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Health and Social Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the community in significant ways. The direct and indirect impacts on individual and community health are being recognized and will likely extend into the future, highlighting post-pandemic recovery priorities for OPH. Over the course of the pandemic, Ottawa residents have reported increases in mental health challenges across the lifespan, as well as increases in substance use. Ottawa has also seen a significant increase in opioid related deaths, from 65 deaths in 2019 to 124 deaths in 2020, equating to a 48% increase.

As reported in October 2020, Ottawa residents continued to report worsened mental health and emotional well-being, loneliness, weaker community connectedness and concern for burnout. OPH recognizes the need for a focus on mental health and substance use, as outlined in the report titled *Ottawa Public Health's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan: Strategic Priority Relating to Mental Health and Substance Use Health* (ACS2021-OPH-HPP-0001), with an understanding that the pandemic continues to affect everyone differently.

Public Health Ontario conducted a rapid review in July 2020 titled, "*COVID-19 Pandemic School Closure and Reopening Impacts*", which found parents of young children reported increases in behavioural difficulties, sedentary behaviours, and increased reports of child maltreatment. Disruptions from school closures have had negative impacts on those students already facing academic difficulties. The waitlists to address these problems and others are backlogged and continue to grow. Furthermore, the pandemic has changed OPH services, including decreases in referrals from social services and health providers, the delivery of services virtually, and the reduction or suspensions of some services. Similarly, dental screenings and treatments for children were limited during the pandemic. When coupled with changes in dietary habits, this raises concerns regarding preventable poor oral hygiene. In addition, due to children and youth missing school-aged required vaccines, there has also been an increased risk of outbreaks from vaccine preventable diseases, such as measles.

COVID-19 restrictions have also resulted in more sedentary lifestyles, poorer dietary habits, and increased substance use, which are risk factors known to contribute to the development of chronic disease. To further complicate matters, according to a June 9, 2021 news release from the Ontario Medical Association, the pandemic has resulted in a backlog of close to 16 million healthcare services in addition to the waitlists for pre-

pandemic procedures. Backlogs in healthcare services (eg. diagnostic screenings) and fewer consults with primary care practitioners may result in an increased incidence and worsening of chronic disease conditions. Consequently, among other disadvantages, COVID-19 is known to result in more severe illness among those diagnosed with a chronic disease.