

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

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GENERATION SQUEEZE

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health endorse the invitation of Dr. Paul Kershaw to an organized community forum to share information about Generation Squeeze, serving as strategy to raise awareness and energize community leaders to invest in families.

Key Points

- The primary driver of net wealth for Canadians age 50 and over is now the primary source of debt for younger Canadians.
- Canadians under age 49 are squeezed for time and money, working and studying more to have less.
- Childhood development is unintentionally negatively impacted as parents spend less time at home, struggle to afford the necessities of life and have difficulty coping with tremendous stress.

Background

Generations X and Y are running faster than ever before only to stay in the same spot. These young men and women are spending much time studying and working resulting in less time to spend with their families. They are “squeezed” between time spent working and money needed to live meaningful and balanced lives. When compared to the 1970s, today’s Canadians between the ages of 25 and 34 are earning less despite more being post-secondary graduates with larger student debts and facing housing prices that have more than doubled. During this time, the federal government has increased spending on benefits and services for older Canadians by \$58 billion while decreasing spending on younger Canadians by \$16 billion. This is in large part due to the advocacy efforts of groups such as Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP), a national organization committed to bringing financial security and equitable access to services for older Canadians. Dr. Paul Kershaw, a University of British Columbia professor, is the founder of Generation Squeeze, which is a national voice for Canadian’s in their 40s and younger advocating for a nation that works for all generations.

Impact on Families and Children

Caring for a child requires both time and financial means which adds further strain on the already stretched resources of the squeezed generations. This strain can compromise early childhood development in key areas such as relationships and learning.

A secure sense of attachment is paramount in parent-child relationships and begins right from birth in the stage that theorist Erikson defines as trust versus mistrust. Establishing a trusting relationship requires a great investment of time as parents learn their child’s cues and how to respond to them. While parental leave from the workforce allows one or both parents to spend time with children during their infancy, a couple sharing a year at home will forgo on average \$15,000 of their after tax income compared to the year before their child was born. The need for parents to maintain their employment or return to work early in order to

provide for their family comes at the expense of spending time with their child. The long-term benefits of secure attachment, including confidence, resiliency and prevention of problem behaviours and mental illness, are being compromised.

When parents return to work, they are faced with the financial burden associated with quality child care. Quality learning environments are crucial to child development, as is being emphasized in Ontario's new Child Care Modernization Act. Child care is essential to a parent's ability to earn income and contribute to society. Two incomes today barely bring home what one did in 1976 – \$68,580 compared to \$65,360 – while child care fees continue to rise. Parents who cannot afford this cost or who work irregular shifts are often forced to place their children in unlicensed centres that may provide poorer quality learning environments and care. Research has shown that quality child care programs positively impact school readiness. School readiness scores for London indicate that 27% of senior kindergarten students are not ready to enter grade one.

Parents are faced with difficult choices. They can choose to stay home with their children in hopes of developing secure relationships. However, with this choice they forgo wages that may help get them out of debt. Alternatively, parents can choose to place their children in child care centres so that they can work. Yet child care costs will use much of their wages. Parents are squeezed between decisions regarding time and money that will ultimately impact their child's development.

Next Steps

Strategies of prevention travel the greatest distance if implemented at life's earliest stages. Community leaders have come together during the recent Poverty Simulation in hopes to truly understand what it is like to live in poverty. The Middlesex-London Health Unit supports partnership with initiatives advocating for better outcomes for families and their children.

A Canada that works for all ages is a country that has policies in place to protect people no matter what stage of life they are experiencing. Allocating resources is truly a balancing act that can create inequities. Childhood development and family well-being are impacted by current inequities in government policy and planning.

Under the direction of Dr. Paul Kershaw, Generation Squeeze is creating and amplifying a collective voice through advocacy strategies. The first strategy involves connecting with leaders directly while the second strategy involves energizing others to join forces. The Middlesex-London Health Unit supports the organization of a community forum and inviting Dr. Kershaw to be the keynote speaker. This will serve to raise awareness and energize community leaders and politicians to protect childhood development.

This report was prepared by Ms. Stephanie McKee, PHN, Early Years Team, Family Health Services.



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