



# **PUBLIC HEALTH BEHIND THE SCENES**

**OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH'S 2014 ANNUAL REPORT**





For more than 125 years, Ottawa Public Health has provided public health programs and services to individuals and communities, while advocating for public policies that make Ottawa and its residents healthier. Protecting and promoting health and preventing disease is embedded in all that we do.

## VISION

Ottawa is a community where people are healthy, safe and actively engaged in their well-being.

## MISSION

In partnership with the people and communities of Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health improves and advocates for health and well-being through prevention, promotion and protection.

## CONTACT US

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## Message from the Mayor

One of the best parts of being Mayor of the City of Ottawa is that I have the opportunity to witness the outstanding contributions of many of our city employees. The work of Ottawa Public Health (OPH) staff is no exception.

In my previous role as the first provincial Minister of Health Promotion, I saw first-hand the importance of healthy public policy and am proud that the City of Ottawa has made great advances in that area. In 2005, as Minister of Health promotion I was proud to successfully implement the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*. In 2014, two years after expanding the number of smoke-free spaces in the City, Ottawa had among one of the lowest smoking rates in Ontario. Recently, the Government of Ontario followed Ottawa's lead by enacting regulations that require all cities in the province to make their outdoor patios, playgrounds and sports fields smoke-free.

Recent advances in healthy policy are complimented by the front-line service offered by the nurses, inspectors, dietitians and other health professionals at OPH. At the beginning of the



last term, Council identified creating healthy and caring communities as a priority. That could not be done without the work of the professionals profiled in this report and their colleagues at OPH.

I hope you enjoy reading about their work as much as I do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Watson'.

Jim Watson, Mayor, City of Ottawa



## Message from the Medical Officer of Health

**A**s Medical Officer of Health for OPH, I am pleased to be able to present to our Board of Health, our clients, partners and all Ottawa residents OPH's 2014 Annual Report.

This year's Annual Report focuses on public health functions that happen "behind the scenes." In the coming pages you will meet Shawn, Lindsay, Erin, Kate, Dominique, Elizabeth, Maria and Lydia. These individuals represent many whose work – outbreak tracking, health hazard investigations and case management – is invisible to most, but indispensable.

OPH's team of health professionals diligently respond to residents' health needs online, over the phone and in-person. We come from a wide range of backgrounds, hold a variety of designations and are dedicated to protecting and promoting health in our community.

I hope that this report gives you the opportunity to learn more about the functions and



dimensions of public health, meet some of the faces behind OPH and learn about their day-to-day work.

Please connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#) or by phone at 613-580-6744.



Dr. Isra Levy

# Investigating Outbreaks

**Lindsay Whitmore, Epidemiologist**

Outbreaks of food-borne illness require careful tracing and investigation. During the three large-scale, community food-borne illness outbreaks in 2014, Lindsay Whitmore, Epidemiologist at OPH, was often behind the scenes putting together the pieces. Connecting with hundreds of residents and visitors she helped get to the bottom of what was making people sick. We met with Lindsay to learn more.

## What sort of work do you do at Ottawa Public Health?

I'm an epidemiologist. My focus is communicable diseases and I study the patterns and causes of these diseases in Ottawa. It can get pretty interesting when we identify an outbreak in the community.

## Describe a memorable project from 2014:

My job in an outbreak is to collect and analyse information from all individuals involved. The purpose of an investigation is to identify what might have caused people to become ill.

Last year, I helped to investigate an outbreak which occurred after a two-day conference of over 200 people. We were able to determine



the cause of the outbreak by gathering information about what people ate, when people became sick, and their symptoms. It was suspected that the outbreak was norovirus and the analysis that I performed supported that hypothesis.

## How does your work impact in the community?

Once we know what is making people sick, we can work to prevent it from happening again. This could include recalling foods, educating food handlers, or educating the public so they don't spread illness to other people.

To read reports written by our epidemiologists, visit [ottawa.ca/healthreports](http://ottawa.ca/healthreports)

# Safe, Effective Vaccines

**Elizabeth (Liz) Youngman,  
Vaccine Room Coordinator**

Did you know that 768,640 doses of vaccines were distributed by OPH in 2014, including vaccines for measles, mumps, polio, diphtheria, hepatitis B, meningococcal, human papillomavirus (HPV) and influenza among others? Liz Youngman, Vaccine Room Coordinator, was behind the scenes making it all happen!

## **Tell us about your work at Ottawa Public Health**

I am a coordinator in the vaccine room at OPH. I distribute vaccines to hospitals, physicians' offices, pharmacies, workplaces and long-term care homes. So basically every publicly funded vaccine that is given to Ottawa residents comes from OPH's newly renovated Immunization Centre.

## **What is a memorable milestone from 2014?**

One thing that set 2014 apart was the sheer number of cold chain inspections I conducted.

Maintaining cold chain means making sure that the supply chain – that brings the vaccine from the manufacturer to residents – is temperature controlled. Storing the vaccine at the right temperature is crucial to keeping the vaccine potent and effective once it is administered.



I inspect local hospitals, physicians' offices, pharmacies, workplaces and long-term care homes to make sure that their fridges are at the right temperature. The number of inspections went up this year because more pharmacies are offering the flu vaccine.

In 2012 we inspected 57 pharmacies and in 2014 we inspected 181!

## **What sort of impact does your work have in the community?**

My team makes sure that millions of dollars of vaccine is kept safe and doesn't go to waste due to improper storage. This includes the time that it arrives in OPH's Immunization Centre to the time that it's given to residents.

For more information on vaccine distribution in Ottawa, please visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca)

# Falls Prevention for Older Adults

Lydia Christ, Public Health Nurse

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations for Ottawa residents. In Ottawa, 1 in 4 older adults will experience a fall every year, with falls often causing disability, loss of independence or even death. With an increase in an aging population, it's no surprise that in 2014, over 650 residents participated in the "*Better Strength, Better Balance!*" Program. Read on to learn how Lydia Christ, a Public Health Nurse, is taking action to reduce senior's falls in our community.

## What sort of work do you do at Ottawa Public Health?

I'm a public health nurse with OPH's Older Adult Health program. Our work supports older adults to be healthy and independent by providing programs and services that aim to reduce falls in Ottawa's older residents.

## What was a notable project in 2014?

With funding from the Champlain Local Health Integration Network, OPH collaborated with the City of Ottawa's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department to provide free falls prevention exercise programs for adults. The "*Better Strength, Better Balance!*" program offers classes twice a week for 12 weeks to adults over 65 years of age. Fall prevention education is provided by OPH staff, and certified fitness instructors from Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services provide the exercise programming. Key messages around fall prevention include seeing a family physician each



year, regular exercise, reviewing medication, having regular vision tests, eating for healthy bones and having a safe home.

The response to the program has been fantastic. Classes filled up quickly, and have long waiting lists. We are excited to be attracting many older adults who were previously inactive. Participants have contacted us to say they are really enjoying these classes and have noticed an improvement in their mobility.

## How do you see your work in the community?

Injuries from a fall can have a lasting impact on an individual's independence and quality of life. Being physically active is one of the most important behaviours that older adults can do to reduce their risk of falling. Offering no-cost fall prevention exercise programming in the community is a step in the right direction.

For more information, please visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca)



# Connecting the Dots with Case Management

**Dominique Kane, Public Health Nurse**

Did you know that Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) – such as chlamydia and gonorrhea – continue to increase among youth in Ottawa? 15-29 year olds account for approximately three-quarters of chlamydia and gonorrhea diagnoses. If left untreated, these infections can lead to infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, ongoing transmission of infections and other painful diseases. We sat down with Dominique Kane, Public Health Nurse, to better understand how OPH works to reduce the spread of STIs in our community and to promote safer sex.

## Tell us about your work at Ottawa Public Health

I am a nurse on the case management team with OPH's Health Sexuality and Risk Reduction Unit. When an Ottawa resident is advised that they have an STI, I provide them with up-to-date and relevant information, support and resources – including our clinical services and information from [sexitsmart.ca](http://sexitsmart.ca).

One of the best parts of my job is connecting with people on the phone. I am able to complete health assessments and provide recommendations for specific actions or interventions based on the client's individual needs. It's great to provide this service over the phone, allowing people to connect with us in the comfort of their own home.

## What is a memorable milestone from 2014?

Some of the most memorable moments are the questions that we received from clients. There are a lot of misconceptions surrounding STIs. As a case manager it's incredibly rewarding to connect with so many people



from varying ages, cultures and beliefs and to dispel some of the sexual health myths in the community. Working with clients on a one-on-one basis is rewarding as I can empower individuals to take charge of their health and encourage safer sex options. I also really enjoy collaborating with other health and social organizations within Ottawa, to help create a united, supportive community that empowers clients to take accountability for their health.

## How do you see your work in the community?

My work is significant in the community as my role involves protecting and promoting the health and well-being of clients, as well as their sexual partners. Each interaction with my clients is unique and my level of participation can vary based on their needs. At times, my role requires that I provide follow-up and support others who might be infected with infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV and Syphilis. Ultimately, this helps reduce STIs in our community and promotes healthier sexual activity.

For more information on STIs and how to prevent them, visit [sexitsmart.ca](http://sexitsmart.ca)!



# Connecting to Residents Through Online Conversation

**Kate Todd, Project Officer**

As of December 2014, 2,900 residents in Ottawa have “Liked” OPH’s Facebook page and OPH has over 22,000 Twitter followers in French and English. This is why the Health Information Coordination Team aims to engage with residents on these platforms. Residents are looking for health information online and we want to be their go-to source. Meet Kate Todd. As part of the Health Information Coordination team, she works with Public Health Nurses, inspectors, nutritionists and epidemiologists to answer residents’ health concerns, live online.

## What sort of work do you do at Ottawa Public Health?

As a Project Officer on the Health Information Coordination Team, I help coordinate health promotion messages, write public service announcements and engage in social media on behalf of OPH.

## Describe a memorable day from 2014:

In the spring of 2014, there was a measles outbreak in the City of Ottawa with a case reported in a local elementary school. We received a message through Facebook from parents whose children attended the school where a case of measles was known. The parent was concerned about some misinformation being spread about the case. At the parent’s invitation, and with the consent of the Facebook group’s administrator, an OPH nurse, Erin Culley, was invited to join the group and became an active participant in



an initial hour long impromptu conversation and follow-up discussion the following week. We then used the Facebook group’s questions to develop website content for the general public and, hopefully, correct misinformation about measles in the community.

## How does your work impact in the community?

We often get positive feedback from clients and residents. Feedback on the Facebook intervention above was very positive and allowed us to connect residents directly with our office in real-time on a platform they were already very comfortable using. We also receive real-time feedback through social media about how OPH can improve, and in many cases this has helped us improve programming and service delivery. The beauty of social media is that it allows us to quickly connect residents to the information and resources they need, when, where and how they want to access it.

Connect with Kate and OPH on [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#).

# Counselling and Connecting

**Maria Tsarouhas, Public Health Nurse**

Simply put: Public health support – from a local public health nurse or public health inspector – is always just a quick phone call away. The Public Health Nurses operating the Ottawa Public Health Information Line (613-580-6744) field a wide range of inquiries. That means quick, easy access to a qualified health professional, who give you qualified advice on a variety of health topics.

Meet Maria, Public Health Nurse, who talks to residents everyday about – children’s health issues, breastfeeding, smoking cessation, vaccines, and public health programs and services and more. In fact, from middle of November to the end of December, OPH Information Line nurses received around 3,000 calls.

## **Tell us about your work at Ottawa Public Health**

My name is Maria and I work with the Ottawa Public Health Information Line. From 8:30 to 4:30, Monday to Friday, residents can contact me with health questions. I do everything from helping new mothers with breastfeeding questions to connecting residents to other social and health services. Ottawa residents with health questions can call us at 613-580-6744.

## **Describe a memorable day or project from 2014:**

In 2014, I began using a new software to track the immunization information of Ottawa residents. I was quite anxious about using it at



first, but it has been an excellent addition. Being able to input a child’s immunization information over the phone, saves parents the time and expense of travelling to our office. This has been a great client-focused software that will improve OPH’s tracking of our residents immunization and can help us inform parents if their child’s immunization needs to be updated.

## **How does your work impact in the community?**

Providing counseling and phone support gives me the chance to educate Ottawa residents about a range of health issues, programs and services that they may not even know about! I’m also able to help them take care of their health and the health of their families.

For more information or to connect with a nurse email [healthsante@ottawa.ca](mailto:healthsante@ottawa.ca) or call 613-580-6744.



# Protecting Against Health Hazards

**Shawn Bowers, Public Health Inspector**

In 2014, OPH's Health Hazard Public Health Inspector – Shawn Bowers – was tasked with responding to a wide range of health hazards across the City, including complaints about pest management, mould, air quality, chemicals and housing. A health hazard, as defined by the Ontario Public Health Standards, is a condition of a premises, a substance, thing, plant or animal other than man, or a solid, liquid, gas or combination of any of them, that is likely to have an adverse effect on the health of any person.

## What sort of work do you do at Ottawa Public Health?

I am a Public Health Inspector, working as part of the Health Hazard Prevention and Management Team. My roles are quite diverse and allow me to work with a number of teams and residents.

In addition to inspecting shelters, rooming houses, arenas and the living conditions on migrant farms, I also respond to lead exceedances in schools and day cares, review marijuana grow-operation remediation reports, as well as respond to public health complaints. These complaints can stem from issues with rental housing, indoor air quality, designated substances (like asbestos), insect and rodent control, or other public health concerns.

I am also the program lead for OPH's West Nile Virus Prevention Program, as well as a member of the joint Ministry of Labour/Ministry of the Environment working group. I am a member of the Rooming House Response Team which ensures adequate housing conditions



and that the premises is operating free of health hazards. I also support OPH's Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) team, which prepares the city in case of large scale health hazards.

## Describe a memorable day from 2014:

I responded to a complaint where a family home did not have running water. I had the opportunity to work collaboratively with a number of City departments to ensure the family's living conditions improved to meet all applicable standards so they could remain in their home.

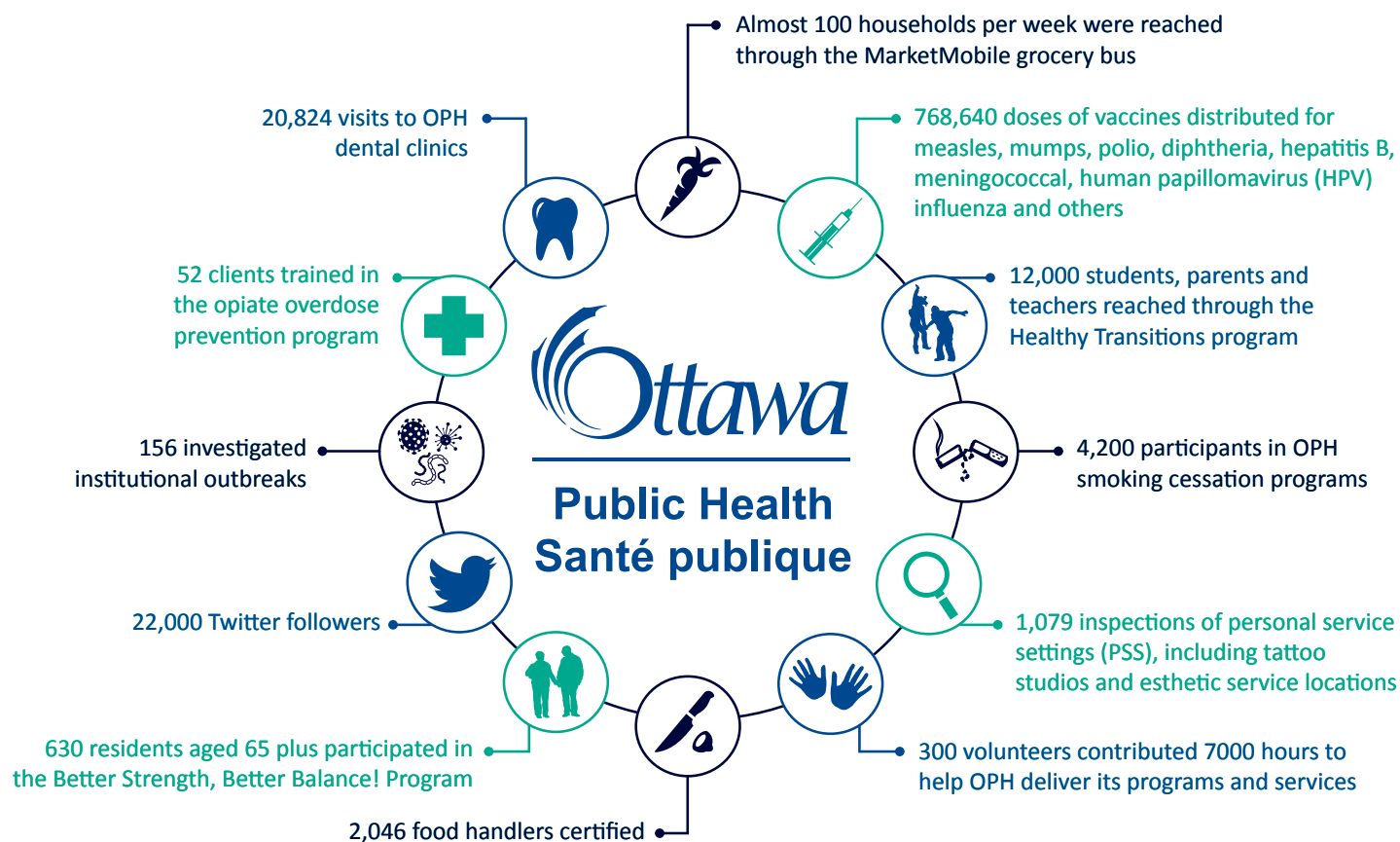
## How does your work impact in the community?

The goal of my work is quite simple: to reduce the impacts of health hazards on Ottawa residents and communities. I have a commitment to protect the public and go about my daily business to ensure that I balance a professional and compassionate approach to all inquiries.

To learn more about the work of a Public Health Inspector visit, [OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca)

# Ottawa Public Health by the Numbers

Every day, OPH is in the community, working with individuals, families and groups to help them be healthy, safe and actively find their pathway to health. Here are some examples of what we have accomplished with our partners in 2014.



## Thank you to our funders

### OPH 2014 Sources of Funding

| Sources of funding                      | \$ in thousands |
|---|-----------------|
| Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care   | 35,426          |
| Ministry of Children and Youth Services | 4,562           |
| City of Ottawa                          | 12,433          |
| Fees & Services                         | 152             |

