

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
6 November 2023 / 6 novembre 2023**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2023-OPH-KPQ-0005

SUBJECT: Ontario Public Health Standards - 2023 Risk Management Report

OBJET: Normes de santé publique de l'Ontario - Rapports de gestion des risques
2023

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance de ce rapport à titre d'information.

BACKGROUND

The [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS) identify expectations for public health programs and services to be delivered by Ontario's local boards of health. Boards of health are accountable for implementing the standards, including the protocols and guidelines that are referenced therein. The OPHS include an Accountability Framework, which sets out the Ministry's expectations of boards of health to promote a transparent and effective accountability relationship. The Accountability Framework is supported by several planning and reporting requirements, which public health units (PHUs) must submit according to established timelines.

The purpose of this report is to provide details to the Board of Health on the most important risks faced by Ottawa Public Health (OPH) this year (2023), as well as mitigation strategies to minimize their impact. As part of the accountability framework, these risks are included in the Standards Activity Report, submitted to the Ministry of Health on October 31, 2023. The report provides a high-level description of the risks, the risk category, the overall risk rating, and key risk mitigation strategies.

DISCUSSION

In 2021 and 2022, OPH's main risks were largely related to the health unit's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, the unintended consequences of the pandemic on OPH's operations and capacity, and OPH's efforts to restore public health services and programs to meet community needs.

In 2023, OPH identified three significant areas of risk: technology, climate change, and equity in health care. Below is an overview of these risks and mitigation strategies.

Technology

A modern provincial public health system requires technology that supports efficient and effective health information management and service delivery. While we wait for the province to finalize its centralized and coordinated digital strategy, the public health sector is left technologically behind the healthcare system, limiting digital engagement, emergency management response capability, and collaboration with clients and key sector partners like Ontario Health Teams. This current state presents numerous risks to the effective and optimal practice of public health and emergency management, including: inefficient (human and technology) resource deployment, such as the use of valuable nursing resources to conduct labor-intensive contact tracing and case management processes; risk to patient safety through the continued use of manual,

paper-based processes, such as the case and contact management of approximately 70 diseases of public health significance; fragmentation of information and solutions, such as in locally developed and/or procured clinical software solutions; and inefficient and time consuming processes to facilitate epidemiological analysis and reporting for timely evidence-informed decision-making in emergencies.

Mitigation strategies include the deployment of local technology solutions based on business requirements, data standards, and procurement vehicles developed in common with other public health agencies, as well as active participation in the development of a provincially led Public Health Digital Platform that has the stated objective of providing a common set of tools and applications that can be leveraged by various programs across public health to enable consistency and efficiencies across public health programs, and integration with the broader digital health ecosystem.

Environment

Climate change is an urgent and large-scale public health crisis. As such, the ability to respond effectively to climate change requires a comprehensive approach in which OPH is one of many contributors. Without a collaborative response across all sectors and levels of government, as well as sufficient funding, OPH is limited in how it can support the City and the community to adapt to the health effects of a changing climate, to advance local impactful mitigation strategies, and to respond to the health effects of climate-related emergencies. Examples of the impacts of climate change on health include increasing extreme heat-related illnesses and death, greater risk from established and expanding vector-borne diseases, increasing risk of water and food-borne illnesses and increasing risk of poor air quality from forest fires.

In terms of **mitigation**, OPH is seeking to readjust organizational resources to contribute to the City of Ottawa's Climate Change Master Plan and to incorporate a climate change lens into all OPH programming. OPH is also working collaboratively with other City departments and the community to assess and strengthen climate change resiliency within the City of Ottawa. Lastly, OPH has incorporated climate change into the new 2023-2027 strategic plan. However, without sufficient provincial policy direction and funding to change individual and corporate actions in the community, climate change mitigation and adaptation are limited.

Equity in Health Care

Connecting residents to primary care, mental health and substance use health services remains a sizable challenge. The implications of inadequate and inequitable access

are far-reaching and have negative consequences on individual and population health. These unmet health needs are resulting in increased pressures on OPH programs and services. For example, the lack of sufficient access to immunization in primary care means thousands of children and youth may not have adequate immunization coverage against vaccine preventable diseases. This could lead to preventable outbreaks and increase pressures on public health and the health care system to contain and manage these outbreaks. In addition, the lack of sufficient access to primary care, mental health, and substance use health services means residents may face poorer or worsening health outcomes without early detection and treatment. This also results in the transmission and spread of communicable diseases. Finally, many residents seeking care struggle with health system navigation, creating an additional barrier on service access. As a result, OPH must stretch its resources and find alternative approaches to help fill the gap caused by insufficient access to care, especially primary care, without any additional resources.

OPH's **mitigation strategies** include, but are not limited to, the following: prioritizing some of OPH's programs and services to better serve high-risk populations and those with limited access to primary care; working with partners, including the Kids Come First (KCF) Health team, to ensure that all children, including children without access to primary care, receive immunization services according to the provincial immunization schedule; supporting health care navigation, in partnership with community partners; continuing to engage partners and service providers to maintain Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs where residents can access a range of services, including immunization, mental health and substance use health support, dental screening, and Parenting in Ottawa drop-ins; working with several partners to improve the health status of the people of Ottawa as it relates to mental health, addictions and substance use health, including the Ottawa Community Action Plan, the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, the Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force, among others; continuing to increase community engagement activities at the neighbourhood level to help people facing the greatest barriers in navigating resources; and continuing to support Ontario Health Team applications and requests for funding.

Although OPH has implemented some mitigation strategies, the lack of access to care is a systemic problem that can only be addressed at the provincial level with additional funding and resources for primary care, and system change to ensure integrated healthcare services and sufficient access to mental health and substance use health services.

Risk Management Process

The identification, mitigation and reporting of potential risks is an essential part of successful program and service delivery. While the Ministry of Health report represents one avenue for identifying and reporting on risks, OPH employs a multifaceted approach to risk management. This approach includes annual reporting to the Ministry of Health for compliance with the OPHS, individual team reporting on potential risks and their mitigation strategies, and regular risk assessment, tracking and review conducted by the Senior Leadership Team.

In the future, the Board's discussions related to risk will be focused on evaluating the Board of Health's risk appetite and its perspectives on emerging risks.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

This report is administrative in nature and therefore no public consultation is required.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information contained in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Risk and mitigation measures are outlined in the Discussion section of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Major risks may affect OPH's ability to deliver and execute on its strategic plan. Risks have been considered and, when possible, incorporated into OPH's new 2023-2027 Strategy Plan.

DISPOSITION

This report is for information. OPH will continue to respond to Ministry reporting requirements as they arise and to report to the Board of Health as needed.