



NEWS

Health unit sees increased requests for mental health supports from parents

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit sees 90 per cent increase in families requiring mental health supports during COVID-19 pandemic

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week

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While the main focus is on vaccinations and curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the local health unit is also dealing with increased demand for programs and services designed to help young families.

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit medical officer of health Dr.

Natalie Bocking said the health unit continues to work on ensuring programs like Healthy Babies, Healthy Children – a free, confidential and voluntary program for pregnant women and families with children up to age six – remain accessible to area families.

Recently, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services issued a letter to public health units to restore service delivery in the above-mentioned program, as well as Infant Hearing, Blind Low Vision, Preschool Speech and Language and Infant and Child Development programs, all of which are provincially funded. Recognizing that public health units are at different points in their local COVID-19 response and recovery planning efforts, the ministry is committed to working with public health units to support them in restoring service delivery for the coming year.

Dr. Bocking said the health unit has continued to offer infant and child support programs, albeit many have had to shift from in-person delivery to online or telephone. Staff have actually noticed an increased demand for services, as many families and children have lost other networks of support and have become more vulnerable, with concerning reports of increased risks and missed opportunities related to child safety, optimal health and development. The early years are a critical stage of development that lays the foundation for lifelong health. Early intervention programs for children and families are critical public health programs supporting positive parenting, healthy child development and family well-being.

This doesn't include the extra pressure on parents with children at home from school and daycare, ongoing worries about income because of job disruptions, stress over going back to work or difficulty responding to a child's questions or concerns over the coronavirus. Some who are pregnant have expressed concerns about accessing medical care for themselves and their newborns during the pandemic.

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“Roughly 75 per cent of families enrolled in the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children

program have received some type of mental health supports,” said Dr. Bocking, adding that this is an increase of 90 per cent over pre-pandemic levels.

Dr. Bocking noted this illustrates the importance of such programs in the community. The health unit has already made requests for continued funding from the province.

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