



OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Message from the Mayor

Ottawa Public Health and the City of Ottawa continue to hold a special and strong partnership to serve the residents of Ottawa. This was evident throughout 2023, and it gave me great pride and confidence in the work OPH is doing for Ottawa residents.

All over the city we are reminded of the importance and impact OPH has on our community. From providing mental health supports to youth in rural Ottawa through a partnership with the Rural Ottawa Youth Mental Health Collective, to a newcomer family visiting the Rideau High School Health and Wellness Hub for dental screenings for their children and employment and social services support for the parents, to a resident in Nepean getting a vaccine booster at the J.H Putman School clinic. OPH's presence is felt throughout this city.

Within the City of Ottawa, OPH has been a key partner with the City's Planning Department, where they have provided key public health expertise and advice in the implementation of our new Official Plan. To build a healthy city, it needs to start at the planning level, so I am pleased to see this wonderful partnership flourish. This collaboration embodies the #TeamOttawa approach of working together



to better our community and serve Ottawa residents to the fullest.

As I reflect on 2023 and look forward to the remainder of 2024 and into 2025, I am confident in OPH's ability to respond to the health needs of all members of this community and I look forward to working with OPH and its Board of Health as they promote and improve the health of all Ottawa residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Sutcliffe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Sutcliffe
Mayor
City of Ottawa

Message from the Chair of the Board of Health

As I reflect on 2023 and the work of the Ottawa Board of Health, I am grateful and appreciative of all those who have come to the table to contribute to improving the health of Ottawa residents.

This board continues to progress an agenda that looks to positively impact our community through equity-driven, evidence-based decision-making.

At the outset of 2023 we approved and implemented our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. This plan prioritizes the needs of Ottawa's diverse communities, eliminating barriers to achieving health and wellbeing, and recognizing the importance of building genuine and lasting relationships with partners and residents.

We ended 2023 with what I would consider the most pressing issue facing public health units, the overdose crisis. The Board of Health passed a renewed Overdose Response Strategy. This crisis stretches to all corners of our city and to address it at its root cause requires us to look not just at helping those suffering from addictions issues but what is also needed to effectively prevent more people from suffering from substance use addictions. This renewed strategy will help guide us and our health system and city partners for years to come and set out a



framework for effective prevention efforts and interventions that can reduce the impact of substance use and addictions.

I want to thank my Board of Health colleagues for their continued support and dedication to improving the health of our city. I also want to thank the employees of OPH for their work and guidance to this Board on some of the most challenging issues of our time. Finally, I would like to thank the City of Ottawa for their continued partnership without which our impact on the community would not be nearly as great.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Kitts'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Catherine Kitts,
Chair, Ottawa Board of Health

Message from the Medical Officer of Health

2023 represented a year of transition and renewal for Ottawa Public Health with a new strategy and commitment to protect and promote health, focused on equity, prevention and impact.

The Get-a-Kit program provides an example of our equity driven health services. In partnership with the University of Ottawa, OPH provided free at-home sexually transmitted infection (STI) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) testing. These kits overcome barriers and stigma that people can encounter in clinical healthcare settings. Close to three quarters of people who used this service identified themselves as belonging to an equity-deserving group.

Routine childhood vaccinations are at the core of preventative medicine. OPH is working to get our youngest residents caught up on their routine vaccinations following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through our work with Kids Come First, primary health care providers, community health centres and in our Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs, we have been able to make significant strides in increasing the vaccination rates of many routine immunizations, with nearly 30,000 doses of various vaccines administered at the hubs.

As we look at impact, in 2023 we launched the Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Partners are using this dashboard to inform health system planning and address not only the terrible drug toxicity crisis but other significant burdens of illness, such as related to alcohol



consumption and mental health. This would not have been possible without the incredible partnerships of many in our community, who are sharing their data and experience to make a difference.

The next 12 months ahead of us will no doubt bring unique and difficult challenges, but the collaboration and commitment I see from community members, partners and the OPH team assures me we will also act on opportunities to improve the health of all people and places in Ottawa.

The City of Ottawa and OPH realize the benefits of strong linkages leading to healthier residents and a healthier City. I continue to be thankful for the amazing, hardworking employees at OPH and the thoughtfulness and guidance that our Board of Health provides us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Etches', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vera Etches,
Medical Officer of Health



Key Highlights from 2023

In 2023, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) continued to focus on adapting post the peak of the pandemic. Through our Re-Imagine process and the introduction of our **2023-2027 Strategic Plan**, we continued to demonstrate our dedication to equity, prevention, and impact. These words guide our efforts as we work in partnership to achieve our Strategic Goals.

Equity-driven: Being equity-driven means bringing public health services and interventions closer to communities facing the greatest barriers. It means building trust with communities to be a part of the solution in influencing the conditions and environments around them to support the health and wellbeing of all.

Prevention-focused: Being prevention-focused means leveraging available opportunities to shift our work to address root causes of poor health, to create the conditions that support a healthy community and individual decisions. This work must be done in collaboration with partners and policy decision-makers.

Impact-maximizing: Being impact-maximizing means strategically allocating public health resources effectively to reach a broader audience and effect the greatest amount of change. This also means having the right people, skills, and resources to do the work.

As an organization, we will continue to drive positive change in Ottawa with the help of a dedicated team, valued partners, and a supportive community. Together, we will continue work toward our vision where all people and places in Ottawa are healthy and thriving.

Developing Ottawa Public Health's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

In 2023, the Ottawa Board of Health approved the **Strategic Plan 2023-2027** and subsequent **Action Plan**. The new strategy reaffirms OPH's core purpose, encompassing its vision, mission, and commitments. It outlines strategic goals that not only enhance and build upon core work, but also drive progress in targeted areas of change.

The Action Plan details the objectives, outcomes, and performance measures of each strategic goal.

The strategy was developed through an extensive, collaborative process that included engaging a range of diverse perspectives, including employees and partners, and considered health data and other key sources of research.

Evidence Informed

The **State of Ottawa's Health 2023 Report** provides a snapshot of the health of Ottawa's population using a variety of indicators across the lifespan. It provides basic information about the demographic characteristics of Ottawa residents, key measures of general health, an overview of behaviours that impact health outcomes, and helps identify health issues of concern. The report served as a valuable resource for developing the strategy to best address the needs of Ottawa's people and places.

OPH also reviewed a variety of evidence sources to inform an analysis of our current context, specifically identifying opportunities that OPH could leverage and challenges that could limit our effectiveness. This analysis led to several key themes that were brought forward to partners and employees for feedback to help refine the key areas of focus in the strategic plan.

Meaningful Engagement and Relationships

OPH engaged over 60 partners through an iterative approach focused on deeply understanding feedback and meaningfully adjusting the strategy. Through this process, we heard most partners supported the strategy, commending its breadth, inclusivity, and representation of all of Ottawa's communities. OPH's focus on equity, prevention,



and impact also garnered significant support from partners.

The strategy itself includes a commitment to meaningful engagement and relationships. OPH is analyzing current partnerships to identify opportunities to further diversifying the network of partners engaged in collaboration. This work is focused on identifying and collaborating with partners whose work is primarily focused on improving health outcomes for equity-denied groups. OPH is dedicating time and effort to enhance the capacity of all teams across OPH to foster new partnerships to collaboratively advance health equity.

Healthy and Inclusive Workplace

A series of engagement opportunities with employees, leaders, and public health physicians were held to identify strategic issues and considerations for the OPH strategy. These encompassed both emerging issues of public health concern in Ottawa, as well as organizational opportunities for growth. Recognizing their unique expertise from lived experience, OPH also regularly engaged a group of employees from equity-denied groups who

brought forward insights for identifying and addressing systemic barriers to health and well-being. Insights gleaned from both partner and employee consultations were leveraged to help shape the Action Plan.

As OPH is implementing the strategy, we will remain responsive to community needs and changes in our surrounding environments by continuously reviewing and adjusting the Strategic Plan and Action Plan.

Equity Driven

Dental Clinics

While Ottawa Residents' oral health has improved in the past 30 years, some groups still lack access to dental services and suffer from more dental health issues that can lead to increasingly serious health conditions. Among the most prevalent reasons for why some do not seek dental care is due to financial barriers, as almost half of those without insurance list cost as a reason they avoid going to the dentist. In Ottawa, 72% of the population have dental insurance, however among people living in the lowest income quintile, approximately 50% or 83,600 individuals are without dental insurance.

In 2023, OPH provided direct dental care to residents through 4 dental clinics, providing 15,025 dental visits. OPH dental hygienists working in the community at neighbourhood hub had a total of 1272 interactions with residents resulting in dental screenings completed for 994 individuals. Among these, 126 were for seniors, 510 were adults, and 358 were children. OPH dental staff work in the community promoting oral health and access to dental treatment services with various partners such as various Indigenous agencies and senior groups, 61 daycares and English as a Second Language programs.

Working with all four publicly funded school boards, OPH undertook oral screenings in 225 elementary schools across Ottawa to identify children with oral pain, infection and/or open tooth decay. Through this program, 34,542 dental screenings were provided leading to the identification of 3,172 children (9%) with urgent dental needs. Ongoing follow-up of children identified with urgent needs ensures they have access to care, either through their private dental insurance or through the Healthy Smiles Ontario program.

GetaKit.ca

GetaKit is a web-based program operated in partnership between OPH and the University of Ottawa. This program provides free at-home sexually transmitted infection (STI) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) testing services for individuals at highest risk of transmission.

In 2023, the program has expanded in scope of testing to now provide HIV self-tests, oral and rectal swabs for chlamydia and gonorrhea, and requisitions for lab-based urine testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea, and blood testing for syphilis, hepatitis C, and HIV.

GetaKit also provides sexual health prevention resources based on reported risk practices and public health guidelines.

Test kits and lab requisitions are either mailed to an individual or made directly available in the GetaKit system on-line to be printed or downloaded to a laboratory website. All test requests and results are reviewed by an OPH nurse, and individuals with positive results are linked directly to the Sexual Health Clinic for treatment and/or referrals to care. The system will also send re-test reminders on when to complete repeat testing for HIV and STIs according to testing guidelines.



In 2023, GetaKit distributed 1217 HIV self-tests and fulfilled 289 orders for STI testing (beginning in June 2023) in Ottawa. Of those who accessed GetaKit, 38% reported having never completed HIV or STI testing before or being unsure if this testing had ever occurred. 71% reported belonging to an equity-deserving group at elevated risk for HIV and STIs, including gay, bisexual, trans, men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, people from African, Caribbean, or Black communities, people who emigrated from HIV endemic regions, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Prevention Focused

Immunizations

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to health-system partners providing routine childhood vaccinations. OPH has been working collaboratively as part of the Kids Come First Ontario Health Team to make it easier for families to access routine childhood vaccines.

OPH has been a key contributor, through Kids Come First, along with, local physicians and pediatricians, Community Health Centres and CANImmunize, implementing a multipronged strategy to provide immunization catch-up opportunities for children and youth without a primary care provider and those without OHIP. Routine childhood immunization coverage rates in Ottawa are recovering as shown in the recent Public Health Ontario Coverage Report for Routine and School-based Immunization. Rates are higher than both comparably-sized health units and Ontario as a whole, but many of Ottawa's rates remain lower than pre-pandemic. Immunization coverage rates for measles are higher than the rest of Ontario. In Ottawa 7 year olds are at 80 percent compared to 60 percent for Ontario. In Ottawa 17 year olds are at 93 percent compared to 92 percent for Ontario. Ottawa rates remain slightly lower than pre-pandemic, and below the target of 95% to disrupt local transmission.

Utilizing the CANImmunize digital platform ClinicFlow, vaccine appointments are centralized, enabling a one stop approach for families to view available clinics across the region and easily book an appointment Online. With this system, health care partners are able to register vaccine administration details with OPH, for seamless entry into the provincial immunization database. OPH has seen a 55 percent increase in submissions for 2023-2024 compared to 2022-2023 school year. This further eliminates barriers for families who may face difficulties reporting these required vaccines to OPH. OPH provided a total of 24,968 vaccine doses between April 1st, 2023 and March 31st, 2024. A total of 9,512 immunization record assessments were conducted prior to vaccine administration and an additional 912 assessments were completed at targeted school clinics.

Respiratory Season Preparedness

OPH developed the 2023/24 Respiratory Season Preparedness Plan to improve our overall response for respiratory season.

OPH hosted Respiratory Season Readiness exercises with internal and external partners such as the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada, the Regional IPAC Hub, and the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, which pointed to the expected challenges that required continued collaboration across all sectors. As a result of these sessions, OPH identified key areas of focus to strengthen readiness and response for the 2023/2024 respiratory season and beyond. In 2023-2024, OPH investigated a much larger number of respiratory outbreaks in institutional settings compared to pre-pandemic seasons.

Influenza vaccination among Ottawa children remained low, as did rates of COVID-19 booster uptake across all eligible ages in Ottawa. Neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic advantage had lower levels of COVID-19 vaccination. OPH supported the roll-out of the new publicly funded High-Risk Older Adult RSV Vaccine program intended to reduce the burden of serious lower respiratory tract infection caused by the virus.

Immunization continued to be a critical component for reducing risk of severe illness for people at greatest risk and alleviating pressure on the healthcare system.

Our OPH team administered 56,916 doses of COVID-19, 29,291 doses of Flu and 1,484 doses of RSV vaccines during the Fall Campaign in 2023. From September 1st to December 31st OPH distributed 5470 doses of RSV vaccine to eligible partners and distributed 32,752 doses of COVID-19, and 159,015 doses of Flu vaccines to community healthcare providers to ensure availability across the community and compliment the vaccine offerings through pharmacies.

Health Communications promoted informed decision-making by the public and partners around prevention and mitigation strategies for respiratory illness.

Infection Prevention & Control (IPAC) and Outbreak Management lessened the impact of respiratory surge(s) and assist with protecting the workforce, including individuals who are part of the health sector, and supported schools and childcare settings to help minimize the spread of illness.



Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs

Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs, initially created to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to disproportionately affected communities, have evolved to offer a variety of services and are continually evolving to meet community needs. The hubs offer services to all Ottawa residents, with a particular emphasis on those living in the priority neighborhoods across the city where barriers to health are greater. OPH has leveraged partnerships with several health and social service providers to bring services closer to those who need them the most and initiated an evaluation to support their effectiveness into the future.

- Hubs provide a range of vaccinations, including flu, school-based vaccines, and routine childhood vaccines for those without a primary care provider or an Ontario Health Card. They also offer routine vaccines to newcomers aged 18 and older without an Ontario Health Card. In 2023, nearly 30,000 doses of various vaccines were administered at the hubs.
- Dental hygienists provide free dental screening, fluoride varnish applications, and support in accessing dental care, including enrollment into Healthy Smiles Ontario and Ontario Seniors Dental Care programs.
- In 2023, The Healthy Growth & Development team operated weekly Parenting in Ottawa drop-ins from the Bayshore Hub, connecting to 316 families.
- OPH partnered with the Champlain Community Chronic Disease Risk Assessment Program diabetes screening program. Champlain SCREEN offers diabetes risk assessment, education, and referrals to high-risk and immigrant communities in Ottawa and the Champlain region. 88 individuals were screened in 2023.
- OPH partnered with the City of Ottawa's Employment and Social Services Department to offer support to individuals navigating financial assistance, housing solutions, employment services.



Impact Maximizing

Built Environment and Climate Change

OPH's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan provided a renewed commitment to creating the conditions to live well and thrive through influencing changes in the built, natural, and social environments that promote health and wellbeing, and addressing the impacts of climate change.

Building on past collaboration, OPH continued with the co-location of two staff in the City's Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development department. OPH provided public health expertise to implement the new Official Plan by integrating health, equity, and climate change into policies, plans and guidelines. This support has been integral in the work to develop a new City of Ottawa Zoning By-law by advising on a range of topics, including potential new provisions to allow for low-risk home-based food businesses and supporting provisions that enable healthy, walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods.

The Healthy Environments Team nearly completed its first and second Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessments (CCHVA) for extreme heat and vector-borne diseases. OPH in conjunction with City departments and community partners will be able to use the assessment results to implement solutions to address the findings (e.g., misting stations as an adaptation). OPH provided the Board of Health with a memo update on the Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment on Extreme Heat to Improve Community Resiliency in November 2023.

OPH's work on climate change and the built environment was published as a **case study** by the Canadian Public Health Association together with the Ontario Public Health Association and the Canadian Health Association for Sustainability & Equity.

Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health (MHASUH) Community Dashboard

As a result of significant collaboration between many community partners, OPH launched the MHASUH dashboard in November 2023.

The dashboard provides a community level look at mental health, addictions, and substance use health issues including people's overall experiences with wellness, individual and societal stigma as well as access to treatment and services. It is used to identify needs, inform systems and service planning, and contribute to building long-term health promotion and prevention strategies in the community. The root causes of poor health section of the dashboard demonstrates the reality that without access to basic needs like housing, healthy food, and positive early childhood development people are at a greater risk of facing negative health consequences. Data from the dashboard is being used across sectors to identify populations that are facing a greater burden of harms, working to fill the gaps in services that they face, as a beginning point for further research, and as a way to measure the impact of partners' interventions. The dashboard will foster accountability for improving the health status of people living in Ottawa.

Ottawa's Overdose Response Strategy

OPH, in collaboration with the Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force, revamped and launched Ottawa's Overdose Response Strategy. The increasing complexity of the toxic drug supply has exacerbated the overdose crisis and made an update to Ottawa's collective approach and strategy necessary. The updated strategy consists of seven pillars that seek to ensure a holistic approach to addressing the overdose crisis as outlined below.

1. **Prevention across the lifespan:** Prevention begins with addressing the root causes of poor health including poverty, racism,

colonialism, housing access and much more. Additionally, prevention includes providing interventions that focus on early childhood interventions, fostering resiliency, and promoting mental health, and substance use health across the lifespan.

2. **Stigma reduction:** Reducing barriers and improving care by addressing stigma and discrimination.
3. **Harm reduction:** Advancing existing and implementing new, innovative harm reduction strategies.
4. **Coordinated access to treatment and services:** Improving access and care across the mental health, addictions, substance use health and social services sectors, including culturally appropriate care.
5. **Data and surveillance:** Improving the availability of evidence to inform system planning and actions by collecting, analyzing, and sharing data.
6. **Community safety and wellbeing:** Furthering efforts to improve the safety and wellbeing of all people who live, work, play, and visit Ottawa.
7. **Cluster response and alert systems:** Monitoring and reporting on emerging issues that are causing harms from the toxic drug supply, including supporting media reporting.

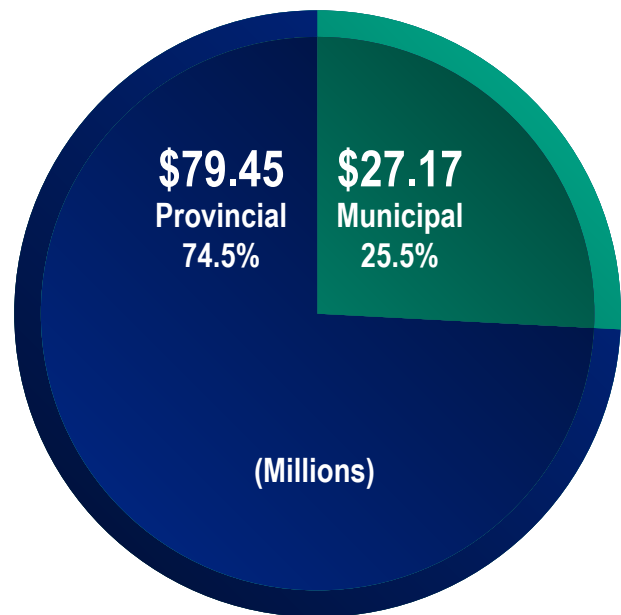
A public health approach to substance use health is foundational to the updated strategy and access to safe, supportive, and affordable housing is an overarching protective factor and a fundamental component required for meaningful improvements.

2023 Ottawa Public Health Budget

We would like to thank our funders, partners, learners and volunteers, whose support is invaluable to the work we do.

Funding Sources	Amount (in millions)
Provincial	79.450
Municipal	27.170
Total Revenue	107.019

Operating Results	Amount (in Millions)
Expenditure by Program	
Cost Shared Core Programs	64.383
COVID-19 - One-Time	31.161
Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program	3.693
Healthy Babies Healthy Children	4.562
Total Provincial Programs	103.799
Supplementary Programs	
100% City Programs	2.664
Miscellaneous Programs	0.556
Total Supplementary Funded Programs	3.220
Total Revenue	107.019



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