

**Report to  
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa  
8 February 2021 / 8 février 2021**

**Submitted on February 5, 2021  
Soumis le 5 février 2021**

**Submitted by  
Soumis par:**

**Dr. / D<sup>re</sup> Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health / Médecin chef en santé publique**

**Contact Person**

**Personne ressource:**

**Svetlana Valkova, Manager, Performance & Corporate Services / Gestionnaire,  
Rendement et services opérationnels  
613-580-2424, x. 12881, Svetlana.Valkova@Ottawa.ca**

**Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE      File Number: ACS2021-OPH-PCS-0001**

**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF  
ONTARIO ON 2021 BUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

**OBJET: SOUMISSION DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA AU GOUVERNEMENT  
DE L'ONTARIO SUR LES CONSULTATIONS PRÉALABLES AU  
BUDGET DE 2021**

#### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit approve the Medical Officer of Health's submission to the Government of Ontario in response to the 2021 budget consultations, as outlined in Document 1.**

#### **RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa approuve la soumission de la médecin-chef en santé publique au gouvernement**

**de l'Ontario en réponse aux consultations préalables au budget de 2021, comme le précise le document 1.**

## **BACKGROUND**

On January 15, 2021, the Government of Ontario launched a public consultation process to solicit submissions in anticipation of the 2021 Budget, with a submission deadline of February 12, 2021. The government's stated objective is "to hear ideas on how the government can continue to support people and employers during COVID-19, while continuing to position Ontario for a strong economic recovery".

Through this report, the Board of Health is being asked to approve Ottawa Public Health's (OPH) submission to the Government of Ontario in response to this opportunity to provide input on the 2021 Ontario Budget.

## **DISCUSSION**

As noted in OPH's report titled [COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Looking Ahead and Building Back Better](#), a healthy population and a healthy economy go hand in hand. In order to have a healthy economy, businesses need people. At the same time, 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.

The above-referenced report also describes the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on residents' mental health and on chronic disease and injury prevention as well as the unprecedented pressures the health unit has faced in responding to the pandemic.

In August 2020, the Government of Ontario provided dedicated funding for local health units to hire additional school health nurses to help schools manage potential COVID-19 cases. As part of this funding announcement, OPH was allocated 45 nursing positions for the 2020-2021 school year, adding to the health unit's previous complement of 25 school health nurses. In addition to providing Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) guidance and support for testing and contact tracing, these nurses have developed relationships with the principals and school communities they serve, answering a myriad of questions from principals, teachers, staff and parents.

Given that OPH's School Health Team supports more than 290 schools and in light of the impact COVID-19 has had on the mental health of our school communities – students, parents and education workers – OPH is indicating that these additional positions will continue to be needed into the future and therefore should be retained and redirected to address mental health and substance use in schools, as discussed in

Document 1 (attached). While the COVID-19 immunization program rolls out, and with no COVID-19 vaccines currently approved for those under the age of 16, there is a continued need for IPAC support in schools into the 2021-2022 school year. The school nurses are cross-trained in communicable disease control and thus also enable surge capacity to respond to increases in COVID-19 or other infectious diseases.

Also as noted in the [COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Looking Ahead and Building Back Better](#) report, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention is an essential function of public health, however this work has been greatly reduced during the pandemic due to staff redeployment. At the same time that preventive work to address risk factors and screening of chronic diseases has decreased,<sup>1</sup> behaviours that contribute to the development of chronic diseases have worsened<sup>2</sup>. As a result, it is anticipated that as the pandemic subsides, there will be an urgent need to focus on the public health work of preventing chronic illness.

During the pandemic, people's coping strategies are being challenged in significant ways and that a large proportion of the population is unaware of or unable to access mental health supports when needed. Further, survey data tells us that Ottawa residents are reporting worsened mental health and emotional well-being, weaker community connectedness, and increases in alcohol consumption.

Mental health and substance use and chronic diseases make up the largest burdens on the health of the population, so decreasing this burden will improve the community's economic recovery and help with health care system capacity.

Demonstrating the value of public health interventions in these areas, studies have shown that in addition to reducing quality and length of life, chronic diseases are also expensive to treat, with direct health care costs estimated at \$10.5 billion per year in Ontario. For example, every dollar invested in tobacco prevention saves \$20 in future health care costs and every dollar invested in mental health and addictions saves \$30 in lost productivity and social costs. Notably, in 2011 Ontario spent \$134 million in direct alcohol-related healthcare costs, with alcohol contributing to 50% of the hospitalizations for substance misuse disorders.

While OPH works to ramp up essential public health services, the health unit continues to face unprecedented budget pressures and to incur extraordinary costs associated with the pandemic response. As such, OPH is looking for the Government of Ontario to provide continued budget support for extraordinary COVID-19 pressures while enabling OPH to engage in addressing the backlog in the delivery of public health programming

related to Mental Health and Substance Use, and Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, as outlined in Document 1 (attached).

### **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 the Board of Health approving this report's recommendation.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

### **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 – Ottawa Public Health Submission - 2021 Budget Consultations

### **DISPOSITION**

Following Board approval, the content of Document 1 will be submitted to the Province in the context of the 2021 Budget Consultations.

Document 1

### **Ottawa Public Health Submission – 2021 Budget Consultations**

In anticipation of the 2021 Budget to be tabled this spring by Ontario's Minister of Finance, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) is pleased to provide recommendations on effective use of resources for a thriving population and economy to the Government of Ontario.

Specifically, to ensure the people of Ottawa and businesses are supported to recover from the pandemic and that public health programs and services are adapted to meet growing demands into the future, OPH is asking the Government of Ontario:

- 1. To address the mental health needs of children, youth and families through sustaining the work of the additional school health nurses hired in the context of the *Reopening Ontario* legislation by extending funding for these positions beyond June 2021 as part of the health unit's base budget, and**
- 2. To provide continued budget support for extraordinary COVID-19 pressures, such that OPH can address the biggest threat to economic recovery and also mitigate the growing backlog of harms related to Mental Health and Substance Use, and Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, by standing up more essential public health services to prevent further illness.**

#### **BACKGROUND:**

A healthy population and a healthy economy go hand in hand. Studies have demonstrated the value of preventing illness and injury, core functions of public health, compared to the cost of treatment.

Aside from the ongoing pandemic response, non-COVID burdens of illness are concerning to OPH, especially two key areas that have been made worse by the pandemic – Mental Health and Substance Use, and Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention. The pandemic has challenged individuals' coping strategies in significant ways, created adverse events in childhood and unemployment that are increasing mental health burdens, and brought to light the fact that a large proportion of the population is unaware of, or unable to, access mental health supports when needed. Further, there has been a decline in preventive work and screening to mitigate chronic diseases during the pandemic, while behaviours that contribute to the development of chronic diseases have worsened. As the pandemic continues to require a heightened response and the vast majority of resources have been reallocated to the COVID-19

effort, OPH recognizes the need to increase services to address the backlog in demand for public health services and the main underlying challenges to the health of the population.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1. Support for child, youth and family mental health through school health nurses**

**OPH thanks the Government of Ontario for the funding provided to date to hire 45 additional school health nurses and requests a continued investment in these positions beyond June 2021 and as part of the base budget.** The relationships and skills developed between these Public Health Nurses and the school community are critical to the ongoing success of Ottawa's children and youth. As such, this ongoing investment will allow OPH to help children and youth bounce back from the pandemic while also enabling some surge capacity to adapt to ongoing infectious disease outbreaks into the future, as the school nurses are cross-trained in communicable disease control.

Despite vaccination programs beginning to roll out, there will continue to be a need for Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) support in schools into the 2021-2022 school year. The additional 45 school nurses in Ottawa have provided principals and teachers the confidence to respond to cases and high-risk contacts in the schools, as well as supported parents and the larger school community in learning and practicing infection precautions. School nurses are also increasing parent engagement within their school communities and offering support and information sessions directly to parents/guardians through various channels such as parent councils. This contributes to building the confidence in the safety of schools and has allowed schools to remain open to meet the educational needs of learners, which in turn supports the re-opening of our economy.

Further, OPH's pre-pandemic School Health Program recognized the importance of schools in supporting child development and improving the health and educational outcomes of children and youth, their families and the community. Public health connects with schools and community partners to develop and deliver early years programming and provide resources to enhance and build coping strategies and resilience, reduce stigma and intervene early in addressing mental health and substance use needs. School nurses increase awareness and the capacity of our students in making healthy choices when it comes to mental health, sexual health, nutrition and physical activity, and the increasing concerns around substance use and youth vaping. Accordingly, in addition to providing IPAC guidance and supporting

schools in preventing COVID-19 transmission, the COVID-19 school nurses will have a continued significant positive impact on children, youth, schools, teachers and parents, supporting physical and mental health and preventing substance use. Pre-pandemic ratios of nurses to schools did not enable the level of direct support that school nurses have been able to provide during the pandemic and feedback from schools is that the increased accessibility to school nurses' support is worth sustaining.

Some examples of supports the COVID-19 school nurses have been and would be able to provide into the future with ongoing investment include: sharing and promoting mental health programs and resources for various ages and stages such as Mindmaster, Healthy Transitions, and COVID-19 Mental Health and Substance Use lesson plans; working with the schools to find opportunities to engage youth, allowing them to improve their understanding of IPAC measures and addressing their more immediate struggles as a result of COVID-19, such as lack of social connection and accessing mental health supports; continuing to help link youth to sexual health resources and clinics; hosting virtual webinars with parent councils and school parent communities to support COVID-19, mental health and other topics of need, provided in multiple languages; and working with community partners to address needs of communities at higher risk to ensure the greatest impact of interventions to keep populations well.

## **2. Continued budget support for extraordinary COVID-19 pressures while addressing a backlog in critical public health programming**

OPH is grateful to the Ontario Ministry of Health for advancing \$12M of funding for COVID-19 related expenses in 2020 and for their commitment to support public health units to do the work needed to keep COVID-19 levels under control in 2021. The health unit **asks that the Government of Ontario continue to fund the extraordinary costs related to COVID-19 response and recovery, while maintaining base funding** to scale up the delivery of critical public health services, particularly in key service areas of Mental Health and Substance Use, and Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention.

Though Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention are core functions of public health, this work was greatly reduced during the pandemic due to the vast majority of employees being redeployed to COVID-19 response activities. As the pandemic continues, there is an urgent need to refocus on these critical public health programs and services because prevention of illness is more desirable and more cost effective than treatment. Not only do chronic diseases reduce quality and length of life, they are also expensive to treat, with direct health care costs estimated at \$10.5 billion per year in Ontario. Public health

initiatives directly tackle the risk factors for chronic disease, for a good return on investment. For example, every dollar invested in tobacco prevention saves \$20 in future health care costs and in 2011, Ontario spent \$134 million in direct alcohol-related healthcare costs, with alcohol contributing to 50% of the hospitalizations for substance misuse disorders<sup>3</sup>. As such, prevention is critical for protecting Ontario's hospital and health care capacity.

The pandemic response has demonstrated OPH's ability to work with partners to quickly and effectively implement measures to improve population health. With respect to Mental Health and Substance Use, survey data tells us that Ottawa residents are reporting worsened mental health and emotional well-being, weaker community connectedness, and increases in alcohol consumption. Further, OPH's partners working in substance use treatment and recovery have witnessed an increase of substance use in their clients during the pandemic.

Public health is uniquely tasked with prevention of chronic disease and injury and works with health system partners to increase prevention activities by others, such as primary care providers, as well as to coordinate responses to promote mental health and address substance-use for greater impact.

### **Conclusion:**

OPH is continuing to face unprecedented budget pressures and incurring extraordinary costs associated with the pandemic response and will be submitting an additional request to cover these expenses as part of the 4th Quarter Standards Activity Report, which is due to the Ministry of Health by mid-February. Vaccination programs run by local public health units will eventually help reduce the need for the COVID-19 response. In the meantime, COVID-19 prevention and response activities must continue and addressing the backlog in chronic disease prevention efforts will be far more economical than trying to recover from the economic damage done by the transmission of infection, and paying for hospitalizations due to COVID-19 and the increased challenges related to mental health and substance use.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7359916/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/resources/Documents/covid-19/societal\\_impacts/OPH-Status-of-Mental-Health-in-Ottawa-During-the-COVID-19-Pandemic\\_June2020\\_EN\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/resources/Documents/covid-19/societal_impacts/OPH-Status-of-Mental-Health-in-Ottawa-During-the-COVID-19-Pandemic_June2020_EN_Final.pdf)

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/resources/Documents/state\\_of\\_alcohol\\_2016\\_en.pdf](https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/resources/Documents/state_of_alcohol_2016_en.pdf)