



Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services and Medical Officer of Health

Public Health 2025 Updates and Future Priorities

1. Recommendation

The Regional Clerk circulates this report and Attachment 1 to Ontario's Minister of Health, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Clerks of the local municipalities, York Region's Human Services Planning Board, and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies.

2. Purpose

This report provides Council, as Board of Health (the "Board"), with a 2025 York Region Public Health ("Public Health") operational update on the six core functions of public health practice (Attachment 1) and 2026 priorities, and raises awareness of important Public Health efforts. The report highlights Public Health's core functions and social determinants that support the health of York Region's 1.3 million residents.

Key Points:

- Public Health delivers a range of programs and services to York Region residents as mandated by the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) ("Standards"), which also includes a requirement to provide a publicly available annual report (Attachment 1)
- Six core functions of public health form the cornerstone of Public Health efforts to protect and promote the health of York Region residents and improve health equity
- Partnerships and coordinated efforts across health care, education, social services, community organizations and varying levels of government are key drivers of improving the health and well-being of York Region communities

- Upstream health promotion initiatives prioritize prevention by improving the social, economic and environmental conditions that support health and healthy behaviours, rather than treating problems after they occur
- The Standards are currently being revised to meet changing landscape of the public health sector and are anticipated for release in 2026
- Public Health’s continued priorities in 2026 and beyond include: Black and Indigenous health, mental health promotion, community engagement, vaccine administration, and cross sectoral action on the social determinants of health

3. Background

Public Health activities and achievements are reported to the Board, as required under legislation and Ontario Public Health Standards

Public Health, governed by Regional Council in its role as Board of Health under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act, 1990*, delivers a range of programs and services to York Region residents mandated by the Standards. These Standards, set out by the Ministry of Health and applicable to all 29 local public health units across Ontario, require the Board to produce publicly available annual reports.

Public Health Standards align with the six core functions of public health to protect and promote the health of York Region residents

Public Health strives to keep York Region’s 1.3 million residents and communities healthy by aligning with the six core functions of public health as outlined in the [March 2026](#) memo to Council on York Region Public Health Population Health Assessment. Together, these functions form the backbone of Public Health efforts to protect and promote the health of York Region residents. Attachment 1 further outlines how Public Health programs and services were aligned in 2025 with the [six core functions](#) of public health.

4. Analysis

Public Health works across sectors to address ‘wicked problems’ and improve health outcomes of the population as a whole

Improving the health and well-being of York Region communities requires an ‘all of society’ approach. Many of today’s public health challenges, often described as ‘wicked problems’, are complex, interconnected and shaped by factors beyond the individual. These include the social determinants of health or, more specifically, the social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape opportunities for good health and choices people make to sustain a healthy lifestyle.

Public Health relies on strong partnerships and coordinated efforts across health care, education, social services, community organizations and varying levels of government. For example, Public Health often participates in conversations related to urban design and planning to enhance connectivity and accessibility, encourage physical activity and reduce injury risk. In 2025, Public Health was actively engaged in the Public Works Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership Program, a York Region initiative designed to promote active transportation by creating safer and more accessible pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

While Public Health often works at a population level, individual level interventions help build trust

While much of Public Health's work focuses on broad population - level initiatives, direct clinical service delivery provides important preventive care directly to clients and continues to be offered. This includes programs such as the Healthy Babies Healthy Children home visiting program for vulnerable new parents, sexual health and infant feeding clinics, dental screening services for children and seniors, and vaccine administration. In 2025, Public Health Nurses and Family Resource Workers completed 5,007 face to face home visits with eligible families experiencing vulnerabilities. This multidisciplinary team works with families through pregnancy and the first two years of their child's life. They provide support such as infant feeding, mental health, and linking families to critical social programming setting the family and their children on a healthy path. Frontline interactions such as these deepen relationships with the community, provide valuable insight into emerging needs and inform the development of broader public health strategies.

Public Health delivered excellence and innovation in programming in 2025

In 2025, Public Health continued to meet its mandates and deliver excellence in programming through six core functions. Some operational achievement highlights include:

- Completing a detailed population health assessment that provides insight into current, emerging, and evolving health trends and the well-being of York Region's residents
- Surveillance and monitoring the health of York Region through ongoing and systematic collection, collation and analysis of health related information, for example, tracking respiratory disease trends during the winter
- Conducting over 34,000 inspections and investigations into the various environments where residents work, live and play to reduce the spread of disease and other environmental hazards
- Administering over 73,000 vaccines to prevent the spread of vaccine preventable diseases
- Screening over 40,000 children and youth for dental needs to ensure timely dental treatment is received

- Carrying out health promotion activities aimed at improving the health of residents and communities, for example, working with youth to strengthen intergenerational connections with seniors
- Ensuring emergency preparedness to safeguard the health and well-being of York Region, for example, participating in emergency preparedness exercises and rapidly scaling operations to address an unprecedented number of measles cases

Details of key achievements and additional operational highlights from 2025 are identified in Attachment 1, demonstrating Public Health’s commitment to serving York Region residents and communities along with partners such as Corporate Services and Public Works.

In 2026, anticipated revisions to the Standards will support future Public Health direction in a sustainable and impactful way

In 2023, the Ministry of Health initiated a comprehensive review of the Ontario Public Health Standards, with input from the field. Anticipated revisions align closely with York Region Public Health’s desired future direction, which includes:

- Furthering alignment of Public Health’s work where the burden of disease in the population rests (e.g., chronic diseases and mental health)
- Using local data and evidence to guide the development of programs and services to ensure a more tailored offering based on York Region’s unique landscape of health
- Increasing focus on health equity, which means ensuring everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible through optimizing the social determinants of health and reducing systemic obstacles to health (e.g., lack of access to services, healthy foods, safe housing and healthy environments). When offering public health services, an approach called proportionate universalism is often used to enhance health equity. This means making services available to everyone, but with a level of support and intensity proportionate to the level of need
- Centering Public Health work in the community in an effort to ensure better alignment of efforts to needs, improved communications (e.g., through focus-testing messaging), and building on community assets that support health
- Strengthening linkages to acute care system, particularly primary care, and exploring innovative ways to better integrate preventive clinical care services (e.g. infant feeding, sexual health) across our health system
- Working collaboratively to combat misinformation and disinformation through more effective communication and public engagement
- Leveraging partnerships with other Regional departments and external partners to enhance synergies and our ability to collectively address wicked public health problems

that cross sectors (e.g. social connectedness, built environment, road safety, public safety and substance use)

Public Health has set priorities for 2026 and beyond in alignment with this future direction

In 2026, Public Health will focus on initiatives in areas such as:

1. **Health Equity:** Ongoing work will prioritize reducing inequities experienced by Indigenous and Black communities by advancing culturally safe approaches, access to services and addressing systemic barriers
2. **Mental Health Promotion and System-Level Advocacy:** Public Health will focus on primary prevention and strengthening community resilience, in collaboration with other areas of Community and Health Services and external partners. This work will include broader system-level advocacy to senior levels of government to prioritize community mental health promotion efforts, particularly targeting youth. A comprehensive report on mental health and substance use will be brought forward to Council in early 2027
3. **Opioids:** Partnering with the Community Opioid and Drug Response Collaborative (a collaborative of community agencies that is informed by individuals with lived experience) to monitor the harms associated with the opioid pandemic locally, counter stigma, prevent and address root causes of opioid use, and engage in offering low barrier access to programs that meet people where they are at and reduce harms of use
4. **Vaccine Promotion:** Focusing efforts on improving access to seasonal and childhood immunizations in 2026 (particularly with vulnerable populations) as well as developing a multi-prong strategy to address vaccine hesitancy
5. **Furthering a 'Health in All Policies' Approach:** Calling for intentional coordination of public policies in a way that is supportive of health. This approach, which is central to health promotion work, recognizes that decisions made in other sectors can influence health in a large way. It is a means of building prevention into core government functions, at a municipal and provincial level

Public Health supports Council's Vision and the Region's 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan

Given the links between well-being and community resiliency, Public Health advances Council's Vision of creating strong, caring, safe communities through health protection, health promotion and emergency preparedness initiatives. While Public Health primarily supports the [2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan](#) priority area of healthy communities, good health is a strong contributor to economic vitality and Public Health action on climate change as well as the built and natural environment supports progress towards a more sustainable environment.

5. Financial Considerations

The proposed priorities beyond 2026 are intended to inform future planning and advocacy. Any new or enhanced initiatives would be considered through the Region's annual budget process and subject to available resources and Council approval.

The Ministry of Health has signaled an update to the current funding model for public health authorities; however, the Region has not received any further formal communication or consultation. Currently, under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, the municipality (or Region) is the obligate funder for Public Health programs and services. However, after the SARS pandemic in 2003, the Province has been sharing to a greater extent in the total cost of program delivery, more recently stating they will contribute up to 75% of eligible expenses. However, because the Province has placed a limit on their portion of the funding, only 59.6% of funds for Public Health services have been covered in 2025 by the Province, resulting in a shortfall of approximately \$21.2M.

6. Local Impact

Public Health engages in a number of partnerships across sectors and different levels of government. Partnerships with municipalities will continue to be built upon to further local progress towards a health in all policy approach.

7. Conclusion

This report enables Public Health to meet its requirement to share a publicly available annual report. Circulating the report to the Minister of Health, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Clerks of the local municipalities and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, will help increase awareness of Public Health's profile, future direction and areas of priority for 2026 and beyond.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla, Medical Officer of Health at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77239. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.




Recommended by:

Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla
Medical Officer of Health



Lisa Gonsalves
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Approved for Submission:

Erin Mahoney
Chief Administrative Officer

April 21, 2026
16918024

Attachment 1 – York Region Public Health: 2025 Year in Review (17115809)