



United Way
Halton & Hamilton

THE NEED IN COMMUNITY

January 2022 Special Report

THE SITUATION

In December 2021, agencies reported even greater challenges. As the calendar year came to a close, it became apparent that the pandemic has placed further strain on the social fabric of our communities. In fact, the pressures on programs have been relentless.

Tens of thousands of local people rely on United Way to be alive, healthy and safe. Many have reached out to a distress line or a food bank for the first time in their lives, and this heightened need will not go away in the thick of widespread job losses, working from home while juggling virtual learning and caregiving, loss of loved ones, and countless other obstacles.

In December, we asked agencies about their current challenges. The response was more than distressing – making this year's campaign even more critical. This is what was reported:

STRAIN ON OPERATIONS

- Not only are agencies facing staff turnover, current team members are struggling and facing mental and physical health challenges, including the burden of carrying caseloads when other staff leave.
- Operating costs are skyrocketing as a result of inflation. Multiple reported the costs of acquiring essential items like food and cleaning products for clients has increased.
- Fluctuating pandemic restrictions and having to adapt programming and operations virtually and then shifting continues to be a challenge. Restrictions result in reduced program numbers. Additionally, staffing needs have increased as agencies needed to offer more cohorts but maintain staff:client ratios.

INCREASED DEMAND

- Nearly half (43%) of programs saw an increase in demand.
- 29% indicated they were not able to meet the demand due to lack of resources as a result of funding restrictions and lack of skilled staffing.



- Specifically, demand pressures include:
 - Increased need for free/accessible programming especially for youth, seniors and those isolated.
 - Increased need for food and essential items.
 - Increased mental health challenges as result of the pandemic.
 - Increase in referrals from other organizations (including school) and self-referrals.

REDUCED ACCESS & WAITLISTS

- Half of programs (49%) reported having a waitlist.
- COVID-19 health restrictions resulted in smaller cohorts & fewer clients served.
- Volunteer challenges and hesitancy resulted in fewer clients being supported.
- Many clients reported not being ready to resume programming, especially if in person due to fear or having to manage other challenges (being overwhelmed).
- Younger children attending virtual programming saw a reduction (fatigue with virtual since schooling was largely virtual over the 2021 year).

Our network of agency partners work to deliver services and support into neighbourhoods where marginalized and vulnerable people live, where poverty is concentrated, and where COVID-19 has hit hardest. We need your support more than ever before, to help frontline community services provide critical support to residents in need. Give today.