

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
20 September 2021 / 20 septembre 2021**

**Submitted on September 9, 2021
Soumis le 9 septembre 2021**

**Submitted by
Soumis par:**
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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2021-OPH-MOH-0005

**SUBJECT: OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL (OAG) 2021 INTERIM AUDIT
WORK PLAN AND PROPOSED AUDIT OF THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE**

**OBJET: BUREAU DE LA VÉRIFICATRICE GÉNÉRALE (BVG) PLAN DE
VÉRIFICATION INTÉRIMAIRE 2021 ET VÉRIFICATION PROPOSÉE
SUR LA RÉPONSE À LA PANDÉMIE**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit support the Auditor General of the City of Ottawa's City-wide operational audit of the pandemic response, based on a limited scope, as described in this report.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa appuie la vérificatrice générale de la Ville d'Ottawa dans sa vérification opérationnelle de l'intervention en cas de pandémie, sur la base d'une portée limitée, tel que décrit dans le présent rapport.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of May 12, 2021, Ottawa City Council approved a report titled [Office of the Auditor General \(OAG\) 2021 Interim Audit Work Plan](#), which included a proposed “Pandemic Response Audit”, described as follows:

“A City-wide operational audit to provide Council assurance on the effectiveness and efficiencies of the City’s response to the pandemic. This audit will be completed in a multi-phase approach. Areas of focus will be further defined during the planning process.”

The report noted the status as *“To commence in late 2021 or early 2022. To be reported in 2022 and future years”*

As of the writing of this report, no further information has been provided with respect to either the potential scope or timing of this proposed audit.

Governance Structure and Authority

The Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit is an autonomous corporation responsible for upholding standards under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)* and other legislation, providing fiscal and administrative oversight, and establishing the overall objectives and priorities of Ottawa Public Health (OPH), in accordance with the accountability framework described by the province in the *Ontario Public Health Standards*. The Board of Health oversees the policy framework within which OPH staff respond to locally identified health needs. The Ottawa Board of Health is also responsible for advising City Council on other issues related to health matters within its jurisdiction, upon Council’s request.

The Board of Health was formally established on April 28, 2011. At its inaugural meeting, the Board approved a report from the City Clerk and Solicitor titled [Foundation Policies and By-laws for Ottawa Board of Health Governance](#), which stated as follows:

*“With respect to audit requirements, the amendments to the City of Ottawa Act, 1999 respecting the Board of Health provide that the City will continue to appoint the auditor for the Board of Health. The City has currently appointed Ernst and Young LLP as its external auditor. Internally, **the Board may request the City’s Auditor General to perform financial, compliance and performance audits of the Ottawa Board of Health.**”*

OPH has been monitoring risks to the health of people in Ottawa from the novel coronavirus that has created the COVID-19 pandemic, since early January 2020, responding to the pandemic with an Incident Management System (IMS) initiated on January 27, 2020 and embedding the response into our strategy and core operations since September 21, 2020. As of the writing of this report, OPH's response to the pandemic is ongoing and is expected to continue into the fall and winter.

DISCUSSION

Throughout the pandemic, the Board of Health has received regular verbal updates from Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health, including at additional information sessions and through sharing regular reports made to Ottawa's City Council, as well as written reports at its meetings of September 21, 2020 and November 30, 2020.

As demonstrated through two (2) reports brought forward at the Board of Health's meeting of February 8, 2021 on Lessons Learned from the Pandemic response to-date and a subsequent report on Emergency Preparedness and Response brought forward at the Board meeting of April 19, 2021, OPH is committed to continuous quality improvement and to learning from every emergency response. OPH's Emergency Plan includes sections on Debriefing and Quality Improvement processes to ensure that the organization evaluates and learns from every emergency response. The aforementioned April 2021 report stated that "lessons learned and actions taken as a result of evaluating emergency responses over the last two years, and experiences during the COVID-19 response, have transformed how OPH manages emergencies with public health impacts".

As noted in the Background section of this report, the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS) include an Accountability Framework, which sets out the Ministry's expectations of boards of health to promote a transparent and effective accountability relationship, and includes certain reporting requirements.

Overall, OPH demonstrates financial oversight and accountability through various reports to City Council and to the Ministry of Health. Specifically, City Council reviews and approves OPH's Annual Budget and receives an Annual Report, which includes, at minimum, an overview of mandate, strategic directions, annual highlights and a financial statement. The Ministry of Health receives the Board of Health Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission, Audited Financial Statements and Auditor's Attestation Report, as well as performance and other ad hoc reports, such as have been requested related to the COVID-19 vaccination program, and may request specific program-focused audits.

In light of the length and magnitude of the pandemic response, OPH also expects that there will be post-pandemic analyses and related provincial reporting requirements, though the details are not yet known. Such a provincial review could involve an operational audit of OPH's pandemic response, and would likely cover much of OPH's pandemic response work that has been and continues to be, outside the City's jurisdiction in terms of work with schools and long-term care, collaborations with local Ontario Health Teams, partnerships with hospitals and other health sector partners, and more.

Under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA), the Medical Officer of Health has a statutory duty to respond to health hazards/communicable diseases during an emergency and, as per Section 7 of the HPPA, OPH emergency operations are required to meet the requirements under the [Emergency Management Guideline, 2018](#). Many of those same functions to respond to emergencies are reflected in the rubric of the City's obligations under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA). The Office of Emergency Management has a coordinating role and various City Department/Services are critical stakeholders in providing support for tasks under the City of Ottawa Emergency Management Plan.

Given the above-referenced coordinating role of the City and the shared interest with OPH in ensuring a successful COVID-19 vaccination program for Ottawa residents, effective November 16, 2020, the Board of Health and City of Ottawa entered into a Service Level Agreement setting out the scope and responsibilities of the Parties with respect to the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination program and operation of COVID-19 vaccine clinics. As such, through Ottawa's COVID-19 vaccination program, OPH worked collaboratively with the City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to coordinate local vaccination efforts based on the Province's Ethical framework for COVID-19 vaccine distribution and its three-phased vaccine distribution plan.

As noted above, OPH expects and intends to learn from the pandemic response pursuant to its Emergency Preparedness and Response framework and is already incorporating lessons learned, though at this time, the pandemic response is ongoing and a fulsome review would be premature and a challenge to staff capacity to respond. Regular reports on OPH's response to the pandemic will continue to be provided to the Board of Health and Ministry of Health. OPH also anticipates that there will be a requirement for some post-pandemic analysis and reporting to the Ministry of Health pursuant to the province's accountability framework. Therefore, the health unit agrees with the OAG's proposal for an audit of the City's pandemic response at this time, though with a limited scope as pertains to OPH's role.

In light of the collaborative work with the EOC on the COVID-19 vaccination program, staff is recommending that the Board of Health support the OAG's request to conduct an of the pandemic response based on a limited-scope as it pertains to the governance interface relating to the partnership between OPH and the EOC on Ottawa's COVID-19 vaccination program. Further, should any recommendations arising from any such audit pertain to aspects of OPH operations, policies or practices, the Auditor General should be invited to present her findings to the Board of Health. Given that neither the City's Audit Committee nor Ottawa City Council have jurisdiction over OPH operations, policies or practices, providing a report to the Board of Health would ensure that the appropriate governing body has the opportunity to consider any actionable recommendations arising from any such audit relating to OPH operations, policies and/or practices and to hear directly from the Medical Officer of Health on her response to any such recommendations.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

No public consultation was undertaken in preparing this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to approving the recommendation in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This report aligns with Goal 5 of OPH's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan – Continuously improve our work to maximize impact.

DISPOSITION

Following Board of Health approval of this report, the Chair will communicate the Board's support to the City's Auditor General and the Medical Officer of Health will work with the OAG to further define the scope of any such audit.

If the OAG proceeds with a limited scope audit, as described in this report, any recommendations pertaining to OPH operations, policies or procedures should be brought forward to the Board of Health at a future meeting.