context

Microbiological indicators, such as bacteria, may appear in source water and emanate from wildlife, livestock operations, septic systems and sewage treatment plants. Since bacteria can cause water-borne disease, microbiological quality is the most important aspect of drinking water safety. Other organic parameters and inorganic parameters, such as salts and metals, are also present in source water.

In 2004, approximately 80 drinking water systems were regulated under the Safe Water Act. According to this legislation, when a laboratory determines that a water sample does not meet the Ontario Drinking Water Standard or an operator/owner of a regulated drinking water system observes or becomes aware of a situation where the safety of drinking water may be compromised, it must be reported to the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) as an Adverse Water Quality Incident (AWQI). When an AWQI occurs, the owner/operator of the regulated drinking water system is required to take prescribed Corrective Actions to remedy the situation. One of the Corrective Actions is to follow the direction of the MOH, who may issue a Boil or Drinking Water Advisory, depending on the contaminant or situation, and direct the owner/operator of the water system to notify the affected users. In 2004, there were 244 AWQIs reported to the Medical Officer of Health in the City of Hamilton.

Key Message

- In 2004, a total of 30 Drinking Water and Boil Water Advisories were issued by the Medical Officer of Health to water systems owners/operators throughout the City of Hamilton.

Public Health Implications

Of the 30 advisories issued in 2004, 29 were Boil Water Advisories and one was a Drinking Water Advisory. This suggests that microbiological contaminants, particularly bacteria, were the majority of the contaminants responsible for Water Advisories issued in the City of Hamilton in 2004. To further improve the quality of drinking water within Hamilton, the City of Hamilton is undertaking a city-wide water and wastewater master plan to develop policies and strategies for its water and wastewater servicing over the next 30 years. To ensure a continued safe drinking water supply to Hamilton residents who depend on municipal groundwater, the City has initiated The Groundwater Resources and Wellhead Protection Partnership and study. Outcomes measured in this study will help develop a plan to protect the reliability of groundwater quality.

