



OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH
2020
ANNUAL REPORT



Message from the Mayor

Throughout 2020, Ottawa Public Health was at the forefront of our City's response to COVID-19 – from the early warnings, which Dr. Etches brought to Council in January, through to the start of the local vaccination campaign, launched in December, and at every stage in between.

2020 demonstrated the importance and value of having local public health expertise, who are able to monitor the local situation and quickly adapt messaging and outreach to achieve the best possible results for our community. Not only was Ottawa Public Health able to work with various City departments on the pandemic response, its local relationships and expertise enabled the health unit to leverage existing partnerships and quickly forge new ones, resulting in collaborations with partners and stakeholders from a wide variety of sectors to ensure that Ottawa's residents, business sector and community organizations had the information and resources they needed to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission for themselves, their families, their workers and clients.



At every turn, Ottawa Public Health has risen to the challenges and, on behalf of Ottawa City Council and the entire City of Ottawa, I would like to thank Dr. Etches and the entire Ottawa Public Health team for all of their work throughout 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Watson". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

His Worship, Mayor Jim Watson,
City of Ottawa

Message from the Chair of the Board of Health

As Chair of the Ottawa Board of Health, I have had a front-row seat to Ottawa Public Health's work in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in our community. Time after time, I have been impressed and proud of the professionalism and dedication of everyone involved.

2020 was an unprecedented year. It brought challenges that none of us could have accurately predicted. Because of the pandemic, we have all had to make adjustments in the way we live, work, play and interact with friends, relatives and colleagues. These realities also apply to Ottawa Public Health employees, yet through it all they have stepped up and focused on the things they could do to inform and help Ottawa residents, businesses and community organizations weather the storm of COVID-19. Moreover, they have done so with kindness, empathy and compassion for each other and for the population they serve.

As such, I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Etches and the entire Ottawa Public



Health team as well as its learners and volunteers for their hard work and dedication to protecting and promoting our community's health and well-being.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Egli". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small dot at the end.

Keith Egli,
Chair of the Board of Health

Message from the Medical Officer of Health

Our team at Ottawa Public Health always has the safety and well-being of our community as the inspiration for the work we do and working through the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. I have watched our team work tirelessly to prevent and mitigate the harm from COVID-19, as I have seen our partners and residents do as well. COVID-19 truly necessitated a One City approach. Never before has our community seen this level of collaboration, reinforcing existing partnerships and creating opportunities for new ones. I am left feeling hopeful for the future. There is no storm this city cannot weather.

My thanks to the people of Ottawa for being kind and caring for each other. My thanks to the City of Ottawa for the support and collaboration provided in so many ways, not least of which was the deployment of workers and various logistical efforts. My thanks also to the various community partners, local hospitals and the broader health care sector for their collaboration, as well as to the business sectors and neighbouring public health units for their engagement. We are all stronger together.



This Annual Report is anchored in Ottawa Public Health's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan and the health unit's COVID-19 pandemic response. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Steady as she goes, Ottawa.
Steady as she goes.

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



Our Strategic Plan

Protecting Our Community's Health: Ottawa Public Health's 2019-2022 Strategy, approved by the Board of Health in June of 2019, was intended to be revised and updated on a yearly basis to ensure ongoing relevancy and alignment with organizational priorities.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the context in which Ottawa Public Health (OPH) operates. Therefore, in September 2020, the Board of Health approved an updated action plan to embed strategic elements of OPH's pandemic response, assess strategic work in the context of the pandemic and revise strategic measures accordingly. Though the goals remain the same, the strategy was revised to reflect the ongoing and new objectives, outcomes and key activities. Below is a summary and a comprehensive update on work undertaken in 2020 to advance OPH's Strategic Plan can be found [here](#).

Goal 1: Drive innovative approaches to mental health and substance use

OPH continues to prioritize the community's mental well-being, especially given the significant impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of the population. This includes developing a Mental Wellness and COVID-19 webpage, adapting programming in order to continue to provide harm reduction services, working with health organizations, school boards and partners to protect people with less advantage, and developing and promoting resources and supports to address the needs of Ottawa's diverse population.

Goal 2: Healthy communities by design

Pandemic activities relate to OPH's objective to use public health control measures to protect the community and prevent infection; provide equitable protection for underserved and priority populations; and influence the physical environment that enables people to live healthier lives.



Goal 3: Streamlining through digitizing

The need to streamline and increase accessibility through digitization has only grown in importance as the pandemic has increased the need to: automate inefficient and manual processes to compensate for the increased demands on scarce employee time and resources; provide the tools and technical training necessary for employees to work remotely; and leverage technology to enhance the capacity, quality, availability and accessibility of health services and better connect with clients, colleagues and the broader health system.

Goal 4: A healthy workplace and workforce

Workforce and workplace health have remained a concern during the pandemic response, as new infection prevention and control measures were implemented and many worked unbalanced hours and contributed significantly of their personal time,

uncompensated and at a cost to their health. Care for employees and the need for a sustainable approach will drive next steps as OPH focuses efforts on enabling a safe and inclusive work environment and on providing the necessary support, training and tools to enable: smooth transitions to new work settings and new roles; work-life balance; and opportunities for employees to safely connect with peers, supervisors and leadership.

Goal 5: Continuously improve our core work to maximize impact

The ever-adapting pandemic response and the need to innovate in delivering essential public health work have supported OPH's goal of continuous quality improvement, driving the health unit to adjust its structure in response to organizational requirements and inspiring the organization to continuously refine its approach so as to optimize its impact on the community.



Key Highlights from 2020

Mental Health and Substance Use

Recognizing the pandemic's impact on residents' mental health and substance use, OPH conducted population-level surveys on the status of mental health in Ottawa. Through these surveys, residents have reported worsened mental health and emotional well-being, loneliness and weaker community connectedness. The surveys also showed that some groups were more affected or faring worse than others. Other data sources showed an increase in demand for mental health and substance use supports.

In response, OPH increased community collaboration with partners who offer mental health and substance use services and continues to increase collaborations with partners on various initiatives. Among other things, in 2020 OPH has:

- Supported the development of virtual counselling and crisis services available at no cost to the clients
- Developed mental health and help-seeking campaigns and resources in collaboration with the Royal Ottawa, CHEO, Youth Services Bureau, Kids Come First Health Team, The Distress Centre of Ottawa and many others
- Developed and delivered mental health, community supports and crisis response workshops to Ottawa residents and those who support residents, such as faith leaders, community leaders and business owners
- Continued to advance work within the Ottawa Community Action Plan (OCAP), with a focus on reducing harms associated with opioids, such as stigma reduction efforts in collaboration with the Community Addictions Peer Support Association and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

- Adapted and enhanced access to overdose prevention and harm reduction services and increased work on coordination and access to services led by the Royal Ottawa, Regional Coordinated Access, CHEO and Kids Come First Health Team
- Collaborated with harm reduction and naloxone distribution partners to adapt services and supports within the COVID-19 context. As new COVID specific services were established, including self-isolation and distancing centers as well as respite services, harm reduction services were incorporated in program delivery. This included a COVID-19 Self-Isolation centre for people who are experiencing homelessness or use shelters, with onsite harm reduction and Supervised Consumption Services led by Ottawa Inner City Health as well as expansion of virtual naloxone platforms with pharmacy partners like Respect Rx Pharmacare.
- Piloted Safer Supply Ottawa program with funding and support from Health Canada and Partners (Pathways to Recovery, Recovery Care, Ottawa Inner City Health, Respect Rx Pharmacy, Somerset West Community Health Centre (CHC), Sandy Hill CHC and OPH) in order to expand access to programming in the community
- Developed multilingual mental health videos and fact sheets with the Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre
- Released the **Mental Health of Ottawa's Black Community** research study and the creation of OPH's ACB mental health strategy which includes active participation

and collaboration with Ottawa's Black Mental Health Coalition

- Developed and implemented a suicide prevention campaign, in partnership with Suicide Prevention Ottawa, to promote the importance of resilience, share stories of hope from people with lived and living experience, and highlight the training, supports and services available in the community
- Developed and disseminated the *Managing Through COVID-19 Employer's Guide* to support the psychological health and safety of workplaces
- Partnered with Workplace Safety and Prevention Services to provide a training workshop *Protecting the MH of Employees During COVID-19*

Further, OPH's Public Health Nurses working within schools consult and collaborate with community partners to support the mental health of children, youth and educators within schools in various ways. OPH remains focused on mental health promotion, reducing harms from substances, keeping people resilient and well, and suicide prevention, including through the work of school health nurses supporting children, youth and families.

Partnership to support communities with higher rates of COVID-19

OPH established a Community Operations service area to work alongside community partners to understand and respond to the needs of neighbourhoods and populations whose social circumstances, e.g. precarious employment, placed them at higher risk for COVID-19 transmission. Working closely with the Ottawa Health Team – Équipe Santé Ottawa's (OHT-ESO) COVID 19 Community

Response, key partnerships were leveraged: to promote COVID Wise practices; to assess and address barriers to testing; to support people to safely isolate; and to increase vaccination. Among other things, the team has:

- Collaborated with partners to implement wellness information events in identified neighbourhoods, promoting COVID Wise practices and assessing residents' perceptions, understanding and barriers to accessing supports and services related to COVID-19
- Alongside the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership, released data highlighting the disproportionate impact of COVID on racialized populations in Ottawa developing tailored approaches to more meaningfully address the needs of the Somali, Arabic and African, Caribbean, Black Francophone populations
- As part of OPH's ongoing commitment to reconciliation, team members engaged with Indigenous partners, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, to develop a better understanding of local pandemic-related needs and priorities. Based on the principles of respect, relationship, reciprocity and reflection, OPH has been actively supporting and collaborating with Indigenous partners on: COVID communications; community-led COVID research initiatives; context-specific interpretation of COVID guidelines; and culturally safe COVID vaccination services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults.
- Engaged elected officials to identify key partners and opportunities within neighborhoods to increase



COVID Wise outreach and prevent COVID transmission

- Engaged partners in various sectors, including the business, sports and recreation, events, faith-based, childcare and shelter sectors to provide information and promote COVID Wise guidance for safer operations
- Partnered with By-law and Regulatory Services to share communications reminding landlords and property managers of their obligations under the Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law and promoting COVID-19 guidance and signage for multi-residential buildings

Further, in collaboration with the Ottawa Health Team – Équipe Santé Ottawa (OHT-ESO), OPH established a referral process to better assist individuals requiring additional support to isolate and/or to access testing, as well as other services, including shelter and housing, food, and mental health supports. Working with our regional testing partners, OPH identified where school-based testing was needed to increase access to testing

Art by Shaylene Gibbons



particularly where there were a larger number of high-risk contacts of someone who attended school while infectious and where barriers existed for testing. In January 2021, weekend testing for students, staff and their families was initiated for groups of schools in areas of the city with higher rates of COVID-19. OPH also worked with regional testing partners to identify priority neighbourhoods for pilot test sites to improve access to testing and to provide wraparound social supports to those seeking testing. Testing sites have been opened in Vanier and the Sawmill Creek areas of the city.

OPH's Work with Ontario Health Teams

Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) were introduced by the province in April 2019 as a new way of organizing and delivering care. Under this model, clients and patients will receive all care from one coordinated team of providers, making it easier to access the right services at the right time. This innovative model offers an opportunity for local health units to have a leadership role in facilitating planning and collaborating to improve the population's health.

OPH has been an active partner in every Ottawa area OHT, including the OHT-ESO (as noted earlier), the Ottawa East OHT / ÉSO de l'est d'Ottawa, and the "Kids Come First / *Enfant avant tous*" Health Team. A fourth OHT, Four Rivers, touches the west of Ottawa and is in the process of submitting a full application to the Ministry of Health.

COVID-19 has in many ways accelerated opportunities to work collaboratively across the health system. Lessons learned from working with hospitals, long-term care partners, primary care providers and so many health agencies during COVID-19 are informing new approaches to addressing the health of our population and reducing health inequities.



Outreach to Ottawa's Business Community

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined that a healthy population and a healthy economy go hand in hand. In order to have a healthy economy, businesses need people - employees and patrons. At the same time, most people need employment to maintain health. In order to fully participate in economic activity, people need to be healthy and feel safe going to work and frequenting local businesses and other community settings.

Recognizing the inter-connections between population health and economic health, OPH engaged with the local business community to inform public health resources and policies. OPH also ensured that businesses had the guidance they needed to operate as safely as possible during the evolving nature of the COVID pandemic, including support for the implementation of infection control practices in workplaces to allow for ongoing participation in employment by keeping the virus as low as possible in the workplace and in the community.

OPH has worked with the Mayor's Economic Partners' Task Force, the Ottawa Coalition of BIAs, the Ottawa Board of Trade, major retailers, restaurant operators and associations, sports associations, small business advocates, the construction sector and others to understand their concerns and to provide the information and resources they required during these challenging times. Lastly, OPH has engaged with local businesses in health promotion campaigns to encourage safer practices in workplaces and businesses.

Outbreak Management

Throughout 2020, OPH has responded to and worked with a broad range of institutions and organizations to provide Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and outbreak management support and guidance to prevent new infections of COVID-19 and thereby decrease the risk of severe illness and death.

From March to December of 2020, OPH investigated 78 COVID-19 outbreaks in 26 of Ottawa's 28 long-term care homes (LTCHs) with a total of 1,540 individuals testing positive (634 staff and 906 residents). During this same period, OPH also investigated 92 COVID-19 outbreaks in 62 retirement homes (RHs), 63 outbreaks in shelters and other congregate settings, 163 outbreaks in schools and childcare settings, and 56 outbreaks in other businesses and workplaces.

With respect to OPH's work with LTCH/RHs specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, building on lessons learned from early COVID-19 outbreaks in these institutions, OPH worked closely with partners on processes to strengthen and streamline responses, including weekly meetings across agencies to address issues and concerns and to ensure collaboration, ongoing communications with facilities, preventative visits and phone calls to

review IPAC strategies and practices, and daily reporting on outbreak status.

In reviewing COVID-19 outbreaks in Ottawa's LTCH/RHs during wave 1 versus those in wave 2, data demonstrates that despite a higher number of LTCH outbreaks being declared in the second wave, overall morbidity and mortality has been lower. Wave 2 outbreaks involved fewer cases and fewer deaths, and the average outbreak duration was shorter. Enhanced case detection and IPAC measures helped mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on this vulnerable population.

COVID-19 Case Management and Contact Tracing

In order to continue to meet the needs of Ottawa's population, OPH significantly and rapidly increased its staffing complement for case management and contact tracing.

As part of its COVID-19 case and contact management process, OPH communicates with every resident who receives a positive COVID-19 test to identify locations they may have visited while contagious, obtain a list of close contacts, and provide information on measures needed to prevent any further spread of infection. The team then makes attempts to notify residents who are deemed to be a high-risk close contact of someone who has tested positive to provide them with information based on their individual level of risk. Beyond that, the case and contact management team also follows up with regular communications to people diagnosed with COVID-19 to monitor symptoms, ensure isolation guidance is being followed, and offer additional supports, as needed.

As the pandemic progressed and the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 increased, OPH added to its case and contact



management team in order to meet the growing need for this work. As a result of growing the team and automating some of the processes, OPH has largely been able to keep up with the demand and largely meet provincial targets. OPH has also had to modify its case management processes several times, based on new Provincial guidance and emerging evidence, such as with variants of concern (VOC).

In addition to redeploying hundreds of internal OPH employees to work in case management and contact tracing, OPH worked with Federal and Provincial governments to onboard and train more than 25 contact tracers to assist with this work.

Core Services

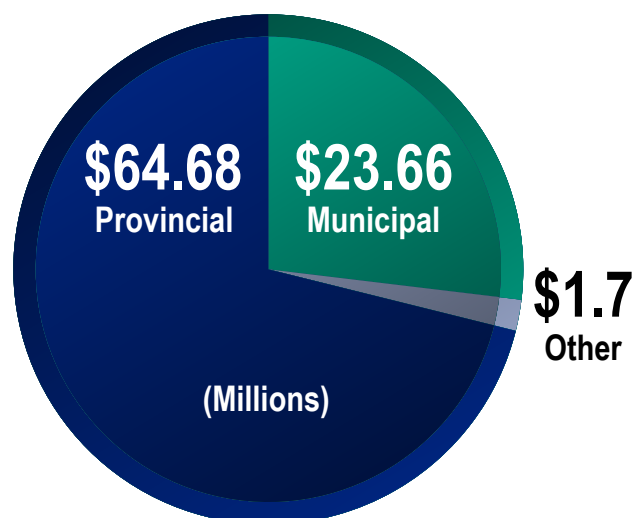
The need for rapid mobilization and scaling up of the public health workforce in response to the pandemic greatly impacted OPH's ability to continue providing some essential services at the same service levels as before the pandemic, especially in the areas of health promotion, including the healthy growth and development program. Notwithstanding this, OPH successfully continued providing essential services to the best of its ability, prioritizing services supporting individuals at greatest risk and individuals most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Innovative solutions, such as providing services in an online format and collaborating with partners, allowed support to continue as best as possible for those in the most need.

2020 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	64.68
Municipal	23.66
Federal	0.12
Own Funds	0.18
Fees and Services	1.39
Total Revenue	90.04

Operating Results	Amount (in Millions)
Expenditure by Program	
COVID-19 - Base	47.95
Cost Shared Core Programs	15.21
COVID-19 - One-Time	18.66
Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program	1.44
Total Provincial Cost Shared Programs	83.26
Supplementary Programs	
Healthy Babies Healthy Children	4.59
100% City Programs	1.69
Miscellaneous Programs	0.49
Total Supplementary Funded Programs	6.78
Total Revenue	90.04



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