



## Message from Hamilton Community Foundation

**V**ital Signs is a citizens' report from Hamilton Community Foundation on multiple aspects of the city's quality of life. It looks at Hamilton's vitality, highlights important research data, and identifies significant trends on issues that matter to all of us.

Since 2010, we've presented statistics in 12 areas that together have generated recurring themes – progress in areas like the economy, environment and the arts, as well as persistent signs of social danger such as the gap between rich and poor, unemployment rates for newcomers and youth and the under-representation of certain populations in civic life.

Over the past two years, we've been encouraged by many community members who have told us how they're using Vital Signs as food for thought on corporate and personal action, and where they allocate resources. At the same time, many of the statistics we presented in 2010-11 continue to have currency and relevance.

This year we're doing something a little different. The 2012 edition of Hamilton's Vital Signs is a progress report. With the input and advice of our Vital Signs advisory committee, we've invited a range of local experts to provide an update on what's happened in six Hamilton Vital Signs indicators over the last year. This ranges from new initiatives, to emerging trends, to broader issues outside city limits that, nevertheless, have a profound impact on life in Hamilton.

We've also invited Christopher Hume, noted urban issues columnist, to share his views of our city both from his broad expert perspective as well as from his more intimate knowledge as a member of the Chamber of Commerce's Renew Hamilton initiative.

Each of our contributors has outlined a section on "what's ahead" in their respective areas. Sometimes it's future implications for the developments they've described, sometimes it's upcoming programs to look for, sometimes it's their



Terry Cooke  
President & CEO, HCF



Paul Gibel, FCA  
Board Chair, HCF

view on how policies need to support change. Always, it contains a challenge, an opportunity for citizens to find out more, to dig deeper and make informed decisions, and to take action that can make a difference to improving life for all Hamiltonians.

Hamilton Community Foundation's goal with Vital Signs is to illuminate challenges and opportunities and to stimulate community conversations and citizen action. We encourage you to share the report and think about the role you can play in strengthening Hamilton.

Vital Signs issues are complex. Visit [HamiltonVitalSigns.ca](http://HamiltonVitalSigns.ca) for more information, including the 2010 and 2011 reports. The website is a rich resource for statistical data around 12 quality of life areas including graphic presentation of the longer-term trends, and links to source data from which Vital Signs has been gleaned.

Please visit [www.hcf.on.ca](http://www.hcf.on.ca) to read about how Hamilton Community Foundation is working with donors, and charitable and civic partners to address the issues presented in Hamilton's Vital Signs.



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[www.hamiltonvitalsigns.ca](http://www.hamiltonvitalsigns.ca)



The transformation of Hamilton's downtown into a vibrant urban core won't be easy, but there are already signs that things are changing.

## Learning to love Hamilton

By Christopher Hume



How does a city that has so much come to believe it has so little? How does a city with so many assets come to see them as liabilities? How does a city gain self-confidence and learn to love itself?

These are the sorts of questions that come to mind whenever I visit Hamilton. Like many Torontonians, I am expected to dismiss our neighbour down the QEW out of hand. It is assumed we Torontonians view Hamilton as a rust-belt lunch-bucket community, Steeltown, a little too rough around the edges for our liking or its own good.

But of course, there's more to Hamilton than the clichés would have us believe. The 2012 Hamilton Vital Signs report paints a

picture of a city that is working to overcome its problems and plant the seeds of its own regeneration at the same time as its residents are finding new ways to inhabit the city.

What's obvious is that Hamilton is a city in flux. Certainly, it is not the same place it was in the heyday of Stelco and Dofasco, who between the two of them, used to employ upwards of 30,000 people. Though the once-mighty steel industry still plays an important role in Hamilton, it is a shadow of its former self.

Globalization has devastated cities such as Hamilton whether they be in North America, Europe or beyond. For many corporations, it's as easy to export jobs now as products.

At the same time, even more profound than globalization in its effects is the great urbanization now underway around

the planet. In 2006, the United Nations told us that for the first time in human history, more than half of humanity lives in cities. Although the most explosive urban growth has been in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, Canada and North America have not been immune from this global phenomenon.

Coincidentally, if the suburban dream isn't dead, it can no longer be assumed. Though sprawl continues apace, it is becoming clear that in an age of climate change, rising energy prices and growing gridlock, cities are inherently more efficient, sustainable and, therefore, more desirable than traditional car-dependent sub-divisions.

For Hamilton, a city that really *is* a city, the implications are huge – and almost entirely positive. But the transi-

tion from hollowed out centre of a highly dispersed suburban region to vibrant urban core at the heart of a network of hubs connected by transit won't be easy. Hamilton and the whole Greater Toronto Area have failed to keep up with demand for public transit. As a result, we are 25 years behind advanced transit cities.

Through it all, Hamilton has been agonizingly slow to dismantle the car-based infrastructure put in place more than half a century ago. Small changes, such as re-thinking the system of one-way streets, can transform whole neighbourhoods and make them once again attractive to residents. More residents lead to enhanced street life which leads to more opportunities, commercial, cultural, retail and institutional.

With its outstanding housing stock and compact form, Hamilton is well poised for the kind of intensification that will occur whether civic officials are ready or not. Already, condos have started to pop up and several important heritage sites – most notably, the Lister Block – have been restored.

Still, Hamilton's long-awaited urban revitalization has yet to unfold. Though rumours of an artist-led reclamation of downtown have been circulating for years, they have yet to materialize fully. But something is happening. Hamilton may not be the new Bohemia – at least not now – yet an arts scene is emerging. If history offers any clues, the forces of gentrification will not be far behind. In the beginning, artists rush in where developers fear to go, but that quickly changes.

The young professionals moving to Hamilton and buying houses that to them seem cheap don't arrive with the baggage of earlier generations. They see what many don't – a city. In the decades ahead, Hamilton's strengths will be those very qualities it has long overlooked, everything from its architecture and its streets to its history and civic grittiness. Unburdened by memories of what Hamilton once was, this new generation will see only what the city could be.

**Christopher Hume** is an urban affairs columnist for the *Toronto Star*. He is also the moderator of "Conversations with Christopher Hume and Guests", a speaker series hosted by the Renew Hamilton Project, an initiative of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce.

# Where we live matters

## THE ISSUE

Just as conditions within our homes have important implications for our health and development, conditions in the neighbourhoods surrounding our homes also have major impacts on our lives. Social and economic features of our neighbourhoods have been linked with mortality rates, general health status, birth outcomes, chronic health conditions, and educational attainment, as well as with mental health, injuries and violence. Hamilton has many reports that highlight the disparities across various health, social and economic outcomes. While some differences in neighbourhood outcomes are to be expected, in Hamilton that gap can often be too wide. Vital Signs found that in some neighbourhoods, poverty rates are below six percent, while in others the rate is over 40 percent; additionally, child poverty rates were over 60 percent in several neighbourhoods.

## What's Happening

Hamilton is taking action when it comes to building healthy neighbourhoods. The City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation are supporting neighbourhood action planning in ten priority neighbourhoods. This fall, people in each of these neighbourhoods will be implementing these plans, unique to each area. They will address issues such as improving parks and community space, traffic calming, and helping youth make positive choices, all based on needs and ideas identified by the residents themselves. The plans support building neighbourhood pride through beautification, property standards enforcement and neigh-

## VITAL SIGN: Gap Between Rich and Poor



This garden, created by residents in east Hamilton's McQuesten neighbourhood, provides community members with the opportunity to work together and grow their own food.

bourhood events. Supporting education for young people, helping residents of all ages connect or re-connect with the workforce, and improving safety are common across many neighbourhood plans.

The plans are being developed through resident leadership, and resident and neighbourhood stakeholders are leading the implementation, inviting government, businesses, non-profits and community groups to work alongside them to make the changes necessary.

The work is being supported by the City (through its Best Start initiative) and Hamilton Community Foundation who have invested in community development workers assigned to the ten neighbourhoods. These community developers act as neighbourhood human resources to help engage and connect local residents.

They have been key to the success of the planning process and will be critical to the success of the implementation.

Beyond these ten focus neighbourhoods, other neighbourhoods are undertaking their own development work, with residents undertaking activities like strategic planning, better connecting neighbours to each other and local services, and working with organizations to increase awareness of their collective roles in supporting their young people.

The support and alignment of governments and other institutions is critical to the full success of neighbourhood plans. There are many positive signs. For example, Hamilton Health Sciences is relocating its Children's Treatment Centre in the lower city to provide more equitable access for families who need these services. The

Hamilton Family Health Team is working with residents and the City to develop a Community Networker position who will work with community families to help them connect with resources for improving health. Initiatives like *Best Start* are delivering services through a variety of neighbourhood "hubs" and are working to increase access to services with families "where they are". By integrating services at the neighbourhood level, they have helped reduce the wait-times for certain programs by up to 80 percent. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and its many community partners are working systemically to address the deep poverty that occurs in neighbourhoods throughout Hamilton.

## What's Ahead

While the current landscape offers plenty of hope, the work has just begun. Neighbourhood change will require significant policy discussions to occur. How will we provide affordable housing in all areas of our community? How will we continue to implement approaches that better integrate our schools across income levels? How will we summon the courage to invest rather than cut valuable community-based services that not only support neighbourhood change but also have a huge impact on the health of residents in neighbourhoods?

What lies ahead is a great opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to "closing the gap" between outcomes that exist in various parts of our community. Residents and other stakeholders have begun to lay out the plan to get us there... all of us need to join them in the work.

**Paul Johnson** is Director of Neighbourhood Strategies for the City of Hamilton.

## VITAL SIGN: Arts and Culture



The James Street North "Super Crawl" last month attracted more than 60,000 visitors to Hamilton's core.

# Investing in the arts pays dividends for the city

## THE ISSUE

Spend a little time at any of Hamilton's festivals and events, growing number of galleries, performances or design spaces, and you'll see the vital contribution the arts and cultural sector makes to our growing civic pride, prosperity, and vibrancy. Vital Signs shows that the number of artists in Hamilton has grown 22 percent over the last 15 years, faster than the overall labour force. The success of the arts community promotes economic development and a sense of belonging in the neighbourhoods they revitalize, enriching Hamilton's overall quality of life.

## What's Happening

Recognizing the role that the arts play as an economic catalyst, in February 2012 the City of Hamilton moved the Culture Division to the Planning and Economic Development Department, which connects Culture along with Tourism to policy-makers and funding streams that could improve the working conditions of Hamilton artists. This move, together with the adoption of a Cultural Policy by City Council in June 2012, paves the way for improved support for the arts. By arriving at a municipal-level consensus on culture as a value worth supporting, the Cultural Policy promotes artistic activities with benefits for civic engagement and free expression

that extend beyond economics alone.

This past year has seen increased recognition of the financial challenges facing Hamilton's arts and cultural sector. Since the report of *The Big Picture Revisited*<sup>1</sup> – the result of a 2009 symposium that took the pulse of the arts community and its needs – the Arts Advisory Commission of the City of Hamilton has established an Arts Funding Task Force. The role of the task force is to research and recommend a stronger infrastructure of municipal support for the arts.

To support the Task Force's work, Hill Strategies conducted an online survey of Hamilton artists and arts organizations<sup>2</sup>. Results from the 275 respondents indicate that individual artists earn a median in-

come of \$27,000, with one third of responding artists reporting incomes below Hamilton's low-income cut-off level of \$22,000. Increased funding was reported as artists' highest priority for municipal support. The survey also found that for arts organizations, 18 percent of revenues came from public sector sources while 47 percent of revenue came from fundraising, with the remaining 35 percent raised through earned revenue activities. The Hill Strategies survey also found that over three-quarters of individual artists received no financial support from the City in the prior year, indicating a potential area for future investment.

Situating Hamilton's support for the arts alongside seven Canadian cities of comparable geography (Southern Ontario) or population (mid-size cities) – London, Waterloo region, Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, Halifax and Winnipeg – reveals a lag in Hamilton's investment in its cultural assets<sup>3</sup>. Of the eight cities surveyed, Hamilton ranks seventh in cultural funding at \$3.08 per capita, compared to the average contribution of the seven other cities at \$5.35 per capita.

## What's Ahead

Hamiltonians can look ahead to the implementation of the City's Cultural Plan and coming Cultural Report Card. While more supportive City policies and the prospect of an arts investment model to come from the Arts Funding Task Force are welcome possibilities, artists remain undeterred and continue to renew our city with new events and spaces.

These new creative initiatives continue to add their diverse voices to our cultural conversations, and Hamilton is increasingly attracting a groundswell of artists from other municipalities drawn not only by our relatively affordable cost of living but also by our opportunities to create and participate in a cultural scene where the drive of creative individuals sends shockwaves of difference through our streets and lives.

**Stephanie Vegh** is Executive Director of the Hamilton Arts Council.

1 Full report of *The Big Picture Revisited* is available online: <http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/CB79FF53-1B2D-4A60-8105-5BBDFOC02E8D/61969/TheBigPictureRevisitedReport20091.pdf>  
 2 The summary of Hill Strategies' findings are included as Appendices B and C of the Arts Advisory Commission's Report AAC-12-001, "Strategic Municipal Investment in the Arts." Presented at the May 2, 2012 session of the General Issues Committee of Council. [http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/2C07B25A-FB74-480B-B865-3AC7844C427B/0/rdonlyres/2C07B25A-FB74-480B-B865-3AC7844C427B/0/May02EDRMS\\_n297008\\_v1\\_8\\_2\\_AAC\\_12001\\_Strategic\\_Municipal\\_Inve.pdf](http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/2C07B25A-FB74-480B-B865-3AC7844C427B/0/rdonlyres/2C07B25A-FB74-480B-B865-3AC7844C427B/0/May02EDRMS_n297008_v1_8_2_AAC_12001_Strategic_Municipal_Inve.pdf)  
 3 The role and structure of arts funding in select Canadian cities (Hill Strategies Research, December 2011).



Government, organizational and individual choices all have a role to play in improving air quality further.

# Breathing a little easier

## Hamilton's air quality has shown steady improvement over the past twenty years

### THE ISSUE

Citizens have become increasingly aware that poor air quality can affect health – especially for young children and the elderly. Hamilton's air quality is affected by industry and vehicle emissions, and by its location next to an escarpment and the lake.

### What's Happening

Over the past 20 years, Hamilton's air quality has improved steadily. All air pollution indicators except one have been decreasing year over year.

Two pollutants associated with negative health effects (respirable particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide) decreased by 32 percent and 27 percent respectively over the past decade, due largely to improved emissions from modern cars and trucks. Unfortunately, ground level ozone levels have remained steady over the same period because of summer smog arriving from the U.S. Midwest.

Major local sources of air pollutants

include emissions from personal and commercial vehicles, and home and industrial heating. While industrial emissions have been significantly reduced, more is needed to achieve levels in line with international industrial best practices.

Poor air quality causes a range of health problems including eye, nose and throat irritation and breathing difficulties, some of which can be life-threatening. *Clean Air Hamilton* commissioned SENES Consulting Inc. to provide the most current assessment of the health risks and impacts of air pollution in Hamilton. The February 2012 report identified five key air pollutants – fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, ground-level ozone, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide – that contribute to approximately 186 premature deaths and more than 700 respiratory or cardiovascular-related hospital admissions of Hamiltonians each year.

We are also beginning to understand how these risk factors vary at the local level. Last year, *Clean Air Hamilton* monitored air quality in 11 separate neighbourhoods

across the city. Using the risk factors identified in the SENES Report, the studies calculated the percentage increase in premature deaths attributable to air pollution in each area, and found a wide variation between neighbourhoods.

### What's Ahead

The private, public and non-profit sectors, as well as individual citizens, all have a role to play in improving Hamilton's air quality further. While industrial emissions have been significantly reduced here, we still lag behind international best practices. As well, decisions about urban design and land use planning, along with personal lifestyle choices like commuting, what vehicle to choose, or what appliance to buy, all have an impact on emissions – and consequently on public health.

Information about daily air quality is available to individuals through the Air Quality Health Index pilot program introduced to Hamilton in 2011. It gives local air quality conditions and offers strategies citizens can use to reduce their exposure

to pollutants ([www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca)).

At a policy level, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment has proposed that Comprehensive Airshed Management areas be established across Canada as a strategy for improving air quality in communities. This would be very useful for Hamilton, as would a place-based airshed management strategy for the city.

Finally, expanding the network of fixed and mobile air monitoring stations is crucial. Better local air quality knowledge will inform policy development, abatement strategies, and initiatives to reduce local emissions.

**Dr. Brian McCarry** is a professor of chemistry at McMaster University and the chair of *Clean Air Hamilton*, an advisory committee on air quality issues to the public and Hamilton City Council.

**Brian Montgomery** is the Air Quality and Climate Change Co-ordinator for the City of Hamilton. For more information on trends and research visit [www.cleanair.hamilton.ca](http://www.cleanair.hamilton.ca)

## VITAL SIGN: Getting Started



An online resource, soon to be available in 11 languages, aims to assist newcomers as Hamilton competes with other Canadian cities to attract professionals, skilled tradespeople and entrepreneurial immigrants.

# Newcomers key to growth

### THE ISSUE

Hamilton increasingly depends on immigration to grow its population and to fill gaps in our local labour market supply. Yet the number of new permanent residents to Hamilton decreased substantially last year and it's still hard to enter Hamilton's labour market.

### What's Happening

Fewer newcomers are settling in Hamilton permanently, though more temporary workers and students are coming to Hamilton. In 2011, 3,296 permanent residents came to Hamilton, down substantially from 4,003 in 2010 and 4,613 in 2005<sup>1</sup>. The number of temporary foreign workers grew by one-third from 2007 to 2011, a similar growth rate to that of Ontario. The number of temporary foreign students in Hamilton also increased during this period.

In the Hamilton-Burlington-Grimsby area, during 2011 the unemployment rate for all landed immigrants was slightly higher than for residents born in Canada (6.6 percent vs. 6.2 percent). Unemployment rates are strongly related to the amount of time in Canada. For example, the rate is estimated to be just over 10 percent for immigrants who have been here for five years or less, and 6.3 percent for immigrants who have been here longer. (This difference was even more noticeable during the peak of the recession in 2009, when the rate was 18.6 percent for those here five years or less, almost double that of those who were here longer.) Immigrant women had lower unemployment rates than immigrant men, but their labour force participation rate was slightly lower.

Given the ongoing challenges that newcomers have entering the labour market in Canada, the federal government is undertaking profound shifts in immigration policy that include linking

immigration more directly to immediate labour market needs and significantly increasing the number of temporary workers. Foreign students can now apply to remain in Canada to work. There are also more restrictions on bringing family members to Canada and on refugees.

There have been many changes to the service landscape for newcomers over the past year. The closure of Hamilton's largest settlement agency early in 2011 saw programs redistributed to a variety of other organizations. At the same time, considerable funding for settlement services to assist newcomers in their first years here has been shifted out of Ontario to other provinces. Recent local research found that many newcomers in Hamilton were not aware of all of the supports and that service providers also lacked information to make referrals confidently<sup>2</sup>.

In response, the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council, Social Planning Council

and other local partners worked to map out service pathways and increase co-ordination among service providers. *The Quick Guide of Services for Newcomers in Hamilton* was released in June 2012. Soon to be available in 11 languages, it can be accessed online at [www.welcometohamilton.ca](http://www.welcometohamilton.ca) under "Online Tools". The guide recognizes informal networks, as often the first point of contact for newcomers, and so bridges the awareness gaps between newcomers and the funded services.

As a result of the altered service climate in Hamilton, there is an ongoing need for co-ordination as well as public education about existing services and the various challenges that newcomers face in our city. Workforce Planning Hamilton worked with community partners to produce a guide to employment for newcomers entitled *Your New Life in Hamilton: Building a Successful Working Life* at <http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/224>

### What's Ahead

Hamilton is already in competition with other cities to attract professionals, skilled tradespeople, and entrepreneurial immigrants. It is estimated that within two decades, approximately one in every three people in Canada's labour force will be foreign born<sup>3</sup>. Newcomers in all immigration categories will still come to Hamilton, but our population is not being replenished: almost 40 percent of our foreign-born population settled here before 1971. For Hamilton to grow and prosper in the coming decades, it needs to be more proactive around immigration, including supplementing our various assets (e.g. post-secondary institutions and Golden Horseshoe location) by more targeted strategies.

**Sarah V. Wayland, PhD**, is a researcher focusing on various aspects of immigration and settlement at the provincial and national levels as well as within Hamilton.

<sup>1</sup> This figure reflects decreasing immigration to the province of Ontario as a whole, especially compared to some provinces in Western Canada. Permanent immigration to Alberta and Manitoba was up 50 percent from 2007 to 2011, and Saskatchewan more than doubled its intake.  
<sup>2</sup> Strengthening Newcomer Services, Report to the Community, Executive Summary, June 2012.  
<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Study: Projected trends to 2031 for the Canadian labour force, The Daily, August 17, 2011.

# Tackling Hamilton's obesity problem

## THE ISSUE

Healthy weight is a key factor in preventing disease. Being overweight increases one's risk of heart disease and diabetes and is linked to some forms of cancer. Mental health issues like depression, anxiety and self-esteem are also linked to obesity. Sixty percent of Hamiltonians aged 12 or older and 26 percent of Canadian children are overweight or obese<sup>1</sup> and these rates are continuing to increase. Experts acknowledge that maintaining optimum weight is a complex issue. While weight and activity can be seen as personal matters, healthy eating and sufficient exercise are more difficult in a society that encourages a sedentary lifestyle and that constantly promotes unhealthy food. To reverse obesity trends, we need to make healthy choices as easy as unhealthy choices, and promote public policies and community designs that encourage healthy behaviours.

## What's Happening

On an individual level, four key behaviours are linked to healthy weight or obesity: nutrition, physical activity, sedentary time, and sleep (sleep contributes to the regulation of appetite). On a community level, factors can range from how walkable or bicycle-friendly a city is, access to affordable recreation, the presence of high quality affordable food in neighbourhoods, school and institutional nutrition policies, and workplace activity programs.

In Hamilton, the City's Public Health Service is committed to developing a comprehensive plan to tackle childhood obesity. Community partner agencies and other

organizations across the city are also making obesity a priority. Together, they are already working on a range of approaches at individual and community levels.

At the individual level, programs promote nutrition and healthy eating in early learning and child care centres, early screening for poor eating patterns in families with pre-school children, pilot projects to develop school vegetable gardens, workshops for teachers integrating food and nutrition into the classroom, and strategies to educate and instill healthy living habits in childhood.

On a broader level, public and private organizations are also balancing the traditional approach of education and awareness with a new focus on a healthy communities model, moving beyond individual behaviours to look at policies and structures that have an impact on activity, access to healthy food, and consequently obesity.

For example, the City of Hamilton, both Hamilton school boards, hospitals and many private sector workplaces have developed healthy food and beverage policies; Public Health Services is working towards improving physical and economic access to healthy food. Recently a group of Canadian high school students put their minds to inventing new products and strategies to promote healthy weight. This summer enrichment program, known as *Shad Valley International*, brought students onto ten university campuses across Canada, including McMaster. Their challenge was to design a product (and its business plan) to decrease or prevent obesity in youth. Projects at McMaster ran the gamut from mentoring programs linking young girls with social work students and positive body image workshops, to high-tech educational devices that link learning with physical movement or measure physical

## VITAL SIGN: Health and Well-Being



Affordable recreation options for children, youth and adults can play a big role in the battle against obesity.

activity and water intake, to mobile apps promoting low-impact exercises, and a pocket-pack product that makes sour things taste sweet. Their creativity bodes well for our future.

## What's Ahead

While we know that obesity is dangerous – for example, an adult's risk of dying from a heart attack is 14 times higher if he or she was obese as a teenager<sup>2</sup> – our understanding of the science of obesity is far from complete. In a new thrust, McMaster University researchers and McMaster Children's Hospital clinicians have joined forces to tackle childhood obesity in a team called the MAC-Obesity Research Program. They are combining expertise in genetics, metabolism, biochemistry, physical activity and other areas to develop new ways to prevent and treat obesity-related diseases.

The momentum is building in Hamilton, but reversing obesity trends will take the continuing best efforts of everyone in the community.

## Contributing experts:

**Dr. Katherine Morrison**, Associate Professor, Pediatrics, McMaster University

**Claire Lechner**, MHS RD, Manager Chronic Disease Prevention, Healthy Living Division, City of Hamilton Public Health Services

**Dr. Chad Harvey**, Assistant Professor, Integrated Science and Biology, McMaster University

<sup>1</sup> The terms "overweight" and "obese" are defined by body mass index (BMI), a ratio of weight-to-height. To see where you fall on the healthy weight scale, go to: [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/weights-poids/guide-ld-adult/bmi\\_chart-graph\\_ilmc-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/weights-poids/guide-ld-adult/bmi_chart-graph_ilmc-eng.php)  
<sup>2</sup> Morrison JA, Friedman LA, Gray-McGuire C (2007) Metabolic syndrome in childhood predicts adult cardiovascular disease 25 years later: the Princeton Lipid Research Clinics Follow-up Study. *Pediatrics* 120: 340-345

# Addressing domestic violence

## THE ISSUE

The number of domestic violence occurrences reported to police in Hamilton soared by 70 percent between 2007 and 2010, rising to 3,798 from 2,189<sup>1</sup>. Experts estimate that less than one-in-four domestic violence incidents<sup>2</sup> are reported to police. Violence against women includes not only domestic violence, but also sexual violence (reported sexual offences increased by seven percent in Hamilton in 2011<sup>3</sup>), and other forms of abuse. The impact of violence against women (VAW) is felt not only by individual women but also by their children and partners, other family members, and the community at large. It devastates women's lives and isolates them from their communities. The cost to society is huge: a staggering \$4.2 billion annually for health care, criminal justice, social services, and lost wages and productivity, according to estimates by The Canadian Women's Foundation<sup>4</sup>.

## What's Happening

In Hamilton, concern for women's safety is shared by a wide range of agencies working individually and together on the issue.

The Woman Abuse Working Group (WAWG), a community coordinating committee of more than 20 agencies from the legal system and social services, has been tackling these issues for two decades. WAWG's public awareness campaigns have targeted high school students, teachers, and dental hygienists – who can often see signs of violence hidden to others. In May, the coalition sponsored a contest for students to produce a public service ad about consent. The winning "Only Yes Means Yes" video was shown before all feature films at Hamilton's Ancaster and Mountain Cineplex screens for two weeks.

Safe shelter is one of the key barriers that keeps women from fleeing abusive situations and some local progress has been made in housing. Emergency VAW shelter beds and some transitional apartments have been added recently, along with supportive housing units for Aboriginal women and children. There has also been



The video "Only Yes Means Yes" was shown before all feature films at Hamilton's Ancaster and Mountain Cineplex screens for two weeks. You can watch it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsB2USFIG9c>

an increased investment in affordable housing. But even with these additions, shelters still have to turn women and children away, funding for transitional housing remains unsustainable, and there are long waiting lists for longer-term subsidized housing.

Provincially, the Domestic Violence Action Plan (which came out in 2005 and was updated in 2008) and subsequent work by the sector's Domestic Violence Advisory Council has sparked improvements in the child welfare and court support systems. As well, after broad consultation with the VAW sector, the Ontario government announced its Sexual Violence Action Plan in March 2011. This province-wide strategy looks at leadership and accountability, preventing sexual violence, improving services, and strengthening the criminal justice response to sexual violence.

These broader efforts support the many agencies throughout the community that are meeting the urgent needs of families living with violence today – and working to end violence against women in the future.

## What's Ahead

This year, the WAWG coalition is building a report card that will help identify the scope of violence against women in Hamilton, discover gaps in service and solutions, and document progress. The group is also working with survivors of violence (especially mothers) to focus its

next community awareness campaign on the child witness aspect of violence.

Recognizing that men's attitudes and male leadership play a pivotal role in addressing violence against women, a group of 35 of Hamilton's male leaders – including agency CEOs, police officials, business leaders, clergy, and others – are working to develop a strategy to move Hamilton forward on violence prevention. With help from Interval House, the men are examining the reality of male violence and exploring ways they might use their roles as male community leaders to create systemic change.

These are just a few examples of many initiatives underway across the community in the continuing battle against a problem that remains pervasive.

## Contributing experts:

**Medora Uppal**, Director of Operations, YWCA Hamilton and **Kristene Viljasoo**, Director Women's Services, Good Shepherd Centre, Co-Chairs of Hamilton's Woman Abuse Working Group.

**Clare Freeman**, Executive Director of Interval House of Hamilton.

<sup>1</sup> Due to a 2011 change in the way Hamilton Police Services keeps statistics, a direct comparison with previous numbers isn't possible; however in the new method, HPS recorded 6,430 domestic violence occurrences in 2011 with charges laid in 1,090 of those incidents  
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence/>  
<sup>3</sup> Hamilton Police Services Year End Crime Statistics 2011  
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence/>



Hamilton Community Foundation works to strengthen Hamilton by connecting people, ideas and resources.

- We help donors build funds to make the difference they want to make in Hamilton.
- We support all aspects of community life by giving grants to the widest possible range of charitable organizations and initiatives.
- We foster community leadership by bringing people together around the community's needs and opportunities.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this report. Please contact us:

120 King St. W., Suite 700  
 Hamilton, ON L8P 4V2  
 Tel: 905-523-5600  
 Fax: 905-523-0741  
 Web: [www.hcf.on.ca](http://www.hcf.on.ca)  
 Email: [friendships@hcf.on.ca](mailto:friendships@hcf.on.ca)

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