

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Ontario Public Health Emergencies Science Advisory Committee (OPHESAC)

September 1, 2022

1. Mandate and Scope

To enhance provincial capacity to respond to a spectrum of public health emergencies with the best available evidence OPHESAC will provide independent scientific advice to Public Health Ontario (PHO) and where appropriate through PHO to Ministry of Health (MOH) to inform the management of public health emergencies consistent with PHO's mission, vision, mandate, and values. For clarity, public health emergencies involve the activation of emergency response structures and the current or anticipated inability of local capacity to respond, requiring provincial coordination and capacity.¹ When not in a public health emergency, OPHESAC will continue to operate on a less frequent basis to provide advice on lessons learned during previous emergencies and to provide scientific advice to mitigate and prepare for threats that may become public health emergencies in future.

Topics, issues and questions for OPHESAC's advice may be identified by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH), MOH, PHO or OPHESAC membership. Issues identified by the OCMOH and PHO will be addressed. Additionally a process for topic selection will be developed to ensure topics deemed important by a majority of members will be addressed, subject to PHO approval based on scope and resources. Although the current focus of the OPHESAC work will be the COVID-19 pandemic, it is intended that the OPHESAC will provide scientific advice in response to a spectrum of public health emergencies. This may include providing interpretation and insight with respect to epidemiology and indicators of disease transmission and severity, as well as mathematical modelling.

Health equity is a core component of OPHESAC scientific advice, consistent with PHO's legislated objects. Populations which may be disproportionately affected by public health emergencies² will be considered and addressed in OPHESAC scientific advice.

Work plans will be designed to minimize duplication with core work of PHO and existing scientific advisory committees. Clinical therapeutics are outside the mandate of OPHESAC. Where appropriate,

1 The Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act defines an emergency as "a situation or an impending situation that constitutes a danger of major proportions that could result in serious harm to persons or substantial damage to property that is caused by the forces of nature, a disease or other health risk, an accident or an act whether intentional or otherwise".

2 These populations may be adversely affected due to inequities such as social determinants of health including Indigeneity, race, gender, income or immigration status; and/or may be more likely to be exposed to a public health threat, more likely to experience a serious impact because of exposure, less likely to access or benefit from public health measures or treatment and/or who may be negatively affected by response and recovery measures.

the OPHESAC may work with other relevant committees and other organizations who have intersecting mandates and responsibilities.

OPHESAC provides independent scientific advice through the use of best available data and evidence, and best practices. PHO is committed to transparency in all its work including with its scientific advisory committees, subject to the protocols required by PHO's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MOH. It is expected that OPHESAC's advice will also follow this same commitment to transparency.

2. Governance

OPHESAC is appointed by and acts in an advisory capacity to PHO through the PHO Executive Liaison designated by the President and CEO. PHO will solicit the input and advice of current OPHESAC members with respect to skillsets and identification of new members of the committee (see section 5.2 Members for information on the process).

3. Transparency and Conflicts of Interest

PHO is committed to the principles of transparency of data and information, scientific and technical advice, conflicts of interest, and activity of OPHESAC. OPHESAC information posted publicly may include, but is not limited to:

- terms of reference
- membership and associated biographies
- members' conflict of interest disclosures
- scientific reports and associated advice and recommendations

All members will complete written conflict of interest disclosures prior to beginning their term as a member of OPHESAC and before the first committee meeting. This form must be updated, as requested by PHO, and as members identify relevant conflicts of interest. Conflict of interest information may be made available on the PHO website and on request.

Scientific reports and recommendations will always be publicly released as produced by OPHESAC, subject to notification procedures outlined in section 10.

4. Membership

OPHESAC membership is voluntary. Members are not compensated for their contributions.

4.1 Leadership

The current external Co-Chair of the COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Committee will be invited to serve as the inaugural Chair of OPHESAC. When the term of the inaugural Chair ends, OPHESAC will have subsequent Chairs appointed by PHO in consultation with the nominating committee (including the outgoing Chair). PHO, working with the Chair, will identify a Vice Chair for the Committee. It is expected that the Chair and Vice Chair will have complementary scientific and/or practice backgrounds.

OPHESAC will also have a Scientific Director identified by the PHO Executive Liaison in consultation with the Chair. The Scientific Director is a member of the Secretariat and provides the day-to-day scientific leadership for OPHESAC.

The Chair and Vice Chair will be responsible for working with the PHO Executive Liaison, Scientific Director and committee members to develop the committee work plan. The work plan will be reviewed and re-aligned, as needed.

4.2 Members

OPHESAC membership is multidisciplinary in nature with expertise, experience and leadership in various domains required for the management of public health and related health system threats and emergencies, including and not limited to:

- epidemiology and surveillance, including modelling and data analytics
- various clinical specialties and scientific disciplines:
 - public health
 - emergency planning
 - immunology
 - infectious diseases
 - microbiology
 - environmental health
 - veterinary science
 - health economics
 - behavioural science
 - implementation science
- health equity and social justice
 - Indigenous health
 - anti-racism
 - cultural safety

A nominating committee formed of the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Liaison will identify new members through calls for interest, nominations from academic institutions and input from existing members. Final decision for membership based on the recommendations of the nominating committee will rest with PHO.

It is expected that many members will have expertise in multiple domains. The total membership of the committee will not exceed fifteen (including the Chair and Vice-Chair). During acute public health emergencies, the membership may expand on a time limited basis, with the approval of PHO, to include additional content expertise specific to the nature of the public health emergency.

To the extent possible, representation will be sought from diverse specialties, practice contexts (e.g., academia, clinical practice, community-based services) and geographies (e.g., urban,

northern/rural/remote). PHO aims to reflect diverse population groups in Ontario, to the extent possible, including Indigenous peoples.

Members are appointed to OPHESAC as individual experts. However, it is expected that members may consult with scientific colleagues to help arrive at the best advice, whilst maintaining confidentiality around the content of discussions undertaken by OPHESAC.

The Chair may, by invitation, include guests or observers on a standing, meeting or topic-specific basis. Such individuals will not be considered OPHESAC members. Guests will be able to participate in the dialogue but will not participate in voting or committee decision making. Guests may include, but are not limited to, PHO representatives consistent with their professional roles and OCMOH and MOH representatives.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

OPHESAC is responsible for providing credible, relevant, balanced, accurate scientific and technical advice within the scope of PHO's mandate, based on the best available evidence. A detailed description of responsibilities for roles is described in Appendix A.

6. Appointments and Reappointments

Details on the terms and conditions of appointments are provided in Appendix B.

7. Meeting Process and Quorum

The OPHESAC will meet at least twice a year and will meet more frequently during acute public health emergencies and to respond to urgent requests for scientific advice.

Two-thirds of members will constitute a quorum. The Chair will be counted towards quorum. Every effort will be made to ensure that members have documentation relevant to the agenda before the meeting.

OPHESAC will be governed by a consensus-seeking process. To the extent possible, published advice reflects the considered consensus of the members. During all meetings, the OPHESAC Chair will encourage discussion based on differing interpretations of research and scientific evidence as a legitimate and necessary part of the research and scientific processes and, where appropriate, ensure that these differences are made explicit and accurately represented. If a vote is required to resolve specific issues within a report or recommendation, OPHESAC will ensure any votes are focused on specific issues.

When consensus cannot be reasonably achieved, two-thirds majority of those in attendance will prevail, provided quorum is met. The Chair may vote, if needed, to achieve a two-thirds majority. Dissenting opinion will be summarized in the meeting minutes. If a recommendation or motion does not receive approval from two-thirds majority, the item will be referred back to the originator for further work. Should consensus be achieved, but quorum not met, the item will be referred to the next OPHESAC meeting or an electronic poll may be conducted to obtain a decision on time-sensitive recommendations.

If a member is not able to attend a meeting, they will inform the Secretariat in advance. Members may not appoint an alternate. If a member misses three consecutive meetings or a majority of meetings (more than half) held within a calendar year (whichever is greater), the attendance of that member will be reviewed by the Chair and PHO Executive Liaison. After such review and discussion with the member

as to their ability to fully participate in OPHESAC, the member may be asked to step down from OPHESAC. If a member is not able to attend called meetings for an extended period due to illness or other reason, that member will inform the Chair and through the nominating process a replacement will be selected.

Minutes, including attendance, will be recorded at all meetings and circulated to all members prior to the next meeting.

8. Working Groups

OPHESAC may establish time-limited and/or task-based working groups on the recommendation of the Chair and PHO Executive Liaison with approval of the PHO President and CEO.

9. Relationship with Private Sector Entities

OPHESAC may determine that a meeting with a private sector entity is required to inform its deliberations. Invitations to private sector entities will follow PHO's policy on Relationships with Private Sector Entities.

10. External Communication

All OPHESAC's scientific and technical advice will be posted to the PHO website in accordance with PHO processes and MOH notification requirements set out in PHO's MOU with the MOH³. All scientific and technical products will include a brief summary written for a general audience.

The Chair is the designated spokesperson for OPHESAC. Public commentary by the Chair or Scientific Director will be through consultation with the PHO Executive Liaison.

OPHESAC public and media communications (including social media) will be in alignment with PHO's Media Relations Policy and PHO's MOU with the MOH, including the special requirements during activation of provincial emergency response structures. The Chair and Scientific Director will inform the PHO Executive Liaison regarding any and all requests for public or media comments related to the work of the Committee. The PHO Executive Liaison will notify MOH partners and inform the Chair/Scientific Director when such notifications have been completed.

Committee members may speak publicly as independent scientists and practitioners but may not speak publicly on behalf of OPHESAC, unless specifically asked to do so by the Chair and PHO Executive Liaison.

11. Review of Terms of Reference

These terms of reference will be reviewed after the first year and then every two years by the Committee (sooner, if required). Any proposed revisions will be approved by PHO before being finalized and incorporated.

³ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Memorandum of understanding between Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and Chair of Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2015 [cited 2022 Aug 30]. Available from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/M/2015/memorandum-understanding-mohltc-oahpp.pdf?sc_lang=en

12. Evaluation

PHO may initiate an evaluation of the OPHESAC after the first year and every two years or sooner thereafter. The scope of reviews or evaluations may include but not be limited to the mandate, activities, functions, effectiveness, outcomes and ongoing relevance of OPHESAC. Recommendations for improvement will be considered on an ongoing basis. PHO retains the authority to determine the continued or future state of OPHESAC and may consult with others (e.g. MOH, OCMOH, OPHESAC members).

13. PHO Support

Secretariat support for OPHESAC and any of its working groups is provided by PHO. The secretariat will provide dedicated planning and administrative support for OPHESAC. This includes ensuring all logistical supports are in place, preparing and distributing material. The secretariat will also provide scientific and technical support for the development of OPHESAC scientific advice and technical products.

Knowledge exchange, product development and communications support will be made available to the Committee through PHO as required.

14. Review, Approval and Clearance of Scientific and Technical Products For Public Release

While the Committee is responsible for the content of its advice, PHO is responsible for the use of the Committee's advice.

Decisions on publication will be made by the Chair and subject to PHO's notification protocols with government and accessibility and French language requirements.

Where the Committee's advice will be publicly released in the form of a report, the process will be coordinated by PHO. This includes the representation of scientific and technical products as follows:

- Branding: OPHESAC watermark
- Citation: Committee as a whole (OPHESAC members named individually in the document)
- Acknowledgements: Other contributors
- Disclaimers: As applicable from Disclaimers at PHO

OPHESAC products will be reviewed by members and approved by the Chair in consultation with the PHO Executive Liaison prior to public release. The PHO Executive Liaison will work with the secretariat to coordinate publishing. Adherence to this process will help to:

- Promote and document consistent review and approval procedures.
- Ensure that the highest quality reviews are performed in a reasonable amount of time.
- Ensure that all OPHESAC documents are of the highest quality, scientifically sound, technically accurate, and useful to the intended audience, while ensuring the appropriate management of conflicts of interest.
- Ensure that ethical and privacy requirements are met.

All OPHESAC's scientific and technical advice and products produced by OPHESAC will be posted to the PHO website in accordance with PHO processes and MOH notification requirements. Members' citation in OPHESAC-published advice does not preclude authorship on peer-reviewed manuscripts in similar subject areas.

In cases where scientific and technical products are developed and disseminated through independent structures or jointly with a collaborating organization, PHO's representation in the review, approval and visual identity of any publicly-released materials will be guided by the same conditions outlined above among other considerations as relevant.

Appendix A: Details of Responsibilities by Role

External Scientific Members

OPHESAC Members

- Endeavour to attend each committee meeting in its entirety, and to contribute actively to discussions and related activities.
- Give best advice to PHO as related to the mandate of OPHESAC.
- Bring forward potential topics and agenda items through the Chair.
- Take all reasonable steps to avoid any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest and to immediately inform the Chair and PHO Executive Liaison of circumstances that may place them in a position of conflict of interest.
- Declare any conflicts of interest at the beginning of every meeting and as they may arise outside of scheduled meetings.
- Inform Chair regarding any and all requests for public or media comments and refer any and all requests for public and media comments to the Chair.

Note: individual members may speak publically as independent scientists and practitioners, but are not authorized to speak on behalf of PHO or the work of OPHESAC unless asked to do so by the Chair and PHO Executive Liaison.

OPHESAC Chair

- Has the same responsibilities as other members, with the exception of media and public comment responsibilities.
- Works with the Scientific Director to develop OPHESAC's work plan and in collaboration with the PHO Executive Liaison provides oversight for the implementation of the work plan. This includes assessment and prioritization of topics and agenda items.
- Reviews and refers all conflict of interest declarations to the PHO Executive Liaison.
- Chairs meetings; facilitates full and frank discussions among members in fulfillment of OPHESAC's mandate.
- Actively participates as part of the membership nominating committee to identify skillsets and new members through calls for interest and submits recommendations of the nominating committee to PHO for final decision. Ensures approval of meeting minutes.
- Asks members to make a verbal conflict of interest declaration at the beginning of every meeting and refers members' conflicts of interest to the PHO Executive Liaison for review.
- Takes all reasonable steps to avoid any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest and immediately informs the PHO Executive Liaison of circumstances that may place them in a position of conflict of interest.

- May, by invitation, include guests or observers on a meeting- or topic-specific basis, and works with the Secretariat to organize their attendance.
- Works with PHO on any review or an evaluation of OPHESAC.
- Provides public or media comments on behalf of OPHESAC consistent with PHO's mission, vision, mandate, and values. As a matter of practice, notifies the PHO Executive Liaison in advance of any and all requests for public and media comments.
- The OPHESAC Chair speaks on behalf of OPHESAC and is not authorized to speak on behalf of PHO.

OPHESAC Vice Chair

- Has the same responsibilities as other members, except as noted below
- At the request of the Chair, or in the case of the Chair's absence, chairs meetings and takes on the Chair's other tasks as required.
- Actively participates as part of the membership nominating committee to identify new members through calls for interest.
- Invited to participate in pre and post committee meeting briefings.

PHO Liaison and Support

OPHESAC Scientific Director

- Leads and coordinates scientific contributions to OPHESAC's overall work in relation to providing scientific expertise and inputs to OPHESAC.
- Leads the development of the work plan and works in collaboration with the OPHESAC Chair and PHO Executive Liaison. This includes assessment and prioritization of topics and agenda items.
- Provides scientific leadership to the work of the secretariat.
- Participates in OPHESAC discussions to provide scientific and technical information to inform committee deliberations.
- Advises the PHO Executive Liaison and Chair/Vice Chair on scientific related issues.
- Provides public or media comments on behalf of PHO consistent with PHO's mission, vision, mandate, and values. As a matter of practice, notifies the PHO Executive Liaison in advance of any and all requests for public and media comments.

OPHESAC PHO Executive Liaison

- Executive responsible for oversight of OPHESAC on behalf of PHO, working closely with the Chair and Vice Chair, and the Scientific Director and Secretariat.
- Actively participates as part of the membership nominating committee to identify skillsets and new members through calls for interest and submits recommendations of the nominating committee to the President and CEO for final decision.

- With the secretariat, ensures that committee members are informed about applicable PHO policies and any other relevant information in a timely manner.
- Works with the Chair, Vice Chair and Scientific Director to assess and prioritize topics and agenda items, and approves the final work plan.
- With endorsement of the Chair, approves members speaking on behalf of OPHE SAC as needed.
- Provides guidance to the secretariat.
- Ensures the preparation of meeting minutes and records.
- Briefs others within PHO on OPHE SAC activities as needed.
- Reviews members' conflict of interest declarations, refers to the PHO Legal Counsel.

Appendix B: Details on Appointment, Re-appointment and Termination

Appointment of OPHESAC members is in accordance with PHO's Policy on External Advisory Committees. PHO appoints members and sets terms for each appointment (and potential reappointment).

When recruiting candidates, PHO may at its discretion:

- Issue open and targeted calls through publichealthontario.ca or other communication channels.
- Invite expressions of interest or nominations in consultation with relevant clients, partners or stakeholders.
- Directly approach/invite individuals.

Appointment of Members

- Appointed by PHO's President and CEO taking into account recommendations from the nominating committee, Chair and PHO Executive Liaison.
- Membership terms are two years in length.
- A member may be reappointed for up to two additional terms of up to two years to allow for continuity and a systematic rotation of membership (total maximum allowable years for membership is six).
- Exceptions to the maximum appointment may be made, depending on individual circumstances and a committee's needs; for example, in circumstances where an individual takes on a committee leadership role.

To formalize participation on OPHESAC and help members understand the expectations of being a member, appointees must acknowledge and agree with the Terms of Conditions of membership as outlined in their appointment letter.

Two months prior to the end of a member's term, they are expected to notify the Chair of any potential interest in continuing with OPHESAC (subject to maximum allowable terms). When a member's term is complete and they wish to continue with OPHESAC, PHO will determine potential reappointment options in consultation with others, including but not limited to: the Chair, Vice Chair and current members.

Either the President and CEO through the PHO Executive Liaison or the member may at any time, for any reason, terminate a member's appointment upon written notice to the other. The termination shall take effect two weeks after receipt of the written notice, or if not known, two weeks after the written notice is sent, or at a mutually determined date.

Appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair

PHO selects and appoints the Chair and Vice Chair.

- Appointed by PHO's President and CEO on the advice of the PHO Executive Liaison taking into account recommendations from the nominating committee.
- Terms are two years in length.
- May be reappointed for one additional term of up to two years (total maximum allowable years as Chair is 4).

The provisions under "Appointment of Members" apply to the Chair in the same way as other members.