



Office of the Commissioner
Community and Health Services

Memorandum

FOR INFORMATION

To: Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: April 10, 2025

From: Lisa Gonsalves
Commissioner of Community and Health Services
Dr. Sarah Erdman
Acting Medical Officer of Health

Re: **Public Health 2024 Update and 2025 Areas of Focus**

This annual memorandum provides Council, as Board of Health, with a 2024 York Region Public Health (Public Health) update and outlines 2025 areas of focus. The last update was provided to the Board in [October 2023](#).

Public Health activities and achievements are reported to the Board of Health, as required under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* and Ontario Public Health Standards

Public Health is governed by Regional Council in its role as Board of Health (the Board) under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990* (the Act), and provides York Region with public health programs and services mandated by the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#). These Standards require the Board to produce publicly available annual performance reports.

Through the Medical Officer of Health and Public Health staff, the Board has a legislated duty to ensure provision of public health programs and services to York Region residents.

Public Health protects and improves the health and well-being of York Region residents

Public Health strives to keep York Region residents healthy by preventing disease, promoting healthy living and addressing factors that influence health at the population level. Public Health provides health protection and health promotion programs along with activities focused on social and economic determinants of health and identifies strategies to decrease health inequities in our communities. Public Health delivers 36 programs and services that serve 1.28 million residents across York Region.

Public Health collaborates internally, and with community and health sector partners to deliver coordinated programs and services to meet the needs of York Region residents and communities. Programs include clinical services to patients and clients, health protection, health promotion interventions and communications, health surveillance and assessment, and foundational branch supports.

Public Health delivered excellence and innovation in programming in 2024

In 2024, Public Health continued to meet its mandates and deliver excellence in programming through several key achievements. Some operational highlights include:

- Distributing over 486,000 vaccine doses to community health care providers and public health clinics ensuring greater access to vaccine availability
- Screening 39,599 students for dental needs in the 2023 to 2024 school year ensuring children receive timely dental treatment
- Completing 5,158 home visits for child and family health ensuring eligible families have support through pregnancy and first two years of child's life
- Conducting 21,568 food premise inspections ensuring health and safety of customers
- Providing 11,287 sexual health clinic appointments ensuring residents have access to sexual health care services
- Treated 107,770 street and environmentally sensitive catch basins with larvicide to prevent spread of mosquitos carrying West Nile disease

Public Health staff launched several innovative educational campaigns on important topics such as [inclusive spaces](#), [youth vaping](#) and [food safety](#). These campaigns used new tactics such as targeting youth in digital and physical places where they spend time such as Snapchat and retail spaces. Staff also implemented more efficient ways to reach high school students for immunization, used technology to drive efficiency in responding to increases in infectious disease, and worked closely with partners such as school boards to promote health and well-being for our communities.

Details of key achievements and additional operational highlights from 2024 are identified in Attachment 1, demonstrating Public Health's commitment to serving York Region residents and communities along with partners such as Paramedic Services, Public Works and Social Services.

Public Health is responding to changing population health trends

Public Health has observed trends impacting the health and well-being of York Region residents and increasing program and service demands, including:

- Increases in mental health-related concerns
 - Increasing number of referrals (104%, 634 to 1,292) in 2024 from external health care professionals for infant feeding clinics and mental health supports, compared to the same period in 2023. In 2024, Public Health offered in person and virtual infant feeding clinic opportunities, increasing access and overall clinic capacity
 - Rising reports of York Region secondary students experiencing suicidal thoughts or intentions over the past 10 years. In 2023, 22% of York Region secondary students reported contemplations of intentional self-harm, compared to 17.7% in 2019. (Source: 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey). Public Health partners with school boards to support students and families, providing mental health resources and workshops
- Increases in reportable infectious diseases to Public Health
 - Several reportable infectious diseases increased in 2024 compared to 2023. This includes 39% increase (51 to 71 cases in varicella (chickenpox) and 21% increase (86 to 104 cases) in infectious syphilis cases reported to Public Health. Public Health is working with partners to increase immunization coverage and reporting for vaccine preventable diseases. For the 2023 to 2024 school year, there was a 15.5% increase in compliance with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* for 17-year olds compared to previous school year
 - Infectious disease surges that are often unpredictable circulating in our communities. In 2024 York Region experienced a 1425% increase (8 to 122 cases) in pertussis (whooping cough) and a 325% increase (4 to 17) in listeriosis cases reported to Public Health. Dedicated resources were assigned to these surges to mitigate impacts to at-risk populations, such as children under the age of one, pregnant women and seniors
 - Respiratory outbreaks in high-risk congregate settings increased by 126% from 2018 to 2024 (107 to 242 outbreaks). This is coupled with increasingly complex outbreaks often with multiple pathogens (e.g., influenza, COVID-19). In addition to outbreak management support, Public Health conducts outbreak preparedness annually with long-term care homes, retirement homes and congregate living settings to prepare for respiratory season
 - Reported incidents of residents having exposures to animals with potential to transmit rabies increased by 27% compared to 2023 (18,352 to 23,366). In addition to investigation and risk assessment of incidents, Public Health offers low or no cost rabies vaccination clinics for residents without resources to vaccinate their pets

- Increases in environmental health concerns
 - 500% increase in the number of mosquito pools testing positive for West Nile Virus in the past two years (three to 18). In 2024, three York Region residents developed West Nile Virus; the first confirmed human cases in York Region since 2020. Each year, Public Health launches the Fight the Bite campaign to inform residents how to protect themselves against the virus
 - 100% increase in investigations of blue-green algae compared to 2023 (two to four), with one confirmed bloom in 2024, meaning it contained harmful toxins which may impact human health. Public Health routinely monitors for blooms during beach sampling season, working closely with Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks for testing
- As noted in the 2024 [Health and Well-being Review](#), Public Health is monitoring a number of additional trends such as substance use and opioid related harms, food insecurity and overall mental health concerns

Public Health is responding to the needs of York Region residents and communities

In 2024, demands on programs and services increased as Public Health worked to meet growth in York Region and changing needs of residents and communities. Increased demand has been experienced in several areas, including:

- 23% increase (1,683 to 2,069) in number of personal service settings requiring inspection since 2019 such as those offering nail services, tattooing and other aesthetic services. Each establishment requires routine public health inspections to protect the health and safety of customers. Public Health also responds to complaints in these settings and works to mitigate identified health hazards
- 13% increase (14,249 to 16,324) over last four years in number of establishments such as food premises and child care centres requiring routine public health inspections
- Increase in number of clients reaching out to Public Health for services in 2024 compared to 2023, including:
 - 4.7% (5,722 to 5,991) increase in Healthy Babies Healthy Children related screenings received from hospitals which identify families who may benefit from parenting and healthy growth and development support and resources. Of these, there was a 70% increase in number of families (1,599 to 2,724) needing these supports.
 - 16% increase (2,522 to 2,918) in client calls into Health Connection related to Child and Family Health services and a 30% increase (22,399 to 29,193) in Health Connection client calls related to Health Protection inquiries

- 8.5% increase (9,981 to 10,827) in number of complaints received related to Health Protection services such as concerns in food establishments and personal service settings
- 43% increase (1,456 to 2,080) in live chats with Public Health Nurses related to Child and Family Health services

In 2024, Public Health met increasing demands to protect the health and well-being of residents and communities through innovations, partnerships and educational campaigns amongst other accomplishments (see Attachment 1). Council's support to supplement funding requirements for Public Health has been critical to meet resident needs going above and beyond the 25% cost share requirements per the provincial funding arrangement, contributing closer to 46% in 2024. The April 2025 Provincial Funding Shortfall of Human and Health Programs and Services report provides further details on Provincial funding shortfalls for Public Health along with recommendations for advocacy efforts.

Public Health priorities for 2025 include programming excellence to support resident and community needs while addressing emerging trends and implementing innovations

In 2025, Public Health will continue to meet its mandates, remaining agile and innovative in disease prevention, health protection, and in promoting health and well-being for York Region residents. Key areas of focus in 2025 include:

- Continuing a comprehensive point in time population health assessment to better understand and respond to the health status and emerging population health trends of residents. This includes expanding publicly accessible dashboards for infectious diseases and overall population health
- Implementing new and innovative digital solutions such as electronic documentation tools and online contact notification forms for infectious disease follow ups. Digital innovation efforts will improve quality of service, increase access for residents and drive efficiency

Public Health will prioritize delivering excellence in programming through:

- Continuing to increase immunization clinic capacity to support compliance with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* alongside enhanced efforts to address vaccine hesitancy
- Ensuring Public Health is in a place of readiness to address surges in infectious diseases and continuing to work collaboratively with congregate settings to deliver outbreak preparedness education

- Providing mental health supports to residents through programming such as perinatal supports and healthy schools services
- Maintaining partnerships with community agencies to enhance collaboration in supporting clients who use substances and continuing promotion of naloxone and needle syringe programs
- Supporting existing and new establishments such as food premises and personal service settings to meet compliance through timely and efficient public health inspections
- Prioritizing the health and well-being of residents through internal capacity building and community partner collaboration to increase awareness, knowledge and advocacy on the importance of social determinants of health in program and service delivery
- Continuing to support seniors with oral health needs in Public Health dental clinics and implementing a dental health promotion strategy to increase education and prevention

The Ontario Ministry of Health has indicated their intention to release revised Ontario Public Health Standards in August 2025. Once available, updates on changes and recommendations for implementation in York Region will be brought to Regional Council in its capacity as Board of Health.

For more information on this memorandum, please contact Dr. Sarah Erdman, Acting Medical Officer of Health at 1-877-464-9675 ext.78863. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Dr. Sarah Erdman
Medical Officer of Health (Acting)



Lisa Gonsalves
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Erin Mahoney
Chief Administrative Officer

March 25, 2025
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Attachment 1 – York Region Public Health 2024 Achievements