

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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January 20, 2023

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Medical Officer of Health Update

Introduction

On behalf of the staff and myself, welcome to the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit). Thank you for agreeing to represent your municipalities as Board of Health members.

While there have been unprecedented pandemic challenges over the last three years for all of us, the Health Unit will continue to face significant obstacles as we navigate through the recovery phase of the pandemic, backlogs, emerging threats (i.e., COVID-19 variants of concerns, other respiratory pathogens), and the shifting landscape of public health in Ontario.

While very little information is available to communicate in this regard, significant provincial changes to public health's structure, function, and funding is anticipated over the coming months and years. As Board of Health members, your engagement, advocacy, and leadership will be critical to help ensure that any proposed changes will, in actuality, realize the Health Unit's vision of a healthy life for everyone in our communities. A goal I am confident we all share. To accomplish this, transparent communication and a collaborative approach among all stakeholders is imperative. I am committed to sharing information with you as it becomes available.

If I may leave you with one last thought, and the most important lesson I have learned in public health over the years. We must all truly commit our scarce and valuable resources to a more upstream, preventative approach addressing why people become ill in the first place, the social determinants of health, and find sustainable, long-term practical solutions. Past and present health care strategies have, and are, primarily focused on short-sighted goals of improving access to care. Albeit important, until root causes of illness and disease is meaningfully prioritized and actioned, the problem will never, ever be resolved. Demand will always exceed supply.

COVID-19 Update

While it is clear the public has moved on from the pandemic, COVID-19 is still circulating and continues to impact vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Provincial indicators for COVID-19 are lower overall compared to the previous week. Weekly percent positivity was 13.9% (January 8, 2023, to January 14, 2023) lower than the previous week, ending the upward trend in percent positivity seen throughout December.

The most prevalent lineage in recent weeks is BQ.1.1, an Omicron sub-lineage, followed by BQ.1 and BF.7, which are also Omicron sub-lineages.

Recently, there has been increased media coverage regarding the XBB 1 and 1.5 variants as they continue to spread quickly, especially throughout the U.S.A. Ontario cases have remained stable around 2% for XBB as reported up to December 24, 2022. While XBB has been reported to be the most transmissible variant detected to date, it is uncertain whether the severity of disease caused by XBB



differs from previous SARS-CoV-2 variants. Increases in bivalent booster vaccine uptake and immunity from previous infections may attenuate the risk of severe cases associated with XBB variants.

Monoclonal antibody agents are not generally effective against XBB but antiviral agents such as Paxlovid are active against this variant. Continued surveillance and research are requisite and will help inform future decision-making.

Influenza

Provincially, the onset of the influenza season began earlier than expected, similar to what the southern hemisphere experienced, and was more severe than previous years. Cases peaked late in November of 2022 and have been declining since. From January 8, 2023, to January 14, 2023, Public Health Ontario is reporting an overall influenza assessment as low and lower than previous weeks, with percent positivity and laboratory-confirmed influenza cases being lower. Institutional influenza outbreaks have remained like prior weeks.

Locally, the Health Unit is reporting sporadic influenza activity for week two (January 8-14, 2023). There were two laboratory confirmed cases of influenza A reported in week two. There were no institutional influenza outbreaks during week two. Since the beginning of the season, there have been a total of 517 cases of influenza A, 0 cases of Influenza B and 0 co-infections with A and B reported in the district.

Other Respiratory Viruses

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) percent positivity is at 7.1% similar to the previous week. However, the percentage that were positive for RSV was over three times higher in <1 year-olds and nearly one and a half times higher in 1–4-year-olds, compared to persons 12 years and older.

Other respiratory viruses circulating locally include Entero/rhinovirus, parainfluenza viruses, and non-SARS coronaviruses.

Immunization Update

As expected, the volume at our community COVID-19 vaccination clinics has been declining since November 2022, but we continue to see moderate uptake. To maintain efficiency, we adjust our COVID-19 vaccine clinic schedule to meet demand, including accommodating walk-in clients. We continue to support community partners in providing COVID-19 vaccines and are updating processes as we gradually transition to a model similar to the Universal Influenza Immunization Program with respect to this support.

Data References:

Public Health Ontario: Risk Assessment for Omicron Sub-lineage XBB(including XBB.1 and XBB.1.5) as of January 4, 2023. Published: January 11, 2023*

Public Health Ontario: Weekly Epidemiological Summary, Respiratory Virus Overview in Ontario from January 8, 2023, to January 14, 2023 (Week 2). Published: January 20, 2023)

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Building and Maintenance

Parry Sound

- Two roof water leaks that impacted operations between September and November. Restoration was conducted as well as inspection for mould. No mould was found.
- Secured new custodial company.
- Parry Sound office planning meetings continuing for new location.
- Furniture for the new Parry Sound office was received.

North Bay

- Snow removal contract for the 2022-2023 season secured.
- Custodial contract extended for 2022.
- New vaccine fridge and freezer installed.
- Heating ventilating and air conditioning Fall maintenance occurred.
- Building sprinkler system maintenance occurred.
- Exterior window washing conducted.
- Oral Health reconfiguration meetings ongoing.

COVID-19

- Weekly monitoring of personal protective equipment cleaning supplies for COVID-19 (sanitizer and disinfectant).

Communications

In late November, Communications, in collaboration with Information Technology, launched the Health Unit's new website. Enhanced features include:

- Updated imagery, videos, and content.
- The option to view content in a different language using the Google Translate feature, available at the bottom of every page.
- The ability to adjust the font size, contrast, view alt text and much more, using the Page Assist feature available at the bottom left corner.
- The ability for users to subscribe to a page and be notified when information is updated or changed.
- Scroll back to the top of any page with one click.

Communications is keeping up with recent COVID-19 developments but has shifted to more program work. Being able to focus on a wider range of topics has allowed Communications to proctor third-year nursing students from Nipissing University again this winter.

Other projects Communications is supporting include: Think You'll Win gambling campaign; Fall flu shot campaign; assisting with harm reduction messaging and videos; holiday Syphilis Grindr campaign; digital media planning for Family Health Information Line; and other one-off program social media needs.

Emergency Management

Emergency Management managed/coordinated Health Unit emergency response activities as follows:

- Work completed in 2022 focused mainly on supporting COVID-19 response, primarily engaged in managing the Call Centre, Incident Management System (IMS) response, municipality liaison, and support for immunization clinic sites. Activities under this portfolio outside of the COVID-19 response also included internal emergency preparedness work, municipal emergency plan reviews, policy development, and observing emergency monitoring system information.
- On January 1, 2023, the Acting Manager of Emergency Management transferred responsibilities for the COVID-19 Call Centre (general and vaccine bookings) to the Manager of Communicable Disease Control (CDC). Call Centre staff have been extended until March 31, 2023.
- In December 2022, the Acting Manager of Emergency Management began the initial steps of transferring responsibilities for internal emergency preparedness to Human Resources to better align with ongoing trainings, internal colour code work, and occupational health and safety procedures. This transfer is currently ongoing.
- As of December 31, 2022, the Acting Manager of Emergency Management returned to their previous permanent position and as of January 22, 2023, the previous Manager of Emergency Management ended their employment with the Health Unit. Work is underway to address this vacancy.

Information Technology

Information Technology management and staff:

- Conducted a security audit to identify and address any potential vulnerabilities.
- Reviewed and updated Information Technology policies and procedures to ensure compliance with industry best practices.
- Performed software and system updates to ensure the latest security patches were installed.
- Prepared new tablets for incoming Board of Health members.

Planning and Evaluation

Population Health Assessment and Surveillance

- The Surveillance Team continues to update the COVID-19 dashboard with the latest trends and indicators. Interpretation of trends is ongoing as changes at the local level occur (e.g., testing eligibility). Analyses on other respiratory diseases (e.g., influenza, respiratory-related emergency department visits) have been analyzed as needed.
- An abstract was submitted to the 2023 Canadian Public Health Conference on a local COVID-19 outbreak in an apartment building, for potential presentation in June 2023. A manuscript describing the investigation of the same abstract is in the process of being created for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
- Analytical support was provided towards investigation of an outbreak of invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease and a Salmonella infantis cluster.
- Organization around analysis and reporting of indicators relating to mental health, infant feeding, and childhood healthy growth and development are underway as programs plan toward their regular pre-pandemic activities.
- Information collected through the Overdose Reporting System is sent to more than 160 community partners in weekly updates through the Health Unit's interactive [surveillance dashboard](#). The Health Unit also continues to collect data based on the increasing trends noted

locally during the pandemic. During the last quarter (September 2022 to December 2022) there were 81 overdoses/negative drug reactions with seven (7) resulting in death within the Health Unit district.

Health Equity

- In collaboration with community partners providing trusted community spaces, the Health Unit continues to offer COVID-19 vaccine clinics to reach individuals who are under housed, transient or experiencing homelessness; individuals who use substances; and newcomers to Canada.
- Seventeen community partners successfully applied for use of the Health Unit's available Health Equity Training funds in order to support their response to the unique needs of populations facing health and social disparities in the Health Unit region. Of those, 15 were able to complete training by the end of December 2022 on a range of areas, including but not limited to, mental health first aid, Indigenous cultural mindfulness, and 2SLGBTQ+ safer and positive spaces.

Planning

- The Health Unit's revised planning documents were released in September and programs and services submitted plans for a one-year (2023) cycle with consideration for how they can meaningfully contribute to the Health Unit's Recovery Priorities (i.e., Getting Children and Youth Back on Track; Nurturing Mental Health Recovery; Prioritizing Equity-Seeking Populations; and Strengthening Community Development).
- An enumeration of Recovery Priority activities is underway to determine how many interventions address the four organizational recovery priorities.
- Plans are currently underway to conduct a thorough assessment of Health Unit planning processes and documents and to revise these collaboratively to best meet organizational needs.

Quality Assurance

Policies and Procedures

- Totals for policies, procedures, and associated documents processed between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022, were: 527 documents issued, and 162 new documents assigned.

Quality Issue Reports (QIR)

- Total QIRs completed (closed) between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022, were 74: 13 at level 0 (near miss, no harm, loss, or damage), 52 at level one (incident did occur but no harm, loss, or damage), and nine (9) at level two (temporary or minor harm, loss, or damage – recovery in days/weeks).
- Classifications were as follows: 38 impacting people (third party, personnel, or client), 23 related to organizational/professional standards, 11 related to resources, and two (2) related to reputation.

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

The Communicable Disease Control (CDC) program continues to manage enteric and respiratory outbreaks in congregate living settings and collaborates with the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

Hub and congregate living settings managing outbreaks in these settings. From September to December 2022, 31 outbreaks were declared in congregate living settings.

The CDC program completes case management and contact tracing for Diseases of Public Health Significance (DOPHS). From September to December 2022, 76 DOPHS were reported to and managed by the CDC program. In addition, 517 laboratory-confirmed influenza A cases were reported from September to December 2022.

The IPAC Hub regularly shares IPAC best-practice resources and completes IPAC assessments in long-term care homes, retirement homes, and other congregate living settings. From September to December 2022 there were 1,037 interactions with congregate living settings. These interactions include outbreak management, IPAC assessments, exposure assessments, and consultation regarding admissions and transfers.

In 2022, twenty-five congregate living settings throughout the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts received financial support for infection prevention and control (IPAC). Congregate living settings were offered IPAC assessments and the opportunity to apply for up to \$5,000 of funding. Successful applicants used the funding for IPAC equipment, personal protective equipment including N95 masks and to have N95 fit testing done, rapid antigen tests, plexiglass barriers, HEPA filters, as well as educational opportunities for staff and volunteers. A total of \$88,000 was provided to successful applicants.

Three third-year nursing students from Nipissing University are completing placements in the CDC program. The students are completing a hand hygiene project with area school-aged children. A fourth-year nursing student completed a full-time placement in the CDC program from September 2022 to January 2023.

Professional Practice

The Health Unit employs a broad range of public health practitioners, which includes public health nurses, nurse practitioners, public health inspectors, registered dietitians, registered dental hygienists, dentists, certified dental assistants, and community health promoters. The role of the Professional Practice Manager/Personal Health Information Lead is to support the organization to foster quality professional practice that meets best practice standards, regulatory college practice standards, certification standards, and legislative requirements including requirements under the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*. A brief synopsis of activities planned in 2023 includes:

- Re-establishing Health Unit professional resource groups and practice advisories that were put on hold during staff redeployment to pandemic-related activities;
- Re-establishing an updated version of the Transition to Public Health Nursing Orientation program which will be more inclusive to all staff disciplines (was on-hold during pandemic staff redeployment);
- Continuing to facilitate and support academic student placements and working to establish increased collaboration with local academic institutions (2022: total of 41 student placements; 2023: accepted 18 student placements in the first quarter);
- Updating staff privacy education training modules (leading activity in collaboration with Privacy Committee), and continuing to act as a consultant for staff and clients related to questions of privacy;

- Acting as a consultant for clinical programs for policy and procedure planning and development; and developing and updating policies and procedures related to privacy and professional practice; and
- Co-leading Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Committee and associated CQI initiatives.

Oral Health and Vision Screening

The Health Unit Dental Clinic improves access to dental services by providing oral health care, including preventive services, treatment, and follow-up to: eligible children 0-17 years of age who meet the criteria for the Healthy Smiles Ontario program; adults in receipt of Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Indigenous individuals with Non-Insured Health Benefits, or meet the Health Unit financial eligibility criteria; and seniors who meet the eligibility requirements of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

Oral health is an important part of the health care system since poor oral health is linked to serious health conditions such as respiratory infections, heart disease and stroke, diabetes, poor nutrition, osteoporosis, and rheumatoid arthritis. Furthermore, the impacts of poor oral health extend beyond medical concerns and can affect learning potential, employability, work attendance and performance, self-esteem, and social relationships.

Healthy Smiles Ontario

In 2022, 2,070 children had an oral health screening in a school in our district. Of those screened, 217 were referred to a dentist who had non-urgent areas of decay, and/or might qualify for preventive services at the Health Unit, 828 children were seen by a dentist at our Health Unit dental clinic, and 315 received preventative services with a registered dental hygienist.

Adult Clinic

The demand for service for the low-income adult dental program far exceeds the Health Unit's capacity, which created a wait list that grew to wait times of over two years. As a result, beginning in January 2023, the Oral Health program made the difficult decision to move to an urgent care model. Moving forward, in order to be eligible for the Health Unit's low-income dental care program, clients must have:

- Severe dental pain that cannot be managed with over-the-counter pain medication;
- Oral/facial trauma;
- Facial swelling;
- Dental pain that worsens at night, or when lying down; and
- Meet the after-tax income based on household size.

In 2022, 502 adults were treated by a dentist at the Health Unit dental clinic, and 216 received preventative services with a registered dental hygienist.

Seniors Clinic

The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) aims to address the dental needs of seniors 65+ who meet low-income eligibility criteria. Through this program, eligible seniors receive dental care services at the Health Unit senior's clinic, or through one of the participating dental care providers in the community. In 2022, 476 seniors were seen by the Health Unit dentist, 546 seniors received services through one of the Health Unit's partnering dental providers, and 320 seniors received preventative

services from one of the Health Unit's registered dental hygienists. In addition, in 2022, 135 seniors were approved to receive dentures through the OSDCP.

Vision Program

Visual health is an important part of a child's overall health, contributing to a child's coordination, independence, play, and learning. The Ontario Association of Optometrists recommends that all children receive their first eye exam at six (6) months old, again at three (3) years old, and every year after that (covered by OHIP). Public health units are mandated to provide vision screening to all senior kindergarten (SK) children in the school setting each year. While this school screening does not replace the need for a full exam by an eye doctor, they can help to detect risk factors for certain vision disorders. In 2022, 362 SK students in the Health Unit district had a vision screen, and 102 were referred to an optometrist for follow up.

Sexual Health/Clinical Information

Sexual Health Services

Objective

The Sexual Health program uses local data to inform public health programming to prevent and manage sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/blood-borne infections (BBIs), within priority populations, including at-risk youth and adults. The Sexual Health program includes the provision of clinical services (in-house/outreach/schools/rural areas) such as testing and treatment for STI/BBIs, contraception counselling, pregnancy testing and options counselling, and 2sLGBTQ+ inclusive supports to priority populations, case and contact management for reportable STI/BBIs and provision of harm reduction services that further support efforts to decrease exposure and infection of STI/BBIs.

Local Priorities

- Increase access to Sexual Health clinical services (in-house, rural, and outreach) for at-risk youth/adults in the Health Unit district to prevent and manage STI/BBIs
- Increase awareness and adoption of healthy behaviors regarding healthy sexuality and safer sexual practices to decrease STI/BBIs, unintended pregnancies
- Deliver services that support increased overall mental health and well-being in alignment with the Health Unit mental health strategy

Sexual Health Update

The Health Unit continues to respond to an increase in new cases of syphilis within the Health Unit district, with a high proportion of cases reported among men who have sex with men. However, there has been an increase in the female population and men who only report sex with women. The internal Syphilis Urgent Response Group continues to evaluate the situation and implement strategies from a health promotion and case and contact management lens. The group also continues to communicate and collaborate with local healthcare providers to increase awareness of the rise of syphilis in the region amongst the target population and to promote testing through social media ads and posters to social services and healthcare providers. The group recently expanded communications to healthcare providers to highlight the risk for congenital syphilis and to encourage enhanced screening in pregnancy. Several requests were received over the last year from other health units to share information about the Health Unit's urgent response to syphilis and presented our response strategy to the Ministry of Health on January 17, 2023. In February 2023, public health nurses plan to return to local and rural school

settings for sexual health promotion and clinical services and resume community-based activities that were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Harm Reduction/Needle Syringe Program (NSP)

Objective

Using a priority population approach to increase access to the Needle Syringe Program (NSP) and naloxone for individuals who use drugs/substances through increased community collaboration among stakeholders, particularly satellite NSP sites providing Human Resources services and supplies, safer use information and service referrals for individuals who use drugs/substances. These services will further support efforts to decrease drug use-related transmission of hepatitis C virus and HIV and reduce overdose deaths and other drug harms.

Local Priorities

- Increase satellite NSP sites in various locations, including rural Parry Sound
- Human resource knowledge exchange
- Increased access by locations, outreach, and/or vending machines

Human Resources/Clinical Information/NSP Update

Goals continue to be met to increase access to NSP and naloxone for individuals who use drugs/substances through community collaboration. More recently, Sexual Health has been working towards supporting the Parry Sound Friendship Centre to become a satellite NSP site and discussing with Crisis Centre staff possible NSP services at the Northern Pines transitional housing program. Sexual Health has secured the support of a Knowledge Broker (KB) through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Evidence Exchange Network (EENet) until April 2024 to transform the Northern Points Needle Syringe Program Committee into a Community of Practice (CoP). The KB support includes the development of a Knowledge Mobilization Plan for a tangible product or professional development event selected by the CoP. Co-leads for this initiative include a public health nurse (Sexual Health and Harm Reduction), a community health promotor (Healthy Living), and an individual with lived experience.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

COVID-19 and Influenza

Throughout the fall months, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) continued to support COVID-19 efforts offering both community and in-house clinics and walk-in appointments. Clinics fielded up to 17 different COVID-19 vaccines, with less frequently used vaccines such as Jansan, Novavax clinics being offered at in-house clinics. In addition to COVID-19 vaccine, VPD coupled all clinics with the annual Influenza Campaign to ensure that anyone who wanted either vaccine could be accommodated. This included offering COVID-19 vaccine at flu clinics and flu vaccine at COVID-19 clinics. Between October 27, 2022, and December 21, 2022, the Health Unit provided 5,266 doses of flu vaccine.

In-House Flu Clinics – 1,813 doses

- 19 fully booked in-house clinics in North Bay = 1,254 doses
- Seven (7) fully booked in-house clinics in Parry Sound = 462 doses
- Hosted one dedicated children's flu clinic on November 18, 2022 (PD day) = 55

- Regular in-house clinic appointments (since Dec 7 when dedicated in-house flu clinics ended) = 42

Community Flu Clinics - Total: 1,643

- Sundridge – November 9, 2022 - administered 359
- Magnetawan – November 11, 2022 - administered 124
- North Bay – November 12, 2022 - administered 625
- Mattawa – November 16, 2022 - administered 277
- Parry Sound – November 19, 2022 - administered 258

Flu Vaccine at COVID-19 Clinics – Total: 1,810 doses

- Actively inquire at COVID-19 clinics if the public would like the Flu Co-Administration
- Uptake continues to be positive

Grade 7 Hepatitis B (HB), and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Program and Catch-up Program

In October and November, VPD began the first round of Hepatitis B (HB), and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine series which is a recommended vaccine for all grade 7 students in the district. While the program annually targets grade 7 students, due to COVID-19 restrictions and school closures over the past few years, VPD was unable to attend schools to offer these vaccines. The Fall marked the beginning of a **“catch-up”** process whereby these vaccines were offered to both grades 7 and 8 students to ensure that all students have access to these vaccines which are a known prevention for head and neck cancers.

At the same time, grade 7 and 8 students were offered Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW-135 (Men-C-ACYW-135) which is a required vaccine under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)*. In all, VPD visited all 44 schools with grade 7 and 8 students across the district. Round two is scheduled to take place in April and May of 2023.

Secondary School Catch-up Program

In December, VPD assessed the vaccine records of all secondary school students in the district to determine which students were due for ISPA required vaccines and which students were eligible for **“catch-up”** of recommended HB and HPV vaccines which may have been missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 3,680 records were assessed and notification letters were mailed to parents / guardians to advise them of their child’s vaccine status and dates for in-school vaccine clinics. Throughout January, VPD has scheduled clinics in all 14 Secondary Schools across the district.

Ongoing planning is taking place to continue to provide **“catch-up”** clinics and opportunities for students to receive these required and recommended vaccines throughout the school year and into the summer months with dedicated in-house clinics targeting students and community HUB clinics across the district. The goal remains to bring vaccine coverage rates back to pre-COVID-19 rates as soon as possible to prevent outbreaks and promote healthy schools.

Community Services

Environmental Health

The Environmental Health (EH) program aims to contribute to the wellness of the Health Unit district population via health prevention and promotion measures as outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards. The EH team practices progressive enforcement of Acts, regulations, guidelines, protocols, and best practices. Focus is on bringing the operators of various facilities to compliance under the public health mandate by providing ongoing education, warnings as warranted, and laying charges against facilities, when required.

The Environmental Health team will be undergoing significant changes in 2023 in order to modernize and streamline the provision of services in the district. Beginning in 2022, and continuing into 2023, the EH team has embarked on cross-training to build capacity and efficiency to enable public health inspectors (PHIs) to support and deal with issues across all areas of the program. The EH team program administrative assistants (PAAs) have been supporting this change by developing new, or adjusting current resources in order to streamline program delivery.

Environment Health will be engaged in the following program activities in 2023:

- PHIs will conduct risk assessments of 969 food establishments to assign risk levels that determine the annual number of inspections based on the Food Premise Protocol within the Ontario Public Health Standards (Standards). Premises assigned high-risk levels are subject to three inspections per year. EH inspects each moderate-risk level establishment twice a year, and low-risk levels are subject to one annual inspection. EH conducts subsequent inspections based on need, such as investigations to substantiate consumer complaints. EH plans to hold 14 Safe Food Handler Training Certification courses in 2023 to enhance food handler operators' knowledge and reduce the occurrence of food-borne diseases. PHIs provide short sessions of food handling awareness upon request.
- PHIs will monitor 57 municipal and over 500 small drinking water systems and remain available 24 hours per day, seven (7) days per week, to respond to adverse water quality incident reports. EH will complete inspections of 17 year-round Class A and B public swimming pools and three (3) year-round spas throughout Winter and Spring. As seasonal facilities open in the summer months, the number of pools and spas to be inspected will increase. Each pool and spa requires, at a minimum, one inspection every three months, as it remains in use.
- PHIs will inspect 200 personal services settings, such as hair salons and tattoo parlours. EH will also conduct inspections of 72 licenced child care centers in 2023. In addition, PHIs will investigate any infection prevention and control complaints relating to these facilities.
- The EH program investigates more than 400 animal bite incidents to prevent and control rabies virus transmission in the Health Unit's service area. EH continues to meet with the Department of National Defense, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Parks and Conservation (MECP), and the City of North Bay, with respect to polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) monitoring from Canadian Forces Base (CFB) North Bay.
- 121 tobacco retailers will be inspected utilizing test shoppers to verify vendors' compliance with the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*. Tobacco enforcement officers check compliance at schools, workplaces, and many other locations throughout the Health Unit district.

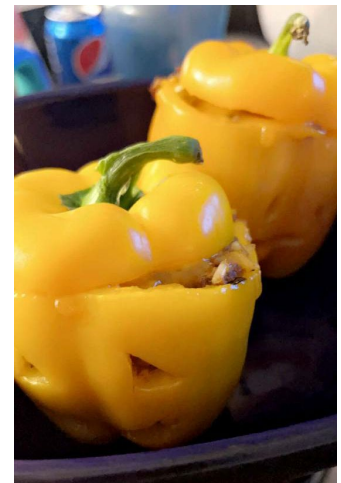
Healthy Families

The Healthy Babies Health Children (HBHC) program has been named as a formal partner of the SmartStart Hub. SmartStart Hubs were developed as a result of the 2021 Ontario Government announcement of new investments to support children and youth with special needs to live happier and healthier lives and have the following objectives:

- Clear entry point to services and early intervention
- Strengths-based and child and family centered approach
- Streamlined assessments and services
- Family-based supports

Children’s Treatment Centres (CTCs) are accountable for the delivery of SmartStart Hubs functions. As a formal partner, the Health Unit is fulfilling its roles and responsibilities as outlined in the [Policy and Practice Guidelines](#). This on-going community partnership will support a clear entry point for families accessing services for their children in the North Bay and Parry Sound districts.

Meal kits were provided to HBHC families for the months of October, November, and December. Meal kits included all the ingredients to make a healthy meal for families. The goal of the meal kit was to increase skills and confidence in the kitchen and engage with families. Recipes included stuffed peppers, broccoli soup, and a roast chicken dinner. Sixty-eight meal kits were delivered to families across the district. One mom said *“We adored every meal and craft kit we have ever received from our healthy babies (HBHC) worker. We are a very hands-on family so it was very fun to be able to try out new meal ideas and have my children join in with the cooking. They were always excited to open up the bags and see what we have received. It’s definitely helped them with trying new things as they are hesitant with new foods/textures. We always look forward to our kits and it makes for positive mealtimes and meal preps, especially if there was an activity involved!”*



Families in the Kitchen is a program that services high risk parents of young children aged 0-12 months, in the North Bay area who face challenging social and financial issues. The goal of the program is to increase food skills and knowledge, increase engagement with community services, and improve social connectedness and support. Families in the Kitchen was put on hold at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and restarted in November 2022. In total, seven sessions were run with 10 families engaged in the program.

Below is a snapshot of direct service metrics for the final quarter of 2022:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Births to resident families | 134 |
| Postpartum follow-ups | 113 |
| Families With Risk Home Visits | 210 |
| Active Families (In Program) | 55 |
| Families on Waitlist | 39 |
| Breastfeeding Clinic encounters | 20 |
| Family Health Information Line Calls | 430 |

Healthy Living

Healthy Living is a health promotion-focused program that works to address the Standard's requirements related to Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Bing, Healthy Environments, and Substance Use and Injury Prevention, along with the Foundational Standard of Health Equity.

Program staff include community health promoters, public health dietitians, a program administrative assistant, and senior positions of an Indigenous engagement coordinator and a health promotion specialist.

Below are key updates of work in the Health Unit led by the Healthy Living program.

Substance Use Retail Map

The Healthy Living team has developed the Substance Use Retail Map in partnership with Planning and Evaluation and Healthy Schools. The purpose of this interactive map is to illustrate substance retail outlets within the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts, including tobacco vendors, e-cigarette vendors, cannabis retail outlets and off-premises alcohol retail outlets. The tool will highlight retail outlet density across the districts and illustrate retail outlet proximity to settings such as schools and at-risk neighbourhoods and communities as defined by the Ontario Marginalization Index.

The Substance Use Retail Map will ensure ongoing surveillance of substance retail outlets, and data can be shared with community partners (e.g., municipalities, schools) to raise awareness and inform practices related to retail outlet density, clustering and proximity to priority populations. The interactive map will be instrumental in informing Health Unit advocacy efforts and policy recommendations at the local and provincial level related to legislative changes increasing the availability and accessibility of legal substances.

Organization-Wide Staff Professional Development

At the end of 2022, "*Biigiiweyan* (which translates in Anishinabemowin to "Coming Home") *Cultural Safety Program*", through Canadore College, was delivered to 15 staff and management. Biigiiweyan targets the training of health care professionals with a focus on Indigenous peoples and their health care journeys. The program uses Indigenous ways of knowing and relating as well as live-actor simulation to redefine interpersonal education and train health care professionals and students to offer culturally safe care. This was the first in-person Biigiiweyan learning opportunity since early 2020, with two more sessions planned for the spring of 2023. The sessions are open to all staff, management, Executive Team, and the Board of Health.

During treaties recognition week, November 6-12, 2022, a consultant who is a citizen of the Mississaugas of Alderville First Nation, provided an education session called "*We Are All Treaty People*" to 47 staff, using a hybrid delivery model. At the end of November, a similar session was offered to 20 members of the management team across the organization. The sessions focused on the treaty-making process and the legal responsibilities of government organizations, as well as Canadians, in upholding and honouring these promises regarding the lands on which we live and work on. This training complements the Biigiiweyan Cultural Safety Training. It was an important and valuable learning opportunity for participants to understand that they are treaty partners with Indigenous peoples.

In follow up to the [2021 internal survey](#) regarding staff knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of weight bias at the Health Unit, a virtual training session called "*How to Make Your Practice Fat Positive*" will be

offered on February 8, 2023. One of the four internal priorities identified in the survey responses was to improve training/education on the topic of reducing weight bias in public health practice. The trainer will support this priority in their training session by focusing on interactions staff may have with clients, partners, and even co-workers, from in-person conversations to interacting with the physical space to general messaging, and social media. This opportunity is open to all staff and Board of Health members. The content will be relevant to everyone, as we all work with people with bodies, and will include examples for clinical, community, and corporate services.

Healthy Schools

The Healthy Schools team is a multidisciplinary team with a strong focus on the goal to achieve optimal health of school-age children and youth through partnership and collaboration with school boards and schools. Developing innovative and cutting-edge initiatives informed by localized data and need, consultations with boards and schools and evaluations, the Healthy Schools team ensure it is using a comprehensive health promotion approach to improve the health of school-aged children and youth.

Meeting youth where they are at and engaging them in ways that resonate, the Healthy Schools team are active leaders in IMPACT social media accounts. IMPACT is the youth branded Health Unit social media [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#) accounts.

The Healthy Schools team continues to support schools, childcares, and camps as they return to pre-COVID-19 programming with the support of the Health Unit's School-Focused Nurse positions. These additional positions throughout COVID-19 allowed the Healthy Schools team to expand comprehensive support to childcare settings.

The Healthy Schools team is excited to share with an initiative that has been in the works for over a year. After extensive research, consultations, and a supported business case, the team will be looking to introduce community partners to an approach known as the Icelandic prevention model, or [Planet Youth](#).

The Icelandic prevention model is an evidence-based approach that has successfully reduced substance use and improved youth well-being in Iceland over the past 20 years. The approach, which is being adapted in communities around the world, brings the community together to address risk and protective factors in the environments that youth are growing up in. By addressing environmental factors, youth have better outcomes – reduced substance use, improved mental health, reduced violence, better sense of belonging, and more. You can learn more at <https://sway.office.com/ymdkfCtAeM8M4T9R?ref=Link>

The Health Unit is hosting an event for agencies in the community (such as municipal leaders, school boards, mental health agencies, service providers, youth clubs and sport organizations, etc.) to learn about this approach. Partners can choose to attend either on **February 23 in Parry Sound** or on **February 24 in North Bay**. The main speaker will be from the Planet Youth organization in Iceland. Sessions will also include highlights of local data and youth perspective.

Finance

During the past few months the Finance department has been working on the following reporting, third and fourth quarter reports to the Ministry of Health (including year-end forecasts), development, collation, and publication of the Board of Health Operation Plan and Financial Budget Proposal 2023, the

Ministry of Health Annual Report for 2021 (distributed in late November, due January 13), which included coordination of data collection, and reconciling to financial statements and annual reconciliation report, and revision and submission of the 2022 Annual Service Plan to agree with Board of Health budget revisions.

Finance continues to work on an upgrade to the financial reporting system to the cloud-based Dynamics 365.

The quantity of data and timelines for Ministry reporting, along with the increased number of transactions generated due to COVID-19 and recovery activities, continues to create workload challenges.

Human Resources

Compensation

Following the ratification of the OPSEU and ONA Collective Agreements and Management/Non-Union Employment Policy in the Fall, rate increases, retroactive payments, and health-care spending accounts are complete. Unused health-care spending account funds will be paid out to applicable employees in February.

Year-end activities are currently underway such as roll-over of attendance credits, source deduction reconciliations, and T4/T2200 preparation. Auditors will conduct their review of 2022 payroll starting in March.

Eligibility requirements to participate in the OMERS pension plan changed January 1, 2023, allowing temporary and casual employees to join the plan regardless of previous service.

Testing continues to update the integrated Finance/Human Resources information system to a cloud-based system. Training sessions for employees and managers will be provided before going live with the new system.

Employee & Labour Relations

The ONA collective agreement for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2025, was ratified by ONA on October 3, 2022, and approved by the Board of Health on September 28, 2022. Changes to the Management/Non-Union Employment Policy for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2025, was approved by the Board of Health on September 28, 2022. As previously reported, the OPSEU collective agreement was ratified on July 22, 2022.

The Health Unit continues to support employees working from home/remotely to comply with the organization's COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan. To develop a plan moving forward (once internal safety measures are lifted), Human Resources is undertaking an environmental scan of other health unit hybrid workplace models, a review of the literature, and collecting internal feedback on implementing a Hybrid Workplace Model within our organization. A Hybrid Workplace Model is defined as a *flexible workplace arrangement that includes both in-office and remote work* (The Conference Board of Canada, 2022).

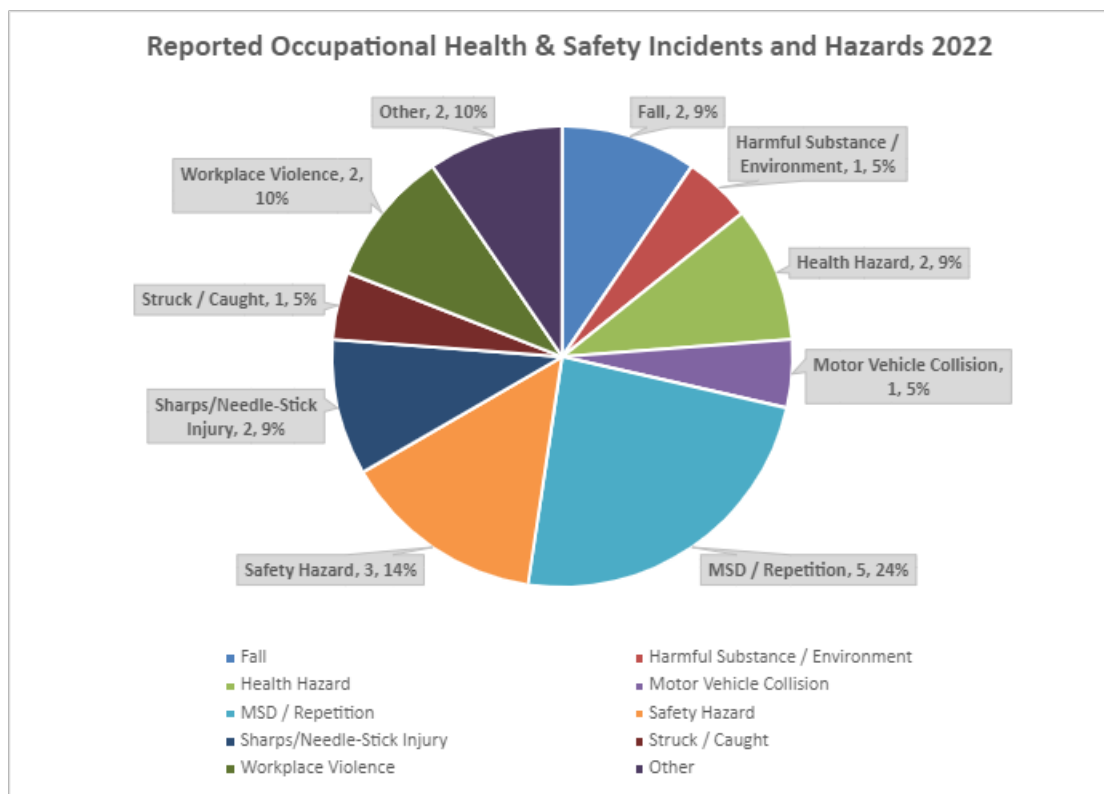
Occupational Health & Safety

The Occupational Health and Safety (OP-POL-10) operational policy is being updated within the new policy framework. Subsequently, the existing occupational health and safety work instructions will be transferred to the new procedure format over the coming year.

Programs and services completed an update to the workplace-specific hazard analysis. A sub-group of the Joint Health and Safety Committee will review the analysis for consistency and to make recommendations for improvement or implementation of additional controls.

Following the recruitment of an Occupational Health and Safety Advisor (casual), the Internal Mental Health Working Group has reconvened. The group is in the process of developing a program logic model to outline goals and objectives to achieve its mission of *fostering positive mental health and wellness of the Health Unit workforce through mental health promotion and policies that support a psychologically healthy and safe workplace*. The group is using best-practice documents and staff input from the Internal Mental Health Survey to inform interventions moving forward. Throughout 2023, the group will be raising awareness internally of the 13 psychosocial factors outlined in the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* and continue to promote staff supports such as our Employee and Family Assistance Program.

Staff reported a total of 21 occupational health and safety incidents and hazards in 2022. Below is a summary:



The five musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) reports relate to workstation set-up at the office (not at home). In 2022, a total of 23 ergonomic interventions were completed – 8 during new employee orientation and 15 based on other staff ergonomic self-assessments. Additionally, two health hazards required noise testing that yielded normal levels; the two Sharps/Needle-stick injuries required medical surveillance; and the two workplace violence incidents required engagement with police.

Professional Development

The Health Unit has been approved as a registered training partner with the Canadian Red Cross. Four staff members were certified as Basic Life Support/CPR instructors to deliver training internally. This results in significant cost savings, scheduling flexibility, and better alignment with our emergency response processes going forward.

Internal professional development sessions recently coordinated by Human Resources since the last report include:

| Professional Development Session | Number of Participants |
|--|------------------------|
| Basic Life Support/CPR | 57 |
| De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations | 10 |
| Crisis Intervention | 27 |

Staffing

Human Resources continues to schedule casual nurses, COVax Assistants and COVID-19 Clinic Assistants to work at COVID-19 immunization clinics across our district.

The following temporary positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created as a result of work related to COVID-19, leaves of absences, and to assist with workload:

- Public Health Nurse - Occupational Health & Safety, Human Resources (1.00 FTE) from September 28, 2022, to April 28, 2023
- Bilingual Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE) from October 3, 2022, to March 22, 2024
- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Living (0.40 FTE) from October 18, 2022, until December 28, 2022
- Data Quality Analyst (1.00 FTE), – COVID-19 Immunization Strategy from November 7, 2022, until June 30, 2023
- Community Health Promoter, Healthy Schools (1.00 FTE) from October 19, 2022, to December 29, 2023
- Public Health Inspector, Environmental Health (1.00 FTE) from December 21, 2022, to August 11, 2023
- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Schools (0.20 FTE) from December 29, 2022, until February 21, 2023
- Registered Dental Hygienist, Oral Health and Vision Screening (0.70 FTE) from January 3, 2023, until May 3, 2024
- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Schools (up to 0.60 FTE) from January 3, 2023, until March 31, 2023
- Public Health Nurse, Healthy Families (0.80 FTE) effective date to be determined

The following permanent positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created because of a resignation, internal transfers, restructure in a program and new permanent funding:

- Certified Dental Assistant Level II (0.90 FTE), Oral Health and Vision Screening effective December 14, 2022
- Public Health Nurse, Healthy Families (0.80 FTE) effective December 15, 2022
- Public Health Nurse, Healthy Families with coverage in Sexual Health (0.80 FTE) effective March 1, 2023
- Public Health Nurse, Sexual Health and Clinical Information (0.80 FTE) effective April 1, 2023
- Registered Dental Hygienist, Oral Health and Vision Screening (0.70 FTE) effective date to be determined
- Community Health Promoter, Healthy Living (1.00 FTE) effective date to be determined
- Health Promotion Specialist, Healthy Living (1.00 FTE) effective date to be determined

The recruitment of the following permanent and temporary positions is currently under way:

- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Schools (0.72 FTE)
- Public Health Nurses, Communicable Disease Control (2.00 FTE)
- Public Health Nurses, Healthy Families (1.60 FTE)
- Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE)
- Public Health Nurse, School Health Nurse, Healthy Schools (1.00 FTE)
- Public Health Nurse, Healthy Families with coverage in Sexual Health (1.00 FTE)
- Bilingual Community Health Promoter, Healthy Schools (1.00 FTE)
- Community Health Promoter, Healthy Schools (1.00 FTE)
- Certified Dental Assistant - Level II, Oral Health and Vision Screening (0.80 FTE)
- Management Administrative Assistant, Quality Assurance (1.00 FTE)

There has been a net increase of a 0.70 FTE permanent position of Registered Dental Hygienist, Oral Health and Vision Screening. This is a new position created with 100% funding related to the Ontario Seniors' Dental Care Program (OSDCP).

Approved by

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North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit