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NEWS

SURVEY REVEALS PANDEMIC IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

MELANIE HENNESSEY
mhennessey@metroland.com

A recent survey conducted by Halton Public Health paints a grim picture of how the pandemic is impacting local residents beyond COVID-19 illnesses.

"The results were concerning," said Halton medical officer of health Dr. Hamidah Meghani in discussing the findings with regional council on July 7.

"Over half (52 per cent of participants) reported their overall mental health and well-being had worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighty one per cent said they were somewhat or very concerned about their children's mental health."

The survey, conducted

by public health last October and November in conjunction with two research institutions, examined the indirect impacts of COVID-19 among Halton residents aged 18 and over.

In addition to the mental health impacts, Meghani said 25 per cent of respondents indicated they increased their alcohol use during the pandemic.

"This is especially troubling because in Halton, our pre-pandemic statistics showed that half of Halton adults were already consuming alcohol above the recommended guidelines," she noted.

Over half, or 56 per cent, of the residents surveyed said they had experienced delays or cancellations for health services, and 42 per cent said they avoided seeking health services be-

cause of the pandemic.

"In addition to the direct disease impacts of COVID-19, the incidental impacts of the pandemic are an important consideration for public health," said Meghani.

"While essential in controlling the spread of the virus, public health measures such as physical distancing and the closure of schools and non-essential services have had unintended impacts on the health and well-being of the population."

The medical officer also noted that 17 per cent of surveyed residents indicated their household had experienced food insecurity in the past month — something she said reflects the challenges some people have experienced with income during the pandemic. Meghani said Halton Public Health will use the survey results and other data to prioritize Halton's recovery work over the next several months.

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