



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health

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JOY IN WORK UPDATE

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 38-22, re: “Joy in Work Update” for information.

Key Points

- MLHU staff and leaders have expressed feelings of stress, fatigue, and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic and the SLT and Board of Health declared this an organizational priority.
- The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) framework for improving ‘Joy In Work’ has been utilized to engage the Management Leadership Team (MLT) in defining action items to improve Joy In Work for leaders at MLHU.
- An implementation plan has been developed to ensure work associated with the action items does not further strain organizational capacity and exacerbate stress and/or burnout.
- Roll out of the Joy In Work framework to staff is planned for September 2022.

Background

In 2017, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) released a white paper entitled, “IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work”, citing incredibly high burnout rates found in studies of healthcare professionals (Perla et. al., 2017). According to IHI, burnout in health and healthcare professionals has serious organizational impacts because it leads to lower levels of staff engagement, which has subsequent negative effects on client experience, quality, and safety. The framework includes the drivers found to improve Joy In Work, as well as a high-level methodology for engaging staff in the discussions (see [Appendix A](#)).

Burnout at MLHU

Staff and leaders at the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), who provide critical public health services to the London and Middlesex communities, have expressed feelings of stress, fatigue, and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some sharing that they were experiencing these feelings pre-pandemic. Leadership turnover has increased at MLHU as well, with leaders citing heavy workload, struggles with work-life balance, and stress as contributing factors to their decision to leave the organization when asked in exit interviews. Given the noted effects burnout has on staff engagement and the subsequent effect on clients, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Board of Health (BOH) determined that the mental health and well-being of staff is of paramount importance. This was officially declared as a strategic priority in the 2021/2022 MLHU Provisional Strategic Plan this way: *Support staff to deliver public health services while addressing staff well-being and mental health.* This included strategic initiatives to support and further define the work:

- Provide regular communications to staff on health and safety topics of concern (e.g., COVID-19 exposure, psychological safety in the workplace) through email, team meetings, and virtual Town Halls.

- Develop strategies to mitigate or address staff stress and/or burnout, including offering a variety of EFAP benefits including those that address mental health and well-being.
- Execute a plan to value and recognize staff contributions in all MLHU programs, including opportunities to enhance staff connectedness and belonging.

Staff and Leader Feedback

Prior to the finalization of the Provisional Strategic Plan, work on this prominent issue had already begun in anticipation of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff were surveyed and a total of fifty-four (54) recommendations related to organizational and individual wellness, and sustaining positive organizational changes, were identified. The BOH has been provided updates on this work and these recommendations were used to inform the Provisional Strategic Plan priorities. Additionally, members of the MLHU Leadership Team (MLT) were guided through an intentional debriefing by a third-party consultant using the Joy In Work framework as a conversation guide. During the COVID-19 Omicron wave and subsequent staff redeployment to support the third dose booster campaign, a manager in the organization leveraged their training as a psychotherapist and engaged staff in ‘All Feelings Welcome’ sessions to get a sense of the state of staff emotions. Finally, structured and formal debriefing sessions were offered to leaders via the Employee and Family Assistance Plan provider, Homewood Health. All this feedback served as a platform to engage leaders at MLHU in the Joy In Work framework.

Finding Joy In Work

The SLT determined that the first cohort to engage in the Joy In Work framework would be the MLT because leaders have significant influence over their direct reports’ levels of engagement. Multiple sessions were held with MLT members to clarify and theme the feedback described above to align with the domains of the framework, ultimately resulting in a comprehensive list of action items that would improve Joy In Work for leaders at MLHU. Directors worked with their respective divisions to further define the best approach for engagement of leaders in each of the action items, as well as clarify realistic timing for implementation to ensure the associated work does not further strain organizational capacity and exacerbate stress and/or burnout. The result is an implementation timetable spanning the next twelve (12) months, with some action items being implemented immediately (see [Appendix B](#)).

Next Steps

Each action item that is implemented will be evaluated in line with the recommendations within the IHI white paper (some formally, most informally via real-time feedback at monthly MLT meetings and via Divisional reviews). Roll out of the Joy In Work framework to staff is planned for September 2022, beginning with education and training for leaders to ensure they feel prepared to engage their teams in the exercise undertaken with MLT. Improving Joy In Work for leaders and staff will remain a key priority for the SLT at MLHU.

This report was prepared by the Chief Executive Officer.



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Chief Executive Officer

Reference:

Perlo J, Balik B, Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J, Feeley D. (2017). IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work. IHI White Paper. *Cambridge, Massachusetts*: Institute for Healthcare Improvement.