



Message from the Mayor

of Ottawa have a long history of strong collaboration and 2024 has been no different. I have appreciated the work to strengthen this partnership while enhancing planning and services for Ottawa residents. An example of this collaboration was the housing leaders forum hosted by the Community and Social Services Department (CCSD) and OPH where sector leaders came together from across Ottawa to discuss affordable housing and its impact on our health with a focus on actions.

OPH's mission to work together with the community to promote and protect the health and well-being of all people in Ottawa is evident in the daily work that brings our City pride.

OPH's impact is felt throughout the City, from urban to rural, day and night, addressing issues such as mental health, addictions and substance use health, housing, climate change, infectious disease prevention and the list goes on. Dental clinics were renovated and expanded to meet increased demand, including a new clinic in the East end. OPH continues to bring health services to Ottawa residents where they are, from Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs, to at home nursing visits for the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, ensuring the community remains healthy.

Public health expertise and community understanding has incredible value at our planning tables.



OPH consistently contributes to advance planning conversations on action on climate change, emergency preparedness and response, the new Official Plan, and many other service areas within the City. These efforts ensure Ottawa residents are better served and represented in all aspects of our services and City-wide strategies.

Reflecting on the accomplishments of 2024 and looking ahead to 2025, I am confident in OPH's work, ability, and approach to addressing pressing and ongoing public health challenges and ensuring the well-being of our City.

Mark Sutcliffe Mayor City of Ottawa

Message from the Chair of the Board of Health

s I look back at our work as the Board of Health in 2024, I am yet again impressed and appreciative of how OPH continues to deliver on its public health mandate and the innovative approaches OPH brings forward for Ottawa residents.

The Board saw a year of progress addressing community health needs, suicide prevention work and updates on the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. OPH also engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion work within our organization and in collaboration with healthcare providers so that the needs of all Ottawa residents are reflected in the work of the health sector. Ottawa residents are central to the everyday work OPH does and the health advocacy initiatives, annual updates, and reports that come to the Board of Health.

I want to thank OPH employees for their continued steadfast work that prioritizes service excellence, and equity and representation of voices in our work. I also want to thank the



many community partners who work alongside OPH to improve the health and wellbeing of our City.

Sincerely,

Catherine Kitts,

Chair, Ottawa Board of Health

Message from the Medical Officer of Health

n 2024, OPH continued meaningful collaboration with community and health system partners, residents, and the City of Ottawa to deliver on our Strategy and the core work of public health.

In partnership with CSSD, OPH held the Housing Forum for partners and City staff to bring our housing planning community together to talk about the public health

implications of the housing crisis we are facing in Ottawa and across the country. Innovative housing initiatives and affordable housing options are needed to address the overdose crisis in our community, and to support people who are experiencing houselessness, new immigrants and older adults. Stable, reliable and affordable housing is a public health matter and OPH is proud to continue working with CSSD and the City of Ottawa to tackle our housing needs.

Since the Neighborhood Health and Wellness Hubs (NHWH) were established, OPH has noticed a growing need for localized community services that reflect the diverse needs of Ottawa residents that face significant geographic, economic and cultural barriers to access healthcare. In 2024 OPH was able to expand the range of services offered, and we will continue to work with our partners to maintain a sustainable service for Ottawa residents.

At the end of 2024, OPH learned Dr. Vera Etches would be moving on from the position as Medical Officer of Health to continue her



work and spread her passion for health as the President and CEO of CHEO (Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario). Her dedication and leadership to public health and our community guided OPH for over a decade and we could not be more grateful. Thank you, Vera.

As we look back at 2024, one thing is certain, OPH will continue to prioritize and advance partner collaboration in all that we do. The work of public health impacts everyone in our City, and we know that we serve the needs of our residents better, when more voices are represented at the table. I am thankful and proud of our accomplishments in 2024, and look forward to the work we will continue to pursue and lead in 2025 to improve the health and wellbeing of all people who live, work and play in Ottawa.

Sincerely,

Trevor Arnason,

Interim Medical Officer of Health



Introduction

Welcome to the Ottawa Public Health (OPH) Annual Report for 2024, where we celebrate a year of impactful initiatives and strategic advancements. Our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, adopted by the Board of Health in June 2023, continues to drive progress in targeted areas for change, supporting the vision that all people and places in Ottawa are healthy and thriving.

This year, OPH has made significant strides towards our strategic goals, adapting and innovating in response to the evolving needs of our community. With Ottawa's rapid growth and increasingly complex public health landscape, our accomplishments underscore the vital role of public health in enhancing the overall health and well-being of Ottawa residents.

Key Accomplishments

Throughout 2024, OPH has focused on equity, prevention, impact, and being guided by our commitments as we advance our strategy and core operational work. Our efforts have included:

- Equity-Driven Initiatives: Collaborating to eliminate health inequities, systemic racism, discrimination, and oppression.
 We have supported teams in collecting and analyzing sociodemographic data, engaged community partners, and launched the OPH Engagement Guide.
- Creating Conditions to Live Well and Thrive: Influencing changes in the built, natural, and social environments that promote health and well-being, and addressing the impacts of climate change.
- Promoting Well-being and Reducing Harms: Implementing innovative approaches to mental health and substance use health, reducing stigma, and decreasing harms associated with substance use, addiction, and suicides.
- Focusing on Prevention: Sharing evidence on local health needs and inequities with healthcare system partners to strengthen clinical prevention and inform decision-making.

 Enriching Our Workplaces: Fostering a diverse, inclusive, equitable, and healthy workforce grounded in a culture of learning and growth.

Challenges and Adaptability

While we have made substantial progress, we acknowledge that challenges exist. Resource constraints and evolving, complex community needs require us to remain adaptable and innovative as the City's population continues to grow, presenting new challenges and pressures on OPH. OPH has accomplished much as a team to address complex issues in the community, and seeing the impact of these efforts on the health and well-being of the people and places in Ottawa will take time. We are committed to continuing our work with resilience and dedication to meet the needs of our community.

Equity Driven

Integrating Health and Housing Systems and Addressing Food Security in Ottawa

In 2024, OPH continued its commitment to monitoring food affordability by conducting the annual Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey. This survey measures the local cost of basic eating that aligns with current nutrition recommendations from Canada's food guide and typical food purchasing patterns. The NFB survey results are used to compare the local cost of food and rent with individual or family incomes, highlighting how inadequate income is the root cause of household food insecurity. The results consistently show that individuals and households receiving social assistance or earning minimum wage struggle to cover the basic costs of living, including purchasing nutritious foods.

The NFB and food affordability data are used to make evidence-informed recommendations

that support income-based policies, programs, and advocacy efforts to ensure dignified and equitable access to nutritious, diverse, affordable, and safe food for everyone, regardless of income, gender, race, culture, or age. In 2024, OPH leveraged this data to show the importance of a basic income guarantee on addressing household food insecurity. The Ottawa Board of Health and Ottawa City Council passed motions supporting a guaranteed basic income as a means to address household food insecurity and poverty.

In addition to these efforts, OPH has strengthen relationships with health and housing partners with an aim to made strides in building awareness of the important connection between health and housing through various initiatives and forums. The 2024 Ottawa Leaders Housing Forum brought together partners from across the city to discuss and develop strategies to address housing insecurity and homelessness while creating bridges with the health and social services sector. The forum emphasized the importance of collaboration between public health, social services, and housing organizations to create sustainable solutions. Key outcomes included the establishment of new partnerships and the development of collective actions across sectors to deepen the integration of health and housing.

Advancing a New Approach to Neighborhood Health and Wellness Hubs

In 2024, OPH made significant strides in enhancing community health and wellbeing through various place-based initiatives. The Neighborhood Health and Wellness Hubs (NHWH) initiative, initially established to address disparities in vaccine access during the COVID-19 pandemic, evolved to provide a broad range of health and social services

directly within communities facing significant geographic, economic and cultural barriers to access healthcare. These hubs offer services such as immunizations, dental screenings, parenting support, diabetes screening, and enhanced services for older adults, among others. The strategic placement of these hubs in high-need neighborhoods ensures that services are accessible to those who might otherwise struggle to obtain them.

OPH focused on expanding the scope of services offered through the NHWHs, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing community engagement. In 2024, the hubs saw over 16,500 interactions, reflecting their growing importance in the community. New services, such as cancer screenings provided by partners and tailored programs for older adults, were incorporated, demonstrating OPH's commitment to addressing diverse health needs. The evaluation of the NHWHs highlighted several strengths, including effective vaccination outreach, professional and adaptable staff, and low-barrier access to services. Community feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with residents appreciating the convenience and comprehensive nature of the hubs.

Moving forward, OPH plans to maintain current service levels, sustain long-term operations, and enhance service quality and responsiveness. This includes evaluating service locations, leveraging data and feedback to guide decisions, and prioritizing quality improvements. The NHWHs' integrated approach to public health services is designed to increase impact, effectiveness, and efficiency, aligning with OPH's strategic objectives and reinforcing its commitment to health equity and optimal health outcomes for all Ottawa residents.



Modernizing and Expanding Public Health Dental Services

OPH conducted significant renovations and expansions across its dental clinics to enhance access to dental services for the community. Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health, the Merivale Dental Clinic, located at 1580 Merivale Road, now features 11 operatory rooms, including a dental surgical suite. Additionally, the downtown clinic at 40 Cobourg Street was fully renovated and reopened to the public in March 2025. A new OPH Centrum Clinic at 255 Centrum Boulevard is set to open in 2025. These enhancements reflect OPH's ongoing commitment to providing accessible dental care and our continued partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Health.

In line with our commitment to modernizing health records, OPH successfully implemented ABELDent and Dexis across all our dental clinics in 2024. ABELDent offers a comprehensive patient management platform, including scheduling, clinical charting, and billing, while Dexis enhances our capabilities with advanced digital x-ray technology.

This integration, supported by our partnership with the City of Ottawa, allows us to eliminate reliance on paper-based systems and outdated tools, ensuring more efficient operations and higher quality patient care. By staying current with the latest technology, our dental clinics can provide the best possible service to our patients, who rely on our services for their dental health.

To further enhance access to pediatric dental services and increase the availability of pediatric dentists accepting socially funded programs, OPH established a strategic partnership with a pediatric dental specialist. Through this collaboration, 599 children were referred for specialized dental care in 2024. This initiative has significantly improved access to essential dental services for children in need, ensuring timely and effective treatment.

Creating Conditions to Live Well and Thrive

Built Environment and Climate Change

OPH advanced its efforts to improve the built environment and tackle climate-related challenges in 2024. The built environment encompasses the human-made design and layout of neighborhoods, homes, workplaces, schools, and other infrastructure. OPH's efforts focused on creating healthier, more sustainable communities that promote active living, access to nutritious food, and social connectedness. OPH continues the strong partnership with the City's Planning, Development and Business Services on the development of

15-minute neighborhoods for the City's Official Plan, aiming to enhance accessibility and convenience within local communities. OPH releases the results of the Climate Change

and Health Vulnerability Assessments, which evaluated the health impacts of extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, food and water-borne illnesses, wildfire smoke, and ultraviolet radiation. These assessments provided valuable insights into the vulnerabilities of Ottawa residents and provided valuable information to inform climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. OPH's proactive approach on climate change included working with partners in promoting green spaces, enhancing public transit networks, and supporting policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Emergency preparedness was another critical area of focus for OPH in 2024. The Municipal Emergency Plan was updated to ensure comprehensive preparedness, response, and recovery efforts in the face of climate-related emergencies. OPH conducted emergency preparedness education sessions, including specifically for older adults and people living with disabilities, equipping residents with the knowledge and tools to develop personal emergency plans and kits. These efforts aimed to build community resilience and ensure that all residents, including populations facing greater disadvantage or barriers, are prepared for emergencies.

OPH's work in 2024 exemplified its commitment to creating conditions that allow all residents to live well and thrive. By addressing the built environment and climate change, enhancing emergency preparedness, and supporting vulnerable populations, OPH demonstrated its dedication to health equity and community resilience.



Promoting Well-being and Reducing Harms

Building Wellness Together: Strengthening Community Mental Health and Substance Use Health

Emerging data from the pandemic and postpandemic periods have highlighted an urgent need for mental health, addictions, and substance use health (MHASUH) services, particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods. The impact has been especially significant in racialized communities, where there are communities that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic who are often without adequate access to support.

In response, our MHASUH unit developed a collaborative, community-driven approach to address these disparities. In January 2024, OPH launched the *Our Community Our House – Working Together on Wellness* initiative, an expansion of our place-based model that integrates MHASUH services directly

within neighborhoods facing systemic barriers. MHASUH staff are now connected within all 16 Ottawa Community Housing buildings, identified as facing the greatest need, as well as in all 11 OPH Neighborhood Health and Wellness Hubs. OPH works alongside community partners and residents to build on their strengths and address their specific needs. This approach ensures that community members are directly involved in decisions affecting them, fostering trust and creating more effective, culturally sensitive programs. This program is impacting equity and inclusive care, while it addresses the unique needs of marginalized neighborhoods, empowering residents and reducing health disparities.

Through workshops, pop-up hubs, and multilingual support (offering services in 11 languages), the OPH MHASUH program ensures culturally relevant, accessible information and training. The OPH initiatives prioritizes capacity-building for community leaders, volunteers, and frontline workers, with a focus on overdose prevention and response, suicide/crisis intervention,

trauma-informed de-escalation, and Naloxone administration. A key milestone has been establishing a Naloxone Distribution partnership with Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre. Since launching this initiative, OPH has directly supported 670 individuals living in or working with equity-denied communities, strengthening local networks of care and wellness.

Party Safer

With the aim of preventing or reducing harms related to substance use at gatherings, the Party Safer program was expanded to increase accessibility and availability through an online course. By finding innovative solutions and expanding reach through digital platforms, OPH has enhanced access to critical information and training related to commonly used substances and their effects, tips to reduce harms, recognizing and responding to overdose, coping strategies and debriefing following a distressing event, information on bystander intervention and resources for Mental Health, Safer Sex and Substance Use Health, as well as access to Naloxone, party safer tips and violence prevention.

The goal of the Party Safer initiative is to better equip communities to identify and respond to substance intoxication and overdoses, while providing knowledge about available support services. This free online course, available in both official languages, has been taken by over 2,000 people to date. Before taking the course, 43% of participants reported understanding harm reduction tips, overdose responses, and the effects of commonly used substances like alcohol, cannabis, opioids, stimulants, and benzodiazepines, while 68% felt knowledgeable about accessing local mental health, harm reduction, and other health resources. Post-course evaluations show

significant improvements, with 95% of participants reporting a better understanding of harm reduction tips, overdose responses, and the effects of these substances. Additionally, 94% feel more knowledgeable about accessing local mental health, harm reduction, and other health resources. These results indicate the course's effectiveness in increasing awareness and preparedness for responding to substance-related harms.

In 2024, OPH continued to prioritize the wellbeing of its residents by addressing mental health, addictions and substance use challenges through collaborative, innovative and community-centered approaches.

Focus on Prevention

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Measures in 2024

In 2024, OPH continued to prioritize the promotion and implementation of infection prevention and control (IPAC) strategies to safeguard the health of Ottawa residents. OPH implemented comprehensive outbreak control measures across various settings, including long-term care homes, retirement homes, congregate living settings, childcare centers, and schools. These measures included rigorous surveillance and screening protocols, timely testing, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand hygiene practices. OPH also emphasized cleaning and disinfection procedures to minimize the risk of infection.

A significant achievement in 2024 was the enhancement of IPAC protocols in response to emerging infectious diseases. OPH's proactive approach involved updating guidelines and providing training to healthcare providers and community partners. This ensured that best practices were consistently followed, reducing the risk of infection and improving

overall public health outcomes. Additionally, OPH investigated and addressed IPAC lapses, ensuring that corrective actions were taken to protect the public.

Healthy Growth and Development

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Healthy Growth and Development (HGD) had to rebuild many health promotion services offered by OPH. Pregnancy Circles were developed to support pregnant individuals in the neighborhoods facing greater disadvantage. These six interactive sessions, covering topics on healthy pregnancy, labor and delivery, transition to parenting, and breastfeeding, were offered in-person at various **OPH Neighbourhood Health and Wellness** Hubs and community resource centers across Ottawa. HGD also expanded the Parenting In Ottawa drop-ins to more sites, increasing availability to seven days a week across the city. This service played a crucial role, offering parents access to public health nurses who provided guidance on infant feeding, safe sleep, growth and development, and perinatal mental health.

Recognizing an important community need, HGD trained six public health nurses to be able to offer a nine-week group-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) program for women who are expecting or have a child up to 18 months and who are experiencing feelings of depression, anxiety, worry, anger, or overwhelm. The first three sessions in Fall 2024 were well attended, and more sessions, including French language sessions and new material for men, are planned for 2025.

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program benefited from an increase to its base funding from Ministry of Children Community and Social Services. This allowed HGD to increase its home visiting capacity with the



addition of four public health nurses and one social worker. Approximately 8,020 home visits were completed in 2024. HBHC is also continuing to collect socio-demographic data from clients who are receiving home visits and, following a community consultation in October, HGD will be able to use that data to support improved services for HBHC clients.

Immunization Promotion and Services

In May 2024, OPH launched the Virtual Immunization Hub to enhance the vaccination services offered in-person at OPH Neigbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs and the Community Vaccination Clinic. This initiative provides direct over the phone access to nurses, who can assess immunization records and help clients locate and access immunization services in the community. The virtual option supports families where they are, advancing health equity goals by assisting those facing barriers to accessing immunization services, such as newcomers to Canada. To further support these efforts, OPH accessed translation services for clients who do not speak English or French, and have translated immunization resources into Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, and Somali.

Additionally, OPH launched a comprehensive communications plan for routine vaccinations to reach diverse populations during the summer of 2024. The goal of the plan was to increase the uptake of routine vaccinations at our Neighbourhood Health & Wellness Hubs from August to early October 2024. This campaign targeted parents, especially from Arabic and African, Caribbean and Black communities in Ottawa, using social media and local radio ads, to increase appointments for routine vaccinations, promote the Kids Come First Clinics, and encourage vaccination reporting through the CANImmunize App and ICON Tool.

OPH facilitated the rollout of the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) prevention programs, which included the older adult program and, in the fall, the newly expanded infant prevention program. OPH supported the implementation of the older adult program by providing timely counsel and vaccine distribution to community providers, along with offering OPH-led clinics to retirement homes needing support. For the newly expanded infant program, OPH provided communication and resources to primary care providers and hospitals, along with ensuring efficient distribution of vaccines. Additionally, OPH offered RSV immunization services at Community Clinics and Neighborhood Health and Wellness Hubs to infants who were unable to access the product through their healthcare provider.

Working with CHEO and through the Kids Come First *Vaccinate and Up to Date* initiative, OPH partnered with the Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre to provide weekly dropin immunization services at the center. This unique partnership offered an access point for infants under midwifery care, ensuring they receive protection from RSV in early infancy when they are most vulnerable to complications from infection.

Infectious Disease Dashboard & Impact on Public Health Monitoring and Response

In February 2024, OPH integrated all COVID-19 data into its weekly year-round reporting on respiratory diseases through the Respiratory and Enteric Surveillance (RES) Dashboard. The RES Dashboard is a comprehensive, timely, accurate, and easy-to-use one-stop shop for data on respiratory diseases in Ottawa. The RES Dashboard provides additional context and visuals to support decision-making at individual and system-wide levels by including data for RSV and influenza, the other main contributors to severe respiratory illness. It focuses on the current season's data and provides comparisons to previous seasons.

The RES Dashboard also provides interpretation of various indicator levels by using statistical cut-offs based on historical data. For example, knowing whether wastewater levels of COVID-19 are very high, medium, or low can be very helpful in deciding whether to change personal behaviors. The integration of COVID-19 into the RES Dashboard created efficiencies by unifying resources, streamlining data management, and facilitating communication and reporting.

In October 2024, OPH launched a new public interactive dashboard for reportable Diseases of Public Health Significance (DOPHS) in both official languages. Updated quarterly, the new DOPHS dashboard and open datasets provide up-to-date data and analysis for 67 reportable infectious diseases, excluding COVID-19 and influenza. By making these data available in a user-friendly format, OPH enhances transparency and allows healthcare partners and the public to understand disease trends in Ottawa. This dynamic data tool allows users to customize their own analyses and visualize them with

time series graphs and tables. It also allows users to compare rates and trends in Ottawa to those in the province.

These comprehensive initiatives highlight OPH's unwavering commitment to preventing infectious diseases and promoting public health across Ottawa. By implementing robust infection prevention and control measures, enhancing health promotion services, and leveraging innovative data tools, OPH continues to address the evolving health needs of the community. These efforts not only improve health outcomes but also advance health equity by ensuring that all residents, including those facing barriers, have access to essential health services and information. As OPH moves forward, these foundational strategies will remain crucial in safeguarding the health and well-being of Ottawa's diverse population.

Enrich our Workplaces

OPH is committed to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and healthy workforce. In 2024, OPH launched the Procedure to Address Microaggressions in the Workplace, along with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) scenario-based training and the development of a departmental Learning and Development Strategy. These initiatives are part of OPH's ongoing efforts to create a supportive and inclusive workplace.

OPH's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion was evident through the development, implementation and maintenance of policies and practices that ensured all employees felt valued and respected. Diversity training included three Blanket Exercises with over 70 participants and Land Acknowledgment training sessions, which



were well-received by staff. Additionally, OPH advanced its microaggression policy to address and mitigate subtle forms of discrimination in the workplace, ensuring a respectful and inclusive environment for all employees. These activities helped build understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures and histories.

Recognizing the importance of mental health to our employees, OPH offered resources and support, including access to mental health services, stress management workshops, and training on psychological health and safety. Open communication about mental health was encouraged through events like the "Diversity Cafés" hosted by the Wellness@ Work Committee, helping to build a culture where employees feel comfortable seeking help and discussing their challenges, and learning about the unique perspectives of other employees.

Professional development remained a key focus, with numerous training programs, workshops, and educational courses provided to enhance skills and knowledge. OPH supported further education and certifications, promoting continuous learning.



Employee engagement was boosted throughout the year with team-building activities, the annual employee appreciation and recognition event, and feedback mechanisms, fostering a sense of belonging and appreciation for everyone.

OPH's commitment to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and healthy workplace is evident through its comprehensive approach to addressing microaggressions, enhancing DEI training, and prioritizing mental health.

By creating a respectful and supportive environment, OPH ensures that all employees feel valued and empowered. The focus on professional development and employee engagement strengthens the sense of belonging and appreciation among staff. As OPH continues to enrich its workplace, these efforts will contribute to a healthier, more inclusive, and dynamic organization, ultimately enhancing the quality of services provided to the community.

2024 Ottawa Public Health Budget

Where the Funding Comes From

- Province and other funding- \$57.4 million
- Municipal -\$29.5 million
- Total funds received: \$86.9 million

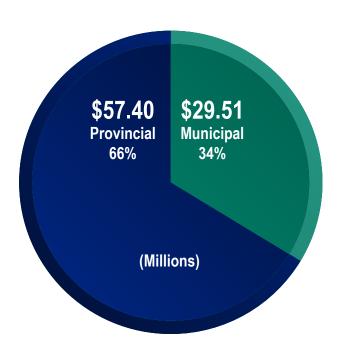
Where the Funding Goes

Provincial Programs

- Provincially Mandated Public Health Programs: \$ 70.51million
- Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Programs: \$5.15 million
- Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program: \$3.38 million
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination programs: \$607,000
- Indigenous public health programs: \$297,500

Supplementary Programs

- 100% City Programs \$2.63M
- HIV/AIDs programs: \$221,000
- Childhood Immunization, also known as Kids Comes First, programs: \$717,000
- Misc programs: \$91,000



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