

Title: Preventing mental illness through Early Childhood Development programming

Sponsor: Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU), Middlesex-London Health Unit.

- WHEREAS one in five Canadians are affected by mental illness or an addiction issue every year, and the burden of illness is more than 1.5 times the burden of all cancers and 7 times the burden of all infectious diseases; and
- WHEREAS suicide is a major cause of premature and preventable death, mental illness is the most important risk factor for suicide, and suicide occurs across all ages, incomes, ethnicities, and social factors; and
- WHEREAS there were more than 9,000 deaths in Canada from 2016 to 2018 and more than 1,250 deaths in Ontario in 2017 related to opioids; and
- WHEREAS the annual economic burden of mental illness is approximately 51 billion in Canada with a substantial impact on emergency room departments and hospitals; and
- WHEREAS 70% of mental health and substance use problems begin in childhood; and adverse childhood experiences, such as poor attachment to parents, child abuse, family conflict and neglect, have been clearly linked to risk for mental illness and addiction later in life; and
- WHEREAS programming that enhances the early childhood experience has proven benefits in IQ levels, educational achievements, income levels, interactions with the criminal justice system and utilization of social services; and
- WHEREAS every \$1 invested in early childhood development can save \$9 in future spending on health, social and justice services; and
- WHEREAS the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program is a prevention/early intervention initiative designed to ensure that all Ontario families with children (prenatal to the child's transition to school) who are at risk of physical, cognitive, communicative, and/or psychosocial problems have access to effective, consistent, early intervention services; and
- WHEREAS the HBHC program supports the early childhood experience and development of resiliency by enhancing the parent-child attachment, parenting style, family relationships, and financial instability and addressing parental mental illness and substance misuse, child abuse or neglect thereby reducing the risk of subsequent mental illness and addictions; and
- WHEREAS in 1997 the province committed to funding the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program at 100% and the HBHC budget has been flat-lined since 2008 with the exception of increased base funding in 2012 for an increase in public health nursing positions for Healthy Babies Healthy Children program as part of the 9,000 Nurses Commitment; and

WHEREAS fixed costs such as salaries and benefits, travel, supplies, equipment and other operational costs have increased the costs of operating the HBHC program, and

WHEREAS operating the HBHC program with the existing funding has become increasingly more challenging and will result in reduced services for high-risk families if increased funding is not provided;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA) actively engage with the Ministry of Children, Community and Youth Services, the Ministry of Health and Long term Care, and the Premier's Council on Improving Health Care and Ending Hallway Medicine to support investments in early childhood development as a strategy to enable health and resiliency throughout life, promote mental health and reduce mental illness and addictions

AND FURTHER that ALPHA engage with the Ministry of Children, Community and Youth Services, the Ministry of Health and Long term Care, and the Premier's Council on Improving Health Care and Ending Hallway Medicine to urgently support adequate funding (including staffing and operational costs) of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program as a strategic immediate action to enhance the early childhood experience and address mental illness and addictions in Ontario.

AND FURTHER that the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario, Ontario Public Health Association, Centre for Addictions and Mental Health and other relevant partner agencies be so advised.