



Equity, Prevention, Impact: Ottawa Public Health's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

2024 Quarter 4 to 2025 Quarter 1 Update

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Preamble

[Ottawa Public Health's \(OPH\) 2023-2027 Strategic Plan](#) was approved by the Board of Health in June of 2023. The strategic plan includes five strategic goals to drive progress in targeted areas for change. This strategic update is informed by the performance measures identified in the action plan and takes into account the progress on key deliverables, available resources and dependencies. The accomplishments profiled below represent only a portion of the important work OPH is advancing.

Goal 1: Equity-Driven

In working to improve population health outcomes and opportunities, we collaborate to eliminate health inequities, systemic racism, discrimination, and oppression.

Summary of Highlights and Challenges

Highlights

Sociodemographic Data

- Continued to advance work to collect, analyze, disseminate and use sociodemographic data (SDD). Programs are at different stages of implementation. Some programs are beginning to think about specific data constructs to collect (as in Dental Health Services), while others have reviewed collection processes and implemented changes to improve data quality (as in Immunization) or are engaging partners to discuss findings and potential uses of the data (as in the Healthy Babies Healthy Children [HBHC] program).
- Collaborated with Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) to co-host a Data to Action Community Dialogue. This online event presented an overview of SDD shared by clients of the HBHC program, discussed underlying systemic barriers to health and well-being for families, and identified how this information may be helpful to system and/or policy change. The 35 participants included HBHC clients as well as people/organizations who work with new and/or expecting parents who are new to Canada.
- OPH's work in this area is aligned with health system partners across Ontario. An important [Consensus Statement](#) was recently released by the Wellesley Institute. This statement highlights the critical role of collecting and using race-based data to make health inequities more visible and to improve outcomes for

racialized populations. It also emphasizes the need for community engagement to ensure appropriate governance and ethical use of the data.

Diverse Partnerships and Engagement

- Launched a Key Partners initiative to identify and document key partners with whom OPH programs engage and to provide a moment-in-time “snapshot” of the diversity and depth of OPH’s engagement partnerships. This initiative tracks partnerships that focus on the health of equity-denied groups (EDGs) and the level and frequency of engagement. The findings demonstrate that key partnerships represent 91% of EDGs and at least 51% of partnerships focused on EDGs are at the involve, collaborate or invest level. The only EDG not explicitly identified through key partnerships was women; however, this is likely due to intersectionality of identities.
- Launched the OPH Engagement Guide. The guide creates a shared understanding of engagement and provides tools and resources to help OPH programs plan engagement activities in ways that are coordinated, meaningful and inclusive. It defines partners and engagement, explains how to use an equity-lens in engagement, outlines the engagement process and levels of engagement, and provides information on evaluating engagement activities.

Challenges

Sociodemographic Data Collection

In the absence of a unified data system to standardize collection across programs, OPH is continuing with data collection approaches that are tailored to teams and their unique client encounters. While there is effort to have consistency where possible, these tailored approaches are resource-intensive and rely on interdisciplinary participation. OPH is carefully managing its SDD collection approaches to ensure positive experiences among clients, high-quality data, and sustainability.

Diverse Partnerships and Engagement

With over 50 partners engaged by multiple OPH programs, a coordinated approach that is intentional and linked to equity-based outcomes at the program level is essential to maximize the impact of OPH’s work and minimize engagement fatigue among partners. By proactively understanding which programs are engaging partners and sequencing these engagements, OPH can better coordinate its efforts.

Goal 2: Create Conditions to Live Well and Thrive

Influence changes in the built, natural, and social environments that promote health and well-being, and address the impacts of climate change. Essential to this is the interconnection between health and nature.

Summary of Highlights and Challenges

Highlights

Built Environment

- Through engagement with City departments, OPH informed multiple plans and guidelines. Examples include: [New Zoning By-law Draft 2](#), [Lincoln Fields Secondary Plan](#), and the [Transportation Master Plan Part 2](#).
- OPH and the City of Ottawa were shortlisted for the [Canadian Awards for Planning Excellence](#) Healthy Communities Award. The nomination recognized Ottawa's leadership in advancing health and well-being and embedding the concept of 15-minute neighbourhoods into the New Official Plan.

Geospatial Storytelling

- Continued to evolve the Draft Geospatial Health Framework. This includes providing geospatial analytics, mapping and advisory support to OPH programs, City of Ottawa partners, and community partners. For example, potential misting station locations were mapped using the Neighbourhood Equity Index, population, newcomer status, age, heat island data and existing cooling options to enhance operational decision-making.

Health and Housing

- In collaboration with the Community and Social Services Department (CSSD), OPH co-hosted the Health and Housing Leaders Forum. Over 30 local leaders from housing, social services, and healthcare contributed to a discussion about short- and long-term actions needed to address three pressure points in the health and housing system: data collection and sharing, service integration and funding alignment. Since the forum, OPH has contributed to advancing data sharing between health and housing partners through membership at Somerset West Community Health Centre's Homeless and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub Executive Committee and Data Table.

Food Security

- In November 2024, the Board of Health received the [Food Insecurity and Monitoring Good Affordability report](#). The report provided the 2024 Nutritious Food Basket survey results and an overview of the work being done to address food insecurity and poverty in Ottawa.

Enhancing Emergency Management Capacity

- Developed and delivered training to employees including the Trauma-Informed Approaches to Supporting Clients Experiencing Challenges training, wellness visit training, and role-specific Incident Command System training.
- Continued connecting with programs to update program-specific Continuity of Operations Plan templates and workbooks to enhance preparedness to maintain time-critical services during a prolonged power outage or cyber disruption and to monitor and mitigate impacts of disruptions.
- Transitioned outstanding corrective actions from the [Results of the Third-Party Review by Dr. Paul Gully of Ottawa Public Health's COVID-19 Response report](#) to the OPH teams to integrate into our regular operations.

Emergency Preparedness Community Engagement

- Attended Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Fun Day to engage members of Ottawa's Inuit community on emergency preparedness.
- Published the [Winter Emergency Preparedness, Staying Safe article](#) in the Black Ottawa Scene e-magazine.
- Initiated outreach at Care Centre Ottawa, a food bank adjacent to Parkwood Hills that serves all of Ottawa, to engage community members on emergency preparedness and the importance of social connectedness.
- Hosted the Forum on Supporting Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults, which was attended by 45 participants representing community organizations.
- Collaborated with the University of Ottawa Inclusive Risk Communication Research Project related to the improvement of health communication systems for people with diverse needs, including persons with disabilities, specifically during emergencies or disasters.

Climate Change

- In November 2024, the Board of Health received the [Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment \(CCHVA\) report](#), which summarized findings from each assessment and actions for consideration by health topic (extreme

heat, vector-borne disease, wildfire smoker, food- and water-borne illness, and ultraviolet radiation due to stratospheric ozone depletion). OPH continues to engage the City's Climate Adaptation branch on the Climate Resiliency Strategy and how to advance shared goals to reduce climate health impacts, especially related to extreme heat. This includes refining climate adaptation actions based on the findings from the CCHVAs.

- Received HealthAdapt funding for three projects that align with the CCHVA findings: cooling options analysis for social housing, equity-based climate adaptation communications and engagement and fire hydrant water fountains in equity-based locations.

Evidence-Informed Practice and Knowledge Translation

- Published the [Enhancing Health Equity in Emergencies: Implementing an Equity Officer in Public Health Emergency Responses article](#) in the Canadian Journal of Emergency Management.
- Delivered a Public Health Ontario webinar on Building Healthy Social Environments from the Ground Up: Planning for Well-Being to public health practitioners across Canada.

Challenges

Public Health Capacity

Although there are many accomplishments, there are some challenges in meeting or exceeding targets due to resource constraints. Key issues include missed opportunities to provide comments on development review applications, stretched resources in meeting demands for geospatial analysis, and resource constraints affecting climate change resiliency and adaptation work. Despite these challenges, there have been significant successes and ongoing efforts to address these issues. The demand for geospatial informatics demonstrates recognition of its impact. To address resource constraints, OPH is continually reprioritizing geospatial storytelling activities to focus work on high impact opportunities.

Goal 3: Promote Well-being and Reduce Harms

Advance innovative and comprehensive approaches to promote mental health and substance use health while reducing stigma; and decreasing harms associated with substance use, addiction, and suicides across the lifespan.

Summary of Highlights and Challenges

Highlights

Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy

- The Board of Health received the [Update on Ottawa's Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy report](#) in April. The report provided an update on Ottawa's Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy, highlighting key initiatives led by the Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force and partners in 2024, and outlined OPH's priorities in 2025, including engaging provincial funders and emphasizing the immediate need for provincial action to support sustainable funding.

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

- Increased timely access to data through the [MHASUH Community Dashboard](#) quarterly refreshes, quality improvement and knowledge mobilization. The refreshes included updated partner data, Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) results (2023) and [Point-in-Time Count](#) results.
- Provided knowledge mobilization resources and workshops on local results from OSDUHS (2023) to over 70 child- and youth-serving partners.
- Delivered a 2-hour in-person workshop to public health professionals at The Ontario Public Health Convention on the MHASUH Community Dashboard. The session highlighted the importance of community partnerships, accessible data, and local action in addressing mental health (MH) and substance use health (SUH) challenges.

Engagement with Health and Social Service Sectors

- Received funding through Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Fund 2024 in collaboration with CSSD and nine health and social services partners. The Ottawa Urgent Connections project aims to address the urgent needs people are experiencing because of the toxic drug crisis. The funding will support community partners to deliver enhanced outreach services and connections to safer spaces, including pathways into treatment in neighborhoods most impacted by the toxic drug crisis.

- Established partnerships and secured in-kind space to launch the Healing Heart Bereavement Support Group, a peer support group for people aged 18+ who have lost someone to an overdose or a substance use related harm.
- Trained three community members as Strong and Steady Falls Prevention Program instructors and started offering this program in Hindi, Punjabi and English at two different locations. A needs assessment previously completed with intermediaries determined the South-East Asian community is experiencing isolation and in need of social connections, which this program will help facilitate.
- Working alongside the Kids Come First Substance Use and Addictions Project, OPH developed resources, provided communication outreach, data and capacity building to advance the project and support children, youth, and families across Ottawa.
- Led and/or supported six Black Mental Health Week activities reaching 203 people, including a webinar with the Community and Social Services Department. All activities aimed to provide culturally adapted tools to improve MH and SUH outcomes with African, Caribbean and Black communities.

Party Safer

- Presented Party Safer and other resources to the [Ottawa Nightlife Council](#) (NC). Through collaboration with the NC, OPH fostered new relationships with key organizations, expanding the reach of safety resources across various sectors like tourism, education, and entertainment, and increased community awareness and engagement in safer nightlife practices.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Program and Pregnancy Circles

- Delivered the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) program to 64 participants during this reporting period. The program is a free, 9-week group-based program for people who are expecting or have a child (birth or adoption) to promote positive mental health. OPH's Healthy Growth and Development program is the first Ontario public health unit to offer the program to Francophone clients.
- Delivered three Pregnancy Circle sessions in fifth quintile neighbourhoods. A total of 102 participants registered for the sessions.

Youth Connections Ottawa

- OPH's Mental Health team was recognized by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario for outstanding contributions and dedications to advancing youth mental health in Ontario. This recognition award for Mental Health Excellence was provided because of the team's leadership in developing and delivering YCO, a mental health peer to peer program.
- Provided YCO training to 48 youth leaders, building capacity in mental health, substance use and overdose prevention.

Gambling

- Engaged in the Gambling Awareness Roundtable hosted by Responsible Gambling Council, resulting in advancing relationships with Youth Gambling Awareness Program and post-secondary institutions, and the development of a co-developed resource for parents and caregiver on sports betting.

Training and Capacity Building Workshops

OPH regularly delivers MH and SUH training and capacity building workshops. Topics include community resilience, suicide prevention, stigma, overdose prevention and response, system navigation and problem gambling. Workshop evaluations consistently demonstrate participants intend to apply the information they learned. Below are some of the training and capacity building workshops delivered during this reporting period:

- safeTALK suicide prevention training to 82 intermediaries who support vulnerable communities and individuals throughout Ottawa.
- Online Party Safer and Overdose Prevention and Response trainings were completed by 808 individuals. Online stigma training was completed by 404 people.
- Capacity building sessions to 1,775 intermediaries on community resilience, with a focus on EDGs.
- Capacity building sessions in partnership with Rideauwood and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) to 70 teachers.
- Capacity building session to 300 Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est (CECCE) staff.
- Medical education webinars in partnership with the University of Ottawa to 135 primary care and allied health professionals.

- In collaboration with the University of Ottawa, Carleton University and the City Studio initiative, intact training sessions to medical students, nursing students, and media studies/journalism students.

Challenges

OPH is responding to a higher volume of requests for support with naloxone training and/or access to kits.

While partners acknowledge and indicate a high demand for mental health and substance use health services and resources from OPH, their capacity for higher levels of engagement (through training and workshops) is limited due to insufficient resources and competing priorities to address other basic human needs (food, housing, safety). OPH continues to co-design initiatives and provide capacity building training with intermediaries and partners when and where it meets their needs.

Goal 4: Focus on Prevention

Gather, analyze, and share evidence on local health needs and inequities with the healthcare system to strengthen clinical prevention. We will engage with healthcare system partners to help inform decision-making.

Summary of Highlights and Challenges

Highlights

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination and Screening

- Established an internal OPH working group with representation from across OPH programs that is responsible for activities aimed at reducing the prevalence, morbidity, and mortality associated with HPV. This includes addressing factors that contribute to screening and vaccination inequities among the Ottawa community.

Engagement with Healthcare System Partners and Decision-Makers

- Following Dr. Jane Philpott's appointment as Chair of Ontario's new [Primary Care Action Team](#), OPH submitted a letter to Dr. Philpott summarizing local trends on primary care attachment and outcomes of the Lowertown Health Care Re-design (unattached to primary care) Project, led by the Ottawa Health

Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa (OHT-ÉSO) and supported by OPH and other partners.

- Submitted a response to the College of Physician and Surgeons (CPSO) consultation on revisions to the *Accepting New Patients* policy. The policy sets out CPSO's expectations for Ontario's physicians to help ensure that decisions to accept new patients are equitable, transparent, and non-discriminatory. OPH's feedback focused on providing recommendations for equity-based approaches for attachment and improving the policy's clarity and use of inclusive language.
- Delivered an OPH Learning Table to City of Ottawa Councillors and Board of Health members on the distinct roles of primary care and public health and how each is critical in advancing the health and well-being of Ottawa residents.

Physician and Nurse Practitioner Engagement

- Via the subscriber-based monthly e-bulletin, Public Health Update, OPH shared evidence on clinical prevention, and where available, local epidemiological data and links to free resources that can be shared with patients. Article topics in 2024 included: cognitive behaviour therapy, hepatitis A and B, human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV), immunization, Mpox, Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs, nutrition, physical activity, radon testing, seasonal influenza, tick-borne diseases and tuberculosis.
- Recently, articles were published on [HPV testing as the primary cervical screening method](#) and [resources to support patients experiencing poverty](#). Both articles provided available data on the topics and equity-based considerations for practitioners.

Challenges

Primary Care Attachment Data

Amidst a demand for increased primary care attachment, many individuals and organizations have pointed to OPH for information and guidance on this issue. Primary care attachment data is dynamic and complex. Other healthcare system partners, such as Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), are better positioned to discuss and disseminate local trends.

Goal 5: Enrich our Workplaces

Foster a diverse, inclusive, equitable, and healthy workforce grounded in a culture of learning and growth. We will support and develop employees and optimize and innovate our processes to better serve the community.

Summary of Highlights and Challenges

Highlights

A Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive (DEI) Workforce

- Facilitated training and capacity building focused on Indigenous Health, Rights and Reconciliation including Indigenous Cultural Safety training, Land Acknowledgement training and Blanket Exercises.
- Delivered training and capacity building focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including Diversity Café on transgender awareness, and scenario-based DEI training related to hiring practices.
- Applied LEAD IT to three management job competitions. LEAD IT is the City's diversity and inclusion strategic hiring program which incorporates a comprehensive approach to ensuring an equitable staffing process.

Equitable Learning and Development

- Completed the OPH Leadership Development pilot program. Seventeen leaders completed courses and coaching circles as part of the program.
- Began monthly OPH Leadership Series which aim to build leadership skills and capacity. Examples of topics include operational finance, performance development and strategic thinking and decision making.
- Launched the individual development plan tool and succession plan to support employee learning and development and organization-wide succession planning. Forty-seven employees expressed interest in participating in succession planning, of whom 14 identified as members of an EDG.

Challenges

Capacity

Many initiatives are advancing, though progress is somewhat slower than anticipated. Meaningful change takes time and supporting teams to overcome challenges, such as operational constraints, and diverse needs, will take time. OPH continues to work

collaboratively, including with City departments, to overcome these obstacles. For example, progress has been made to advance a peer support network and consultations with the City's Wellness Leads are underway.