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To: Committee of the Whole  
Meeting Date: October 12, 2023  
From: Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services  
  
Dr. Barry Pakes  
Medical Officer of Health  
Re: Public Health 2022 Achievements and 2023/2024 Areas of Focus

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**This memorandum provides Council, as the Board of Health, with an update of Public Health 2022 achievements and areas of focus in 2023 and 2024**

York Region Public Health (Public Health) is governed by Regional Council as the Board of Health and is guided by the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#). Public Health works with families, individuals, businesses and organizations across all ages and communities to protect, promote and improve the health and wellbeing of York Region residents. To ensure Public Health meets the requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards and to keep the Board up to date on Public Health activities, this first annual memorandum provides highlights of Public Health's 2022 work and achievements and outlines key areas of focus in 2023 and 2024.

**The goal of Public Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and wellbeing of York Region residents**

Public Health primarily refers to population level interventions that protect and promote health and improve environments and conditions in which people can be healthy. Public Health does this by providing an array of diverse health protection and health promotion programs and activities with an emphasis on the social and economic determinants of health and health equity. Programs include clinical services to patients and clients, health protection and enforcement, health promotion interventions and communications, health surveillance and assessment, and foundational branch supports. To support these programs and activities, Public Health often works in partnership with governments, health and social sectors, and community organizations that work with equity deserving populations, and populations who are marginalized or experiencing vulnerabilities.

## **York Region Public Health uses innovative approaches to deliver 37 programs that are guided by the Ontario Public Health Standards**

York Region achieves its goal through 37 programs and services which serve York Region's 1.2 million residents. Public Health's core programs and services are organized and delivered through four divisions (Child and Family Health, Healthy Living, Health Protection and Infectious Diseases and Control), as well as foundational support services. Attachment 1 describes the programs and services offered by each division and highlights innovations that have improved our effectiveness and efficiency as we recover and renew from the pandemic.

Internal and external collaborations ensure Public Health delivers coordinated programs and services that meet the needs of York Region residents and communities.

## **In 2020, 2021 and 2022 Public Health was instrumental in York Region's COVID-19 Pandemic response**

During the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Public Health focused on the pandemic response, redeploying most of its staff and maintaining only essential public health services. Working collaboratively with Regional Council, internal regional partners, communities, agencies and all levels of government, Public Health worked to decrease COVID-19 morbidity and mortality and minimize social disruption, all with a health equity lens. Public Health demonstrated steadfast leadership and resiliency. Thanks to its integration within a Regional Government, the unwavering support of Council, and both internal and external partners, Public Health protected residents and supported their wellbeing despite the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Public Health led Health Emergency Operation Centre used incident management system principles to scale, expand and adjust its response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. After rigorous planning, the Health Emergency Operation Centre began to transition functions out of the incident management system structure in November 2021, and by April 2022 all Health Emergency Operation Centre operations were successfully absorbed into the Public Health divisional structure.

## **During 2022, Public Health delivered core Public Health programs and services in innovative ways**

During the transition out of the incident management system, Public Health continued to prioritize staff wellness and resiliency while progressively resuming programs and services that prevent disease, promote and improve the health of residents. This included many successes with the relaunching of programs and services in innovative ways (Attachment 1), for example:

- Developing digital mental health and wellness interventions to prevent and improve mental health during pregnancy and early parenthood

- Launching a multimedia campaign to raise awareness about the health risks associated with youth vaping
- Creating a secure portal to report animal biting incidents for the purpose of rabies control
- Providing virtual care, counselling, and medication management for tuberculosis patients

### **Public Health programs and services continue to be integrated with Community and Health Services Department initiatives**

As a Branch within the Community and Health Services Department, Public Health is an active partner meeting the human service needs of York Region through Public Health's participation and collaboration with departmental initiatives such as:

- Supporting and contributing to the Region's reviews and submissions of [long-term care legislative changes and draft national standards](#)
- Participating in Community Action Tables established under the [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#)
- Partnering with Social Services to enable funding of a rental or purchase of a breast pump for families who receive subsidy through Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support program
- Working with the Region's Access York Contact Centre to streamline processes for Access York to be the first point of contact for Seniors Dental clients and to update Public Health program information for residents that call into the contact centre for information

### **Public Health continues to protect York Region residents from COVID-19**

With the COVID-19 virus continuing to circulate locally and globally, Public Health has integrated COVID-19 surveillance, outbreak investigations and vaccination into routine programs while maintaining capacity for future surges. Public Health continues to protect the public by:

- Monitoring and surveillance of COVID-19 in the community and globally
- Messaging to the public about the risks of COVID-19 and the steps to take to protect themselves
- Working with internal and external partners to ensure planning and preparedness for potential surges
- Continuing to offer paediatric and adult COVID-19 vaccines at clinics in Regional and mobile locations to eligible individuals six months of age and older

- Ensuring COVID-19 vaccine distribution to health care providers across the Region
- Monitoring and completing outbreak investigations in high-risk settings including congregate living settings, long term care, and retirement homes
- Providing congregate living settings with timely onsite support (e.g., onsite assessments, hand hygiene audits, cleaning and disinfection audits, consultations, etc.), educational infection prevention and control audits, and updated training designed specifically for essential caregivers, visitors, and families

## **Public Health has identified areas of focus for 2023 and into 2024**

During 2023, Public Health embarked on strategic priority setting to support the recovery and renewal of public health through innovative and efficient delivery of core programs and services, recovering from the gaps created during the pandemic (e.g., school oral health screening and immunizations), and understanding and meeting the changing needs of York Region's communities and residents. Key areas of focus into 2024 include:

- Delivery of innovative and efficient core programs and services by:
  - Implementing the principles and values of a learning organization to enhance skills in creating, acquiring and translating knowledge within and beyond Public Health
  - Enhancing efficiencies, client experiences and outcomes by leveraging virtual care, web-based engagement and enhanced processes
  - Revisioning and augmenting the structure and function of branch level foundational supports with a focus on a culture of quality and innovation
  - Implementing learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic response across all Public Health programs and structures
  - Supporting staff wellbeing post-pandemic and optimizing work and wellness in a hybrid environment
  - Enhancing effectiveness and coordination of communication to protect and promote community health and wellbeing, including improving awareness of the value of public health work with internal and external stakeholders
- Recovering from program and service gaps created by the pandemic and prevention of future pandemics by:
  - Identifying and responding to the increasing burden of chronic diseases, mental health and addiction issues and the changing environmental health landscape

- Maintaining ongoing surveillance for COVID-19, seasonal influenza and other pathogens and working collaboratively with health care and congregate settings to deliver a coordinated response that prevents and protects against infectious diseases and outbreaks
- Ensuring the population of York Region is protected from vaccine preventable diseases by catching up on routine childhood immunizations in York Region and delivering and communicating about new vaccines to protect York Region residents
- Continuing to work with external providers to deliver services that address dental emergencies, denture and dental specialist services, and completing construction at a fifth Public Health dental clinic at 50 High Tech Road in the City of Richmond Hill. This clinic is in addition to four other Public Health dental clinics located at 4261 Highway 7 East in the City of Markham, 17150 Yonge Street in the Town of Newmarket, 20849 Dalton Road in the Town of Georgina and 9060 Jane Street in the City of Vaughan
- Understanding and meeting changing needs by:
  - Conducting a York Region population health assessment to better understand the post pandemic health status and needs of residents and inform program delivery
  - Supporting harm reduction initiatives to decrease opioid and other substance related harms and deliver innovative programming to minimize the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improve emotional wellbeing during pregnancy and early parenting
  - Prioritizing an aging population by working collaboratively with Community and Health Service partners to set Public Health actions and outcomes within the pending [renewed plan to support seniors](#)

## **The work of Public Health is funded through both Provincial and Municipal contributions**

Until 2019, the Province funded up to 75% of eligible costs for mandated public health programs and up to 100% of other related programs, with municipalities contributing the rest. In 2020, the Province integrated all related programs into mandatory programs and changed the funding formula to fund 70% of eligible costs for mandated public health programs, with municipalities contributing the remainder. For 2022 and 2023, the Province provided a 1% increase to mandatory programs, the first funding increase since 2018.

On August 18, 2023, the Province announced the return to the 75/25 cost sharing funding ratio. Since York Region already contributes more than the required cost share this recent announcement will not change the mandatory programs base funding for the Region. Provincial

funding for mandatory programs continues to fall short of its 75% share of actual costs of delivering the programs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Funding for Mandatory Programs

Year	Provincial Funding		Regional Funding		Total Expenses (\$ in millions)
	(\$ in millions)	% of total expenses	(\$ in millions)	% of total expenses	
2020	\$44.8	66.4%	\$22.7	33.6%	\$67.5
2021	\$44.8	64.2%	\$25.0	35.8%	\$69.8
2022	\$45.2	63.0%	\$26.6	37.0%	\$71.8

In addition, since the 2019 implementation of the 100% funded Seniors Dental Care program, York Region received funding increases in both 2022 and 2023 (Table 2).

Table 2  
Funding for Seniors Dental Care Program  
(\$ in millions)

Year	Approved Funding
2020	3.96
2021	3.96
2022	7.10
2023	11.60

Beginning in 2020 through 2023, the Province has been providing COVID-19 one-time funding to offset extraordinary costs associated with the COVID-19 response and COVID-19 vaccination efforts (Table 3). In addition, the Province also provided COVID-19 related one-time funding for the School Focused Nurses initiative and Temporary Retention Incentive for Nurses.

Table 3  
 COVID-19 Funding  
 (\$ in millions)

Year	Ministry Funding
2020	19.06
2021	75.44
2022	50.55

Additionally, the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program is funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services up to a capped funding of \$4.4 million.

For 2023, Council approved an operating budget of \$136.7 million gross and \$28.5 million net tax levy, excluding corporate and departmental support costs estimated at \$14.3 million.

**York Region remains committed to using innovative strategies to protect, promote, and improve the health and wellbeing of York Region residents effectively and efficiently**

Public Health will continue to identify innovative and efficient ways of delivering core programs and services to meet the needs of residents and communities using a health equity approach to assess the health of York Region and leveraging learnings from the pandemic. Into 2024, programs and services will continue to adapt and address gaps resulting from the pandemic. Public Health will continue to be an integral partner within the Community and Health Services Department in addressing the human service needs of York Region while actively working in partnership with governments, health and social sectors and community organizations that work with equity deserving populations, and populations who are marginalized or experiencing vulnerabilities.

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For more information on this memo, please contact Dr. Barry Pakes, Medical Officer of Health at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 74012. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.




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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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Julia Roitenberg  
General Manager and Chief Nursing Officer



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Dr. Barry Pakes  
Medical Officer of Health



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Erin Mahoney  
Chief Administrative Officer

September 29, 2023

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Attachment 1 –York Region Public Health Activities and Innovations 2022