

# REPORT

## Oakville Public Library Board

Meeting Date: March 21, 2024

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**FROM:** Oakville Public Library

**DATE:** March 12, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Halton Information Providers Update – March 21, 2024

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### RECOMMENDATION:

That the Halton Information Providers (HIP) Update report be received for information.

### KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Oakville Public Library (OPL) leads the HIP joint venture and manages the Halton Community Services Directory ([hipinfo.ca](http://hipinfo.ca)) together with Burlington Public Library, Halton Hills Public Library, Milton Public Library, and The Halton Resource Connection as participating systems.
- Directory usage in 2023 returned to pre-pandemic levels, reaching almost 900,000 sessions.
- Significant leadership changes within the HIP Executive team and among local data curators in 2023 necessitated extensive onboarding and training across the partnership.
- With support from the InformOntario and InformCanada Boards of Directors, HIP successfully facilitated the merger between the two I&R organizations, establishing the foundation for a national I&R association, with Marcus Logan, Manager Community Development and Engagement appointed as president.
- In 2023, HIP posted lower than budgeted revenue numbers. This was an expected/monitored shift over the past several years and will need to be addressed as part of the 2025 budget.
- Negotiations are in progress for a new MOU with Halton Region to provide an internal service catalogue through the HIP Database, detailing every service offered to Halton residents.

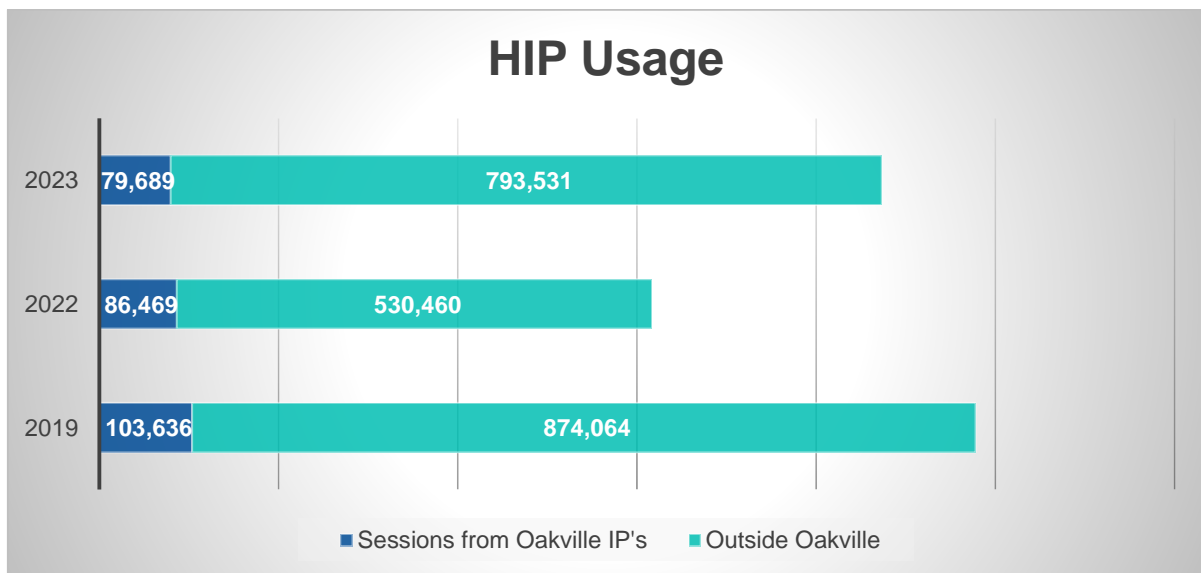
### BACKGROUND:

The Halton Information Providers (HIP), led by the Oakville Public Library and in collaboration with Burlington, Milton, and Halton Hills Public Libraries as well as the

Halton Resource Connection, operate the Halton Community Services Directory (hipinfo.ca). This platform provides comprehensive access to community and social services in the Halton Region, covering health care, emergency services, food support, housing, employment, and more. Local certified Information & Referral Specialists and Database Curators maintain community services data for various community agencies, including youth and seniors, and supports other Information and Referral (I&R) staff by providing the most up-to-date information and culturally appropriate referrals on programs and services to Halton residents in their time of need.

**HIP sees positive growth in 2023**

In 2023, the Halton Community Services Directory showed positive engagement, with usage nearing pre-pandemic levels, reaching almost 900,000 sessions. Oakville residents contributed significantly to this trend, with unique sessions in the area amounting to 79,689 over the year. This reflects a steady recovery and a move towards the activity levels seen pre- pandemic. The annual viewership statistics present a pattern of consistent yet resilient usage, indicating the directory's sustained relevance and its key role in connecting the Halton community with essential services. Furthermore, hipinfo.ca recorded a notable increase in database sessions in 2023, with a 42% rise over 2022, highlighting the directory's ongoing importance and effectiveness in serving the community.



Measure	2019 Q4 YTD	2022 Q4 YTD	2023 Q4 YTD	% Change 2019/2023	% Change 2022/2023
Database sessions	977,700	616,929	873,220	-11%	42%
Unique Visitors*	39,774	41,474	48,525	22%	17%
Training sessions	11	18	18	64%	0%
Outreach	18	61	51	183%	-16%

### **Leadership Challenges**

Amidst this backdrop of growth, HIP navigated through a year marked by substantial leadership changes at the executive levels within the municipalities outside Oakville. These transitions necessitated extensive meetings with partners and a focused effort on training new staff and reinforcing the partnership's foundation. A new 3-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the partners was signed, symbolizing a renewed commitment to collaboration and expansion. Furthermore, a satisfaction survey in (Q3) aimed to capture comprehensive feedback from agencies and the community ensures the directory's continued evolution and effectiveness.

### **Halton Newcomer Pods**

In 2023, the Halton Newcomer infopods emerged as a standout success, drawing attention and requests from various agencies. As the IRCC grant concludes this year, the program's evaluation will focus on usage, community impact, and strategic location assessments (6 infopods reside in Oakville).

### **InformOntario and InformCanada Merger**

HIP also led the merger of InformOntario and InformCanada. This initiative, currently awaiting CRA approval, signifies a monumental step toward unifying and enhancing the I&R sector nationwide. This merger not only highlights HIP's leadership in the field but also sets a precedent for future collaborations, including closer ties with InformUSA to bolster the I&R sector's profile and support those who serve within it.

### **Revenue Challenges**

In 2023, HIP faced lower-than-expected revenues, primarily due to decreased service fees, marking a continuation of a multi-year trend. As this trend is expected to continue, OPL will need to make strategic adjustments to the 2025 budget. The shifting landscape of Information & Referral (I&R) services in Ontario, marked by financial instability, and several closures of smaller information centers and community data providers, has necessitated organizations like Toronto's FindHelp Information Services (211) to assume data management responsibilities for agencies that have discontinued operations.

Moreover, the shutdown of the Niagara Ontario 211 call center, where calls from Halton were answered and referrals made using HIP data, highlights the vulnerability of funding models within the sector. HIP leadership is a part of these conversations and has the support of FindHelp advocating for a new funding model.

The HIP team is diligently reviewing the financial model before the 2025 budget process. The goal is to identify all additional revenue streams and cost-saving measures to mitigate the impact of these changes. This approach aims to ensure the continued provision of essential services to the Halton community amidst evolving financial landscapes. Full financial details will be provided during the 2025 budgeting process, ensuring transparency and strategic foresight in addressing the upcoming fiscal challenges for HIP.

As these developments unfold, discussions around a new Service Agreement with the Halton Region and an internal service catalogue project hint at further strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing service delivery and information accessibility across the community. These efforts reflect HIP's ongoing commitment to innovation, collaboration, and service excellence, setting a promising trajectory for the future.

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