

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer

DATE: 2019 March 21

**ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES (alPHa) RESOLUTION:
PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESS THROUGH
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING**

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1) *Receive Report No. 023-19 re: “Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) Resolution: Preventing Mental Illness Through Early Childhood Development Programming” for information;*
- 2) *Co-sponsor the proposed resolution for the 2019 alPHa Annual General Meeting.*

Key Points

- Mental illness and addiction affect one in five Canadians; adverse childhood experiences are an important cause of mental illness and addiction later in life, with 70% of mental illness and substance use problems beginning in childhood.
- Investment in early childhood programs, such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC), provides a significant return on investment in terms of increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors for mental illness and addictions.
- Other than a minor enhancement in 2012, the HBHC program has not seen any increase in funding since 1997; a resolution to address this is proposed for the upcoming alPHa annual general meeting.

Background

Mental illness and addiction-related harms are costly to Ontarians, both financially and socially. Costs are incurred at every level, including education, healthcare, law enforcement, the judiciary system, social assistance, workplaces, and premature death. The burden of mental illness and addictions in Ontario is more than 1.5 times the burden of all cancers, and seven times the burden of all infectious diseases.

Mental health and addictions are complex issues with multiple causes and contributing factors across the lifespan. A comprehensive strategy includes mental health promotion, treatment and harm reduction, healthy public policy, and addressing social factors.

Mental Health Promotion involves increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors for mental illness and addictions. Improvements in these factors promote positive mental health, reduce the likelihood of mental illness and addictions and may support recovery and treatment from mental illness and addictions. Many of broad range of protective and risk factors apply to the prenatal and early childhood period.

The prenatal and early childhood period is a critical time for neurological development with broad reaching, lifelong consequences. Early childhood programming has proven benefits to IQ and income, and reduces incarceration and need for social services. Every \$1 invested in early childhood development can save \$9 in spending on health, social and justice services. Improving a child’s mental health from moderate to high leads to average savings of \$140,000 across the lifetime of the child.

The proposed Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) resolution focuses on the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program. The HBHC program was created to improve outcomes for families experiencing challenges to help children to get a healthy start in life and achieve their full potential. HBHC was introduced in 1998 as a mandatory program under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and Ontario Public Health Standards. The home visiting component of the HBHC program uses a strength-based approach to support pregnant women and their families, and families with children from birth to their transition to school. Evidence-based tools are used to assess the needs and strengths of families.

Home visiting provides protective therapeutic relationship opportunities by role modeling regulated, attentive, and attuned interactions with both parents and children which counteract the effects of early childhood adversities consistent with neglect, maltreatment and otherwise impoverished environments. Without foundational nurturing experiences during infancy and early childhood, children are at high risk for developmental, relational, and behavioral difficulties and are at an increased risk for mental illness.

In 1997, the province committed to funding the HBHC program at 100%. Although fixed costs for salaries, benefits and overall operational costs are ever-increasing, funding for the HBHC program has remained static. In October 2012, the Ministry announced the addition of base funding as part of the 36 new full time equivalents public health nursing positions for HBHC (as part of the 9,000 Nurses Commitment). This funding supported salaries, benefits and operational costs associated with the HBHC Screening Liaison role only. With the exception of this new funding, Ministry base funding for HBHC has not increased.

Proposed alPHa Resolution

Leaders from several health units have drafted a background paper ([Appendix A](#)) and resolution ([Appendix B](#)) for the upcoming alPHa Annual General Meeting in June 2019. Recommendations include the following:

1. 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
2. That alPHa engages 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.

Next Steps

Should the Board of Health approve co-sponsorship of the draft proposed background paper ([Appendix A](#)) and resolution ([Appendix B](#)) for the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) Annual General Meeting, MLHU will continue to partner with other co-sponsoring health unit leaders to finalize the materials and submit to alPHa by the resolution deadline.

This report was prepared by the Healthy Start Division.



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