

Annual Report 2023: A Reimagined Public Health Unit for the Future

Board of Health

OUR VISION

People Reaching Their Potential

OUR MISSION:

To promote and protect the health of our community

OUR VALUES:

- Collaboration
- Integrity
- Empowerment
- Striving for excellence
- Health
- Equity



Matt Newton-Reid
Chair - City Representative
(Citizen Appointee)



Mike Steele
Vice-Chair
Provincial Representative



Aina DeViet
County Representative



Michelle Smibert
County Representative



Mike McGuire
County Representative



Skylar Franke
City Representative



Peter Cuddy
City Representative



Selomon Menghsha
Provincial Representative



Howard Shears
Provincial Representative



Tino Kasi
Provincial Representative



Emily Williams
Secretary, Treasurer and
Chief Executive Officer
(ex-officio as Chief Executive Officer)



Dr. Alexander Summers
Medical Officer of Health
(ex-officio)

The Shifting Public Health Landscape: A Message from the Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer

We are delighted to share with you the Middlesex-London Health Unit's 2023 Annual Report.

For the Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2023 was a year of challenges, innovation, and resilience – and this report paints the picture. In it you will find a high-level overview of our organization and our work, including updates on our [Provisional Strategic Plan](#). We highlight some of the activities of our amazing teams in their service to the community. And finally, we share highlights from our [2023 Audited Financial Statements](#).

In our continued recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear that we faced significant budget pressures and could not sustain current or historic levels of service. Tough decisions needed to be made, and through the fall of 2023, areas for disinvestments were identified to balance the budget. Regrettably, we were forced to undertake layoffs of both leadership and staff for the first time in our history. Given the magnitude of the disinvestments, a new organizational structure was also required. Our staff and leaders, as well as our union partners, have our gratitude for their grace and professionalism throughout an incredibly challenging time.

Much of our other work in 2023 was guided by our Provisional Strategic Plan. Recognizing the critical importance of our relationships with key community partners, we focused on improving 'Client and Community Confidence.' Our role in facilitating collective community action as part of the 'Whole of Community Response to Health and Homelessness' is one example of this commitment. Similarly driven to ensure 'Program Excellence,' we set out to define our work clearly, and confirm it is grounded in the best evidence. From supporting childhood vaccination through our work with school boards, to ensuring safe food and water through our inspections, to fostering the confidence of new parents through our home visiting programs, we demonstrated our value to you, our community. We are again grateful to all the MLHU staff for their tireless commitment to this work and this community.

Throughout the year, supporting 'Employee Engagement' was mission critical, especially as the toll of the pandemic became more apparent and as we faced restructuring and layoffs. To that end we introduced additional mental health and employee wellness supports and fostered leadership development opportunities. Underpinning all of this was our commitment to 'Organizational Excellence'

and we started developing a Management Operating System to guide our decision-making and future work. Parallel to all this internal work, leaders and staff tackled the shifting and complex public health issues facing our community. We're grateful that in this work we had the collaboration of our municipal, community and health system partners – we could not do any of this alone.

In July 2023 we were delighted to welcome an important addition to the Leadership Team with the arrival of Dr. Joanne Kearon as our Associate Medical Officer of Health. Dr. Kearon's strategic vision and expansive expertise have been a tremendous addition to the agency.

In August 2023, the Ministry of Health announced the 'Provincial Strategy to Strengthen Public Health in Ontario'. The objectives of the initiative were to optimize capacity, stability, and sustainability in the public health sector, and included clarifying roles and responsibilities through the Ontario Public Health Standards, supporting voluntary mergers among local public health agencies, and providing stable, sustainable funding to local public health agencies. We look forward to learning more about the changes ahead and are confident that we are well-positioned to respond to whatever comes our way.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of the work of public health. Looking ahead, the mission of our agency remains as vital now as it always has – to promote and protect the health of the residents of Middlesex and London.

Sincerely,

Alex and Emily



Refocusing for the Future: A Message from the Board of Health Chair



The last year required tremendous resilience and dedication from the MLHU staff and leaders, and I am incredibly proud of how the team navigated the uncertainty in the public health landscape. While the start of 2023 brought focus on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and re-initiation of pre-pandemic programs and services, announcements from the Ministry of Health regarding 'Strengthening Public Health', along with impending financial pressures for the 2024 budget quickly shifted priorities. While the plan for the Ministry review of the Ontario Public Health Standards and the funding approach for local public health began, we set out to focus on advocacy. As Chair, I joined Medical Officer of Health Dr. Alex Summers, and Chief Executive Officer, Emily Williams, in delegations at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference and Annual General Meeting. We emphasized to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, and leaders of each provincial party, the critical work of local public health and the need for adequate and sustainable funding for agencies like ours.

With the results of the Ministry's initiative still pending, the financial pressures heading into 2024 drove the need to prioritize the important work of the MLHU. This unfortunately culminated in a reduction in health unit staff and leaders, a reduction in programs and services, notably in our support of school health and health promotion activities at the provincial and federal levels, and organizational restructuring at the end of the year. As difficult as these decisions were, the Board of Health remains confident that these changes will position the agency to respond to the outcomes of future Ministry initiatives. Despite these challenging times, I commend the grace and professionalism of the entire team at the MLHU who were steadfast in their commitment to public health throughout this process. I thank my fellow Board of Health Members, Dr. Summers, Ms. Williams, and all staff at the Middlesex-London Health Unit for their ongoing commitment to promoting and protecting the health of the community. As we look to 2024, I am confident we have the right people and team to tackle whatever comes our way.

Sincerely,

Matthew (Matt) Newton-Reid

Board Chair



Painting a Picture: A Day in the Life of Public Health

Catch a glimpse of the day-to-day activities of the nearly 300 public health professionals promoting and protecting health in your community every day through these stats and illustrations.



SEXUAL HEALTH

7,834 visits to our Sexually Transmitted Infection Clinic for testing, counselling and prevention guidance.

2,443 cases of Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Disease Cases (Hep C, Hep B, HIV, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, and Chlamydia) diagnosed.



SCHOOL HEALTH

26 secondary and **150** elementary schools supported

1148 interactions with individual students

Top health topics covered? Vaping, Sexual Health, Mental Health Promotion, Immunization.



IMMUNIZATION

98.9: Percentage of refrigerators storing publicly funded vaccine inspected.

9,991: Number of clients vaccinated at one of the MLHU clinics (not including schools).

20,769: Number of routine vaccines given to those **9,991** clients.



COVID-19 VACCINE PROGRAM

31,437 doses administered (mobile and mass immunization clinic)

2,126 doses administered (11 years and under)

24,751 doses distributed (hospital, LTCH, RH, HCP).



FOOD SAFETY

2,763: Number of fixed year-round food premises in operation in 2023.

582: Number of these premises considered “high risk” (requiring inspection every 4 months).

99.8: Percentage of high-risk premises inspected once every 4 months.

206: Number of food safety complaints that triggered an investigation.



CLEAN SYRINGE DISTRIBUTION

1,176,152 (RHAC), **142,895** (MLHU), **400,452** (satellite locations and mobile services) = **1,719,589** total syringes distributed.



VECTOR BORNE DISEASE

37,525 catch basins treated with larvicide for mosquito control.

1084 rabies exposures investigated (including 5 that were monkey related!)



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

15 infection prevention and control complaints that triggered an investigation.



RECEPTION

13,000 live phone calls responded to by our Client Service Representatives.



ORAL HEALTH

19,964 of school children were provided an oral health screen in 2023/24.

2,770 of those children screened were identified with urgent needs.

245 clients who received new dentures through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.



FAMILY HEALTH

210 Smart Start for Babies (SSFB) sessions offered across 5 sites.

172 unique SSFB participants, 42 who were aged 23 or younger.

33 new clients enrolled in intensive nurse-family partnership (NFP) program for young first-time parents.

552 in-person visits to 80 total NFP clients.

18 participants who completed the 6-month iHEAL program for women separating from abusive partners.

816 calls from families with infants or young children to the Healthy Growth and Development phone line.

4328 home visits delivered to families for breastfeeding support or as part of the Healthy Babies Health Children Program.



INFECTIOUS DISEASE

6194 individual cases of 29 different Diseases of Public Health Significance (DOPHS) in 2023.

5111 cases of novel coronavirus reported, the most common DOPHS of 2023.

7 DOPHS of which we had a single case (Yersiniosis, Q fever, pertussis, paratyphoid fever, listeriosis, amebiasis and acute flaccid paralysis)

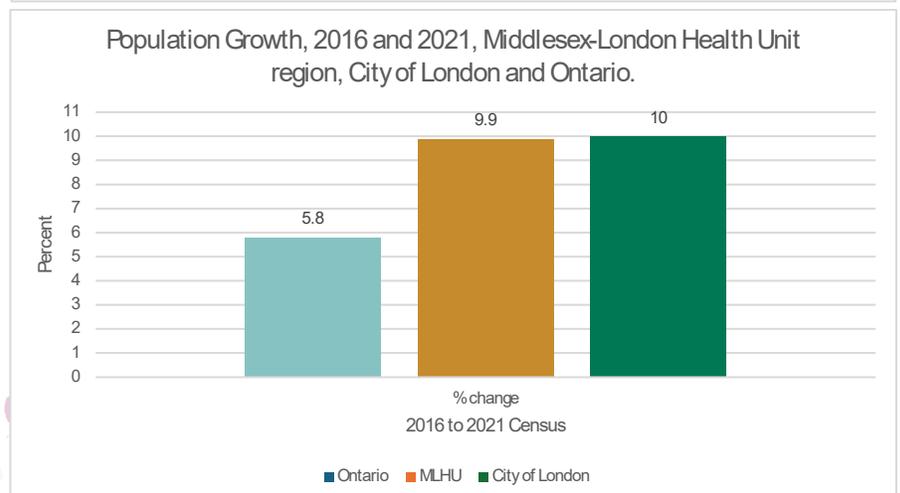
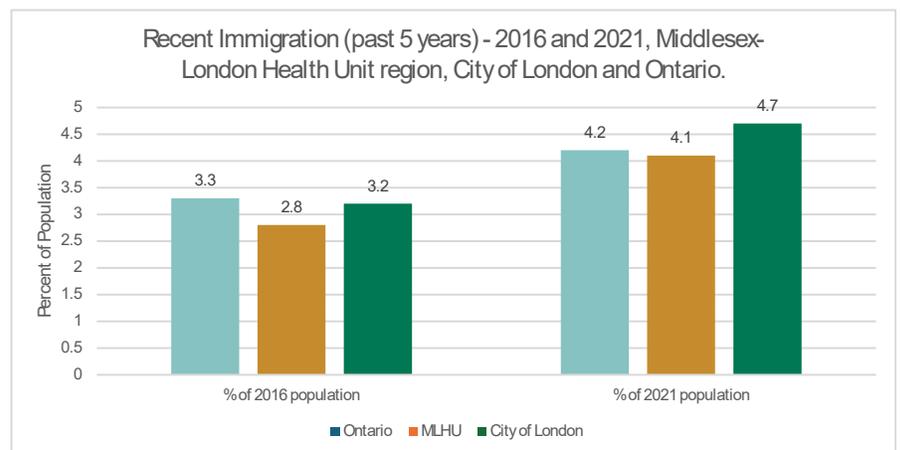
470% increase in cases of chicken pox over annual average

The Changing Palette of Middlesex-London: Population Changes Must Shift Service Delivery

As mentioned in the CEO and MOH message, the Middlesex-London Health Unit faced difficult decisions this year. While we faced budgetary pressures, we were firm in our desire and obligation to serve our community with excellence. Fortunately, recent census data, and epidemiological data from various provincial databases helped us see our community, understand its needs, and allocate our resources accordingly.

For example, the 2021 Census revealed a dynamic shift in the Middlesex-London region's demographic profile, marked by rapid growth and transformation. Over the five-year period from 2016 to 2021, the population in Middlesex-London expanded by 9.9%, surpassing the growth rate of Ontario as a whole (5.8%). Both the City of London and Middlesex County populations witnessed notable growth of 10.0% and 9.2%, respectively. Furthermore, the 2021 Census indicated that 4.1% of the Middlesex-London population had immigrated in the previous five years, showing an increase from 2016 (2.6%). This demographic evolution demands an ongoing assessment of the needs and priorities of a growing population. Our commitment is to modify and orient our programs and interventions to effectively address the needs of equity-deserving groups.

Related to that is the expansion and standardization of social determinants of health data collection from Health Unit clients, in alignment with our strategic [Taking Action for Reconciliation Report](#) and [Anti-Black Racism Plan](#). In response to needs identified by community partners, a pilot began among four teams in the summer of 2023, focusing initially on collecting information about Indigenous identity and racial identity, with plans for expansion to additional data domains and programs in the future (i.e., income, gender identity, and sexual orientation). Collecting and analyzing this data from local clients will be used to assess, report, modify, and orient MLHU interventions and service delivery to better suit the needs of clients, and contribute to the population health assessment of the community.



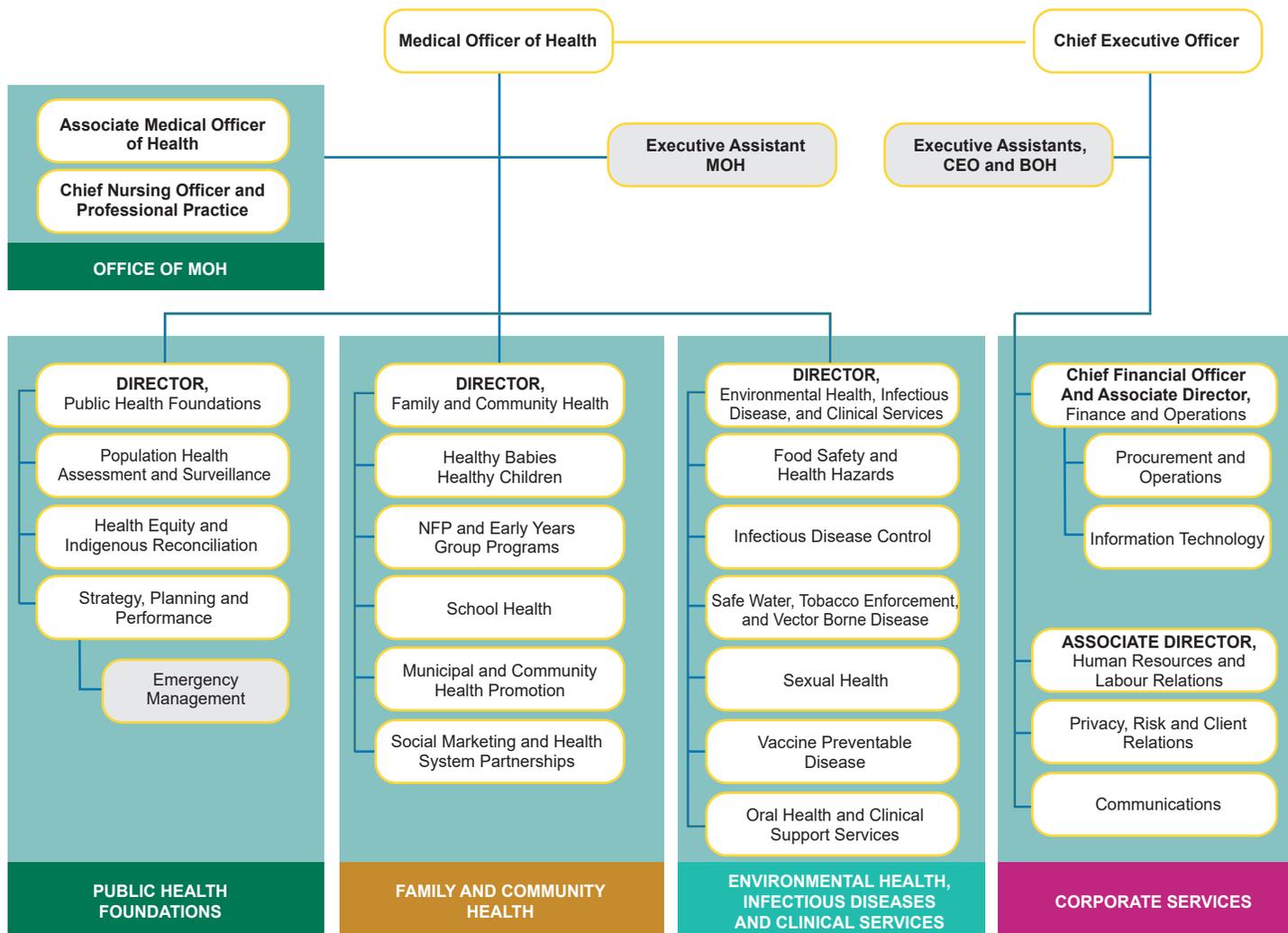
The Shape of our Future: A New Organizational Structure

Starting in January 2024, MLHU will debut the new organizational structure that followed our disinvestments this year. Rather than organizing around public health topics, as had been done previously, we decided to try something innovative. Interventions and skills became the primary building blocks by which the agency is organized. In simpler terms, our teams are now defined by the work that they do, not by the topics they cover in any given day, month, or year.

Through this restructuring, the number of divisions within the organization decreased from five to four. Several teams were combined as they performed the same interventions, but on different topics. Additionally,

the number of staff members on each team were adjusted in response to shifting community demands for different services, regulatory changes, and growing public health challenges.

For our clients and community, these structural changes may not be obvious through the day-to-day interactions with the many services MLHU offers. What the new structure does mean is that our teams will be better positioned to use their skills to strategically target prioritized issues, depending on the burden of illness and the needs of the community. Through this new approach, we will be nimble in the face of ever-shifting public health challenges.



Meet Our New Divisions

Over the next year, our strategic partners may begin to see changes in which teams they work with, and how. We're looking forward to continuing our important work with you in this new way.



Public Health Foundations

This division provides agency-wide leadership in foundational public health principles and practices and supports the development of public health strategy. As a multi-disciplinary division, they help the Senior Leadership team build and maintain the organization's assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation infrastructure to ensure that our work is of exceptional quality, population-oriented, proactive, innovative, equity-driven, and evidence-informed. PHF provides a coordinated and cohesive approach to support the acquisition and maintenance of knowledge, skills, and attributes required to apply the foundational standards to public health work amongst staff at the MLHU. Within the division are three teams:

The **Population Health Assessment and Surveillance** team provides population-level data analyses and interpretation to inform local planning and decision-making. With a provincially defined mandate to carry out PHAS activities, they are uniquely positioned within the Middlesex-London region to be leaders in providing population-level health information to community members, municipalities, and health system partners.

The **Strategy, Planning and Performance** team ensures effective public health practice through research and knowledge exchange, quality monitoring and planning and evaluation. They also ensure we meet the emergency management requirements, support organizational strategy, and act as the organization's Project Management Office.

Finally, the **Health Equity and Indigenous Reconciliation** team (HEART) considers effective ways of delivering core public health services while at the same time upholding fundamental standard of healthy equity. HEART determines processes for embedding health equity and related principles such as anti-racism, anti-oppressive practice, cultural humility, and trauma informed care into training, policy, procedure, and performance management. This work aims to increase measurable actions to bridge health equity gaps.





Corporate Services



This division supports the organization's overall effectiveness by providing critical business functions such as Finance, Procurement and Operations, Information Technology, Corporate Communications, Human Resources and Labour Relations, and Privacy, Risk Management, and Client Relations. 2023 brought renewed focus on the optimization of business processes as part of the Provisional Strategic Plan goal of achieving 'Organizational Excellence'. We updated many policies and procedures, introduced the centralized ordering of supplies, and enhanced financial reporting to our funders and the Board of Health. Streamlined communications request processes assisted program staff and teams to engage assistance more easily. Continued prioritization of cybersecurity measures saw the introduction of new training for staff, and enhanced IT infrastructure. The adoption of Microsoft 365 and migration of information from shared drives to SharePoint was a big undertaking across the agency, supported by our **IT** team. The organizational restructuring brought the welcome addition of **Client Service Representatives** to the division, who serve as the front door to our clients and community as members of our Client Relations team. Our **Human Resources and Labour Relations** team led our restructuring work with courage and professionalism.

As challenging as 2023 was, there were many highlights, including the build of a new Dental Clinic in Strathroy. Led by our **Operations** team, in collaboration with the **Oral Health** team, the new clinic significantly increased our capacity to see patients in need of dental services. We also made considerable progress on our Employment Service Review project, aimed at improving employment equity at the Health Unit, with totally revamped recruiting processes designed to eliminate bias in hiring.



Environmental Health Infectious Disease and Clinical Services

The Environmental Health Infectious Disease and Clinical Services division is a multidisciplinary group of public health inspectors, public health nurses, registered hygienists, certified dental assistants, clinical team assistants, tobacco enforcement officers, outreach workers, program assistants, dentists, program managers, associate managers and supervisor.

This division primarily delivers preventative and protective services that mitigate the public from the risk of harm and diseases. Many of the programs are clinically based integrated with education, health promotion, partner collaboration, surveillance and enforcement interventions.

The **Food Safety and Health Hazard** team inspects all food establishments in Middlesex County and City of London and responds to complaints of environmental health hazards that may impact the wellbeing of the public. The **Infectious Disease Control** team moves into action when it receives a report of a case of one of the 50 diseases that can cause serious illness in humans. They complete a case and contact investigation to prevent transmission of the disease to others. The IDC team also supports high-risk congregate settings such as Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes during outbreaks. Every personal service setting and childcare centre is also inspected regularly to ensure that their infection prevention and control practices meet the provincial standards. Through case and contact management and clinical service provision, the **Sexual Health** team cares for individuals with sexually transmitted and blood borne illness. If a client needs additional resources, an outreach worker is assigned to the client to support completion of treatment and appropriate follow-up to stop the transmission of the communicable disease.

Many communicable diseases are vaccine preventable diseases. The **Vaccine Preventable** team offers clinics at the health unit and in local schools to vaccinate school age children against diseases such as measles, chicken pox, meningococcal, and diphtheria. As respiratory illnesses such as Covid-19 and influenza continue to circulate in our community, the VPD distributes these vaccines to health care providers, and administers them directly to health equity deserving populations.

Another source for humans to acquire disease is from untreated water, tobacco and vape products, and vectors such as ticks and



mosquitos. Through routine inspections, the **Safe Water, Tobacco Enforcement and Vector Borne Disease** team ensures that recreational and drinking water meet the required standards. Daily, the tobacco enforcement staff are in the community ensuring that tobacco and vape products are not sold to anyone under 19 years or using these products in smoke-free areas. Throughout the warm weather months, the vector borne disease staff treat catchment ponds, drag for ticks and monitor mosquitoes. In addition to all this work, these teams regularly provide prevention education to the community so that community members can best protect themselves from communicable and vector borne diseases.

The **Oral Health and Clinical Support Services** team delivers comprehensive dental care to children and seniors across various settings, including our dental operatories, schools, and licensed childcare facilities. Under the Healthy Smiles Ontario program, children receive preventive and essential dental services, with school-aged children screened during school visits and fluoride treatments provided to children in 15 licensed childcare facilities. Through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, vulnerable seniors can access free dental services at the MLHU clinic or through referrals to external dental professionals.



In addition to protection from disease is the delivery of oral health services to seniors and children. The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program supports low-income seniors with their oral health to improve the quality of living. Healthy Smiles Ontario provides routine, preventative and emergency oral services to children and youth. When the oral health staff are not in the clinic, they are in the schools providing essential oral health checks and referrals for treatment.

Family and Community Health

Comprised of five teams, the Family and Community Health division delivers clinical services; provides education and skill-building opportunities; mobilizes people and organizations to achieve collective impact; and ensures issues of public health importance are on the agenda of policy makers – all in collaboration with individuals, families, communities, schools, government, and health system partners.

The **School Team** collaborates with school boards and elementary and secondary schools in the Middlesex-London region to promote healthy school environments. This is achieved through health promotion activities, curriculum supports and the provision of clinical services in secondary schools.



The Municipal and Community Health Promotion team builds, maintains, and strengthens municipal and community partnerships to support the development and implementation of local strategic priorities and plans. They also provide evidence, expertise, and recommendations to contribute to healthy public policy development.

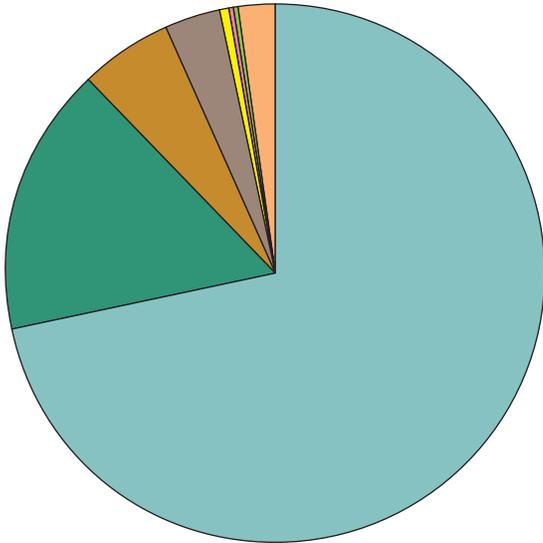
The **Social Marketing and Health System Partnership** team fosters influential partnerships within the health system, to share information, coordinate activities, and mobilize resources. They also create and disseminate health information to the public and community partners with targeted messaging to influence behaviour and healthy public policy development. Priority areas of focus for both the Municipal and Community Health and Social Marketing and Health System Partnership teams include, reducing substance use harms, and changing social norms related to substance use.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children provides call-in support to pregnant individuals and families with young children through the Healthy Growth and Development line. They also offer phone and home visiting breastfeeding support and deliver Ontario's Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program.

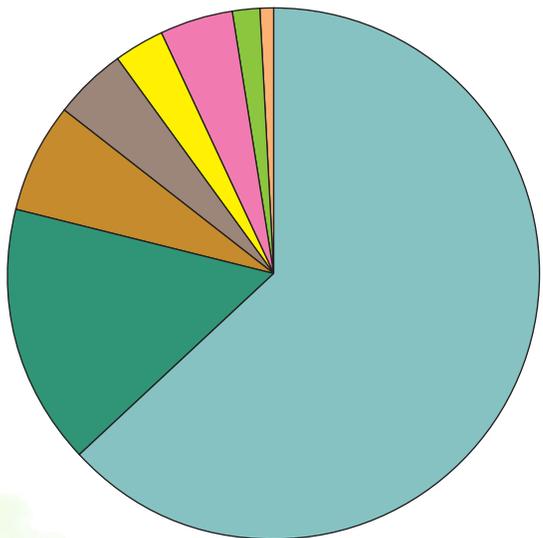
The **Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** and **Early Years Group Programs** team delivers home visiting services for young first-time parents, universal on-line prenatal education and a targeted prenatal class for individuals at risk for food insecurity. NFP complements the HBHC program by providing a more intensive intervention to families experiencing complex challenges. The team is also participating in a research project piloting implementation of the iHEAL program – an intervention aimed at providing support to individuals experiencing intimate partner violence.



Audited Financial Statements



Revenue	
Ministry of Health	\$33,161,332
The Corporation of the City of London	\$7,768,346
Ministry of Children and Youth Services	\$2,483,313
The Corporation of the County of Middlesex	\$1,485,535
Government of Canada	\$312,265
Property Search Fees	\$451
Family Planning	\$106,803
Cannabis Legalization Implementation Funding	\$110,035
Other Income	\$1,230,173
	\$46,658,253



Expenditures	
Salaries	\$28,414,596
Benefits	\$7,076,335
Professional Services	\$3,117,322
Rent and Maintenance	\$2,607,726
Other expenses	\$1,310,560
Materials and supplies	\$1,952,440
Amoritization expense	\$824,953
Travel	\$260,143
	\$45,564,075

The Middlesex-London Health Unit ended in a balanced position in 2023, with a small draw-down on reserve funding used to address labour relations costs associated with the organizational restructuring. While the 2023 financial statements denote a surplus, this is reflective of Public Sector Accounting Standards, and the classification of non-cash assets such as Amortization as surplus. If you have any questions, or would like a copy of our [Audited Financial Statements](#), please email health@mlhu.on.ca.



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