

# Strategic Plan 2020-2023



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# Introduction

Ontario is facing increasingly critical health threats – both emergent and ongoing. How can we protect and promote health for individuals, families, communities, and populations across the province?

This is the critical work of public health.

Public Health Ontario is an essential part of those efforts, working with our public health and health care system partners to detect, understand, and respond to threats to public health with actions based on sound and robust information, knowledge, and evidence.

This refreshed Strategic Plan is being released with the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Never before have we seen the world move so fast and, at the same time, see other domains of society come to such a standstill. We are in the midst of what may be the greatest global crisis of a generation. While COVID-19 has brought with it vast social and economic impacts, it is, at its core, a public health issue: an emergent pathogen that threatens the public's health and has disproportionate health impacts on racialized and other marginalized communities and populations, exacerbating persistent health inequities. Public health is in the spotlight – and, at the same time, comprises the backdrop – of the world's efforts and attentions. The heightened needs and demands for an effective public health response highlight the crucial responsibilities of the public health sector, as well as important opportunities to enhance and increase the impact of our work.

Public Health Ontario remains committed to protecting and promoting the health of Ontarians and reducing inequities in health, through our regular work, and throughout public health emergencies, including COVID-19. We remain vigilant and responsive to current and emerging threats to health, providing leadership and expertise to protect the public's health. We study and evaluate what makes people healthy and how we can help Ontarians live healthier lives. We inform and mobilize decision making and actions of government, public health practitioners, front-line health workers and researchers by linking them to the best scientific intelligence and knowledge.

PHO was created by legislation in 2007 as a Crown operational service agency. We emerged as part of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's (MOHLTC) (now the Ministry of Health (MOH)) plan to renew Ontario's public health system following the SARS outbreak in 2003. MOHLTC's Operation Health Protection committed to creating a public health agency, and made significant program investments in public health renewal, the public health laboratories, infection prevention and control, and public health emergency preparedness. In 2006, the Agency Implementation Task Force set the blueprint for our organization in its final report *From Vision to Action*.

Our first strategic plan focused on building our new organization. Our second strategic plan, covering 2014-19, reflected PHO's established role as an essential component of the province's public health sector and our drive to measure and increase the impact of our work. The plan highlighted the expansion of PHO's services, topical expertise, and leadership on priority public health issues,

advancements in data integration and analysis for enhanced population health monitoring, innovations in evidence synthesis and knowledge exchange, and strengthening our roles in research on key public health issues.

PHO's second five-year review was completed in August 2018 by a board-commissioned external peer-review panel. With the intention to use the five-year review to inform our next strategic plan, the panel assessed PHO's activities, impacts, and areas for growth. The report from the review highlighted several areas in which PHO should consider advancing work to enhance support for the sector and increase our impact, including increasing engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations to address urgent health needs and health inequities; advancing in methods and technologies in genomics, data analytics, and artificial intelligence; and expanding our collaboration with sectors beyond public health and health services.

We had planned a fulsome initiative to develop a new five-year strategic plan to start in 2020. However, the anticipation of changes to the public health sector based on the province's public health modernization goals and the emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic hindered our ability to consult with clients and broader stakeholders about strategic directions and goals for the next several years. At this juncture, we also expect that PHO's roles within the sector may evolve to meet the needs of a modernized public health sector and in the progression and eventual aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the constraints and potential changes to the system, launching a new strategic plan seemed ill-advised at this time. However, current and relevant strategic directions and goals are imperative to guide PHO's work. We have therefore engaged in a process to refresh and extend our 2014-2019 Strategic Plan to reflect the significant changes within and outside of PHO since our last strategic plan was published.

Our refreshed 2020-2023 Strategic Plan builds on PHO's accomplishments to date. While preserving the mission, vision, mandate, and values articulated our 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, this refreshed plan captures a revised list of our areas of expertise and services and extends our five strategic directions with updated goals for the next two years. Despite being unable to consult with our partners and clients, we involved leadership from all program and corporate areas within PHO in developing this document.

The refreshed plan is informed both by looking back at the contributions and success of PHO's first 10 years, considering the current landscape and critical roles of the public health sector in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response and other recent public health crises, and anticipating what will arise as the vital work of public health in continued response to and recovery from the current public health emergency, including upcoming efforts to roll-out a comprehensive coordinated COVID-19 vaccination program. It reflects advancements in technology, the increasing visibility of public health, and appeals for transparency about how science is informing decision-making. It also integrates the challenges and goals articulated by ongoing provincial efforts to transform and modernize the health care and public health sectors.

With a refreshed strategic plan, our strong mix of programs and services, and our dedicated people, PHO will continue to protect and promote the health of Ontarians, support the transformation of the public health sector, and contribute to scientific and evidence-informed approaches to existing and emergent public health threats to the province and broader society.



## Who We Are

## What We Do

Public Health Ontario provides expert scientific and technical advice and support to government, local public health units and health care providers. We generate timely, relevant and reliable information, results and guidance, and tools. In doing so, we help to ensure effective and responsive health care delivery, promote health, and prevent or manage public health events, such as outbreaks and pandemics.

Our laboratory, clinical, scientific and public health experts provide consultation and deliver services throughout Ontario, working from sites across the province to ensure equitable access and delivery.

PHO's expertise and services correspond with the objects legislated in the *Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Act, 2007*.

## Areas of Expertise

- chronic disease prevention
- environmental and occupational health
- communicable disease control including infection prevention and control
- microbiology
- emergency preparedness and response



- immunization
- Health promotion
- injury prevention
- knowledge exchange

## PHO Services

- scientific and technical advice, consultation, and interpretation
- public health and reference laboratory services
- guidance and interpretation for laboratory testing and test results
- surveillance and population health assessment
- outbreak investigation and management
- analytics and informatics
- research and evaluation
- library services
- ethics
- professional development and education



PHO is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the Government of Ontario. As an integral part of Ontario’s public health sector, PHO works closely with the Ministry of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ministry of Long-Term Care, and local public health units.

## PHO’s Impact

PHO maintains vigilance, working to protect and promote the health of Ontarians by:

- Monitoring new and emerging pathogens
- Developing and conducting testing for pathogens of public health importance
- Evaluating and understanding health risks
- Assessing factors that increase risk of disease
- Investigating outbreaks of infectious disease



- Monitoring and reporting on health, patterns of disease, and health inequities
- Assessing programs and policies that have the potential to reduce health inequities and improve the health of individuals, families, and communities
- Supporting evidence-based decision-making by local public health units
- Supporting infection control efforts and clinical decision-making

Our work sheds light on what affects health, while also quantifying burden of disease and inequities in health and disease across our neighbourhoods and populations, to inform public health policy and practice.

## Information and Knowledge

We conduct epidemiologic analyses to understand population health and burden of disease across the province. PHO publishes knowledge syntheses, best practice documents, original research reports and peer-reviewed articles, and technical reports on key public health issues. We create interactive tools that enable our clients to interpret and apply local data to inform their programs and services. Our work focuses on topics such as chronic disease risk factors, tobacco control, mental illness and addictions, environmental health, child and youth health, microbiology, and infectious diseases.

PHO accelerates the uptake and clinical application of new knowledge by applying emerging methods and innovative strategies for knowledge mobilization and implementation. We also advise professionals and institutions on how to manage health care issues, often bringing unique and multi-disciplinary expertise to the task. PHO contributes significantly to a growing body of public health knowledge with research that crosses the Canadian Institute for Health Research's four health research pillars: biomedical; clinical; health systems and services; and population health. We also train professionals who advance to practice and create impact in local, national, and global public health.

As an agency created in the aftermath of a public health emergency, PHO is structured and situated to be able to quickly scale up to meet the demands of emerging and urgent health crises, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. PHO has been an essential component of the province's response to COVID-19, instituting an incident management structure (IMS), redeploying staff and resources, and efficiently integrating emergency funding from the MOH to provide scientific and technical advice and develop resources for the public health sector, at significantly increased pace and volume. Our epidemiologic, outbreak management, and laboratory testing and scientific support have been critical contributions to decision makers at local and provincial levels, as they respond and work to control this devastating pandemic. Our immunization and vaccine-preventable disease control program is ramping up to provide essential scientific and technical advice for the COVID-19 vaccination programs planned for the next year and a half, as effective vaccines are approved and made available.



## Support and Services

Our experts provide support and services across Ontario through our regional IPAC offices; laboratories; website and comprehensive catalog of resources and online tools; laboratory call centre; and telephone, email, and in-person consultations.

PHO supports emergency preparedness and response through research and evidence synthesis, scientific response teams, incident management, and training. PHO has enhanced capability to identify and respond quickly to emerging pathogens and we provide scientific leadership during public health events and emergencies such as the opioid crisis, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, Ebola outbreaks, spread of the Zika virus, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our critical roles in public health emergency response include: producing guidance documents, delivering advice to the MOH and the field, developing and performing laboratory testing and reporting test results, and conducting real-time research.

Excluding pandemic COVID-19 testing, PHO performs more than six million laboratory tests a year, providing timely results to inform patient management, health care decisions, and public health practice. The laboratories field over 400 calls a day from health care practitioners looking for results, interpretation and advice. To manage the surge of calls during COVID-19, our laboratory customer service centre implemented an automated voice message system that provides answers to frequently asked questions. This system has enabled us to focus on inquiries that require tailored information or advice.

PHO's modernized laboratories and advanced technology testing platforms contribute to more efficient testing, faster communication of test results to physicians and public health practitioners, and realizable data for surveillance and analysis of infectious diseases. Our laboratories are able to quickly develop and validate testing methodologies and ramp up operations to meet testing demands for emerging pathogens, such as Ebola and SARS-CoV-2.

Teams within our health protection portfolio conduct surveillance, epidemiologic analysis, and research on communicable diseases and outbreaks, immunization, antimicrobial stewardship and infection control lapses. We respond to emerging incidents and events across the province and provide the public health sector with scientific and technical reports, consultation and advice for programs and service delivery, and tools to support analysis and interpretation of local and provincial data. We also support our public health and health care partners through education, individualized consultation, and collaborative learning exchange opportunities.

PHO's environmental and occupational health team helps government and local public health units respond to a variety of issues (e.g. radon, exposure to health hazards, and the potential health effects of radiofrequency). We apply and share innovative tools to help quantify and communicate health risks to the population and support local decision-making to address and reduce risks.

We conduct research, surveillance, and program evaluation on a wide range of health promotion, chronic disease, and injury prevention issues, including tobacco and e-cigarettes, alcohol use, child health, nutrition, physical activity, and cardiovascular disease. Our health promotion services respond to

client requests for knowledge syntheses and provide scientific and technical support for program planning and evaluation.

Our research ethics services provide advice and access to review within PHO's public health ethics framework for local public health units' proposed research and evaluation initiatives.

As research is published at an increasingly rapid pace, library services at PHO and within health unit hubs across Ontario help public health professionals to access knowledge and evidence to inform their work.

We have created an extensive and expanding collection of knowledge products and publications that synthesize information and provide evidence-based advice to support public health practice as we respond to the needs of the sector, particularly in the context of COVID-19 and other emergent health issues.

PHO's professional development and continuing education programs and annual convention are other key vehicles to exchange knowledge on public health issues.

## Evolving and Growing the Organization

We have streamlined our systems and services to support our programming and our capacity to meet our clients' needs. We have pursued ongoing continuous improvement and realized efficiencies within our control for our laboratory operations, established an informatics program, increased our research and grant holdings, pursued and developed new partnerships, and improved the quality, quantity, and relevance of our knowledge products. However, with a base funding allocation that has been flatlined for the past nine years, PHO continues to face significant challenges due to financial sustainability.

Measuring our progress matters to us. A comprehensive performance measurement framework monitors our success, including a balanced scorecard, annual Ontario Laboratory Accreditation, and client and stakeholder satisfaction surveys. External reviews have assessed aspects of our performance, including an international Peer Review Panels that evaluated PHO's first five years and years five through ten of operations.

Our program areas are supported by streamlined corporate departments. Consistent positive results demonstrate that PHO has solid foundations and a strong track record; we must continue to enhance our programs and services to improve how we respond to the needs of the sector and increase our impact.

## Vision, Mission and Mandate

Vision, Mission and Mandate statements are integral to any organization. PHO's Mission describes what we do best every single day: our purpose. Our Vision is our aspirational statement of what the future will be like because we deliver on our Mission. Our Mandate articulates our role and services in pursuit of our Mission.

### Vision

Internationally- recognized evidence, knowledge and action for a healthier Ontario.

### Mission

We enable informed decisions and actions that protect and promote health and contribute to reducing health inequities

### Mandate

We provide scientific and technical advice and support to clients working in government, public health, health care, and related sectors.

We build capacity, assemble expertise and guide action through:

- advice, consultation and interpretation
- continuing education and professional development
- health emergency preparedness
- information management
- knowledge and best practices generation
- laboratory services
- library services
- research, ethics and evaluation
- support to policy and program development
- surveillance and population health assessment

In meeting our Vision, Mission and Mandate, our primary clients include:

- Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health
- Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long-Term Care and other ministries
- local public health units
- health system providers and organizations across the continuum of care

In addition to these clients, our Partners for Health can also include academic, research, not-for-profit, community-based and private sector organizations and government agencies working across sectors that contribute to Ontarians achieving the best health possible.

## Our Values

Our values are critical to shaping PHO’s shared organizational culture. They underpin the way people approach their work, make decisions and interact with each other.

PHO is committed to acting in accordance with our values, which are connected and inter-dependent. No one value stands above the others or alone in isolation. We live our values as a shared promise to each other, our clients and our partners.

### **Credible** — Trusted in what we do

Through a commitment to excellence, we are a trusted source of expert knowledge and quality service. Relying on the best available information, methodologies and research, we take pride in providing objective advice, relevant results and high quality evidence.

### **Innovative** — Creative solutions

We continually seek novel approaches – in our thinking, our research and our service delivery. Building a culture of creativity together, we explore new possibilities and pursue innovative solutions to complex operational and public health challenges.

### **Responsive** — Taking action

We anticipate and meet the needs of our clients and partners, acting in a timely and decisive fashion. We are proactive, anticipating change and taking relevant actions that make a difference and achieve positive results. We demonstrate a passion for engaging, understanding and responding to those we serve, and asking how we can do even better.

**Collaborative** — Stronger together

Our best work and results come from applying our collective experience and knowledge together with our partners. We develop and leverage partnerships that respond to shared challenges and goals. In each relationship, we seek the best from each other, and engage a broad network to share the best of PHO and advance the field of public health.

**Integrity** — Acting honestly and ethically

We consistently act in the best interests of Ontarians, with impartiality and transparency. We live by the highest standards of integrity in our professional and scientific endeavours. We stand behind our work and our people. We act honestly and ethically, delivering on our commitments.

**Respect** — Valuing others

We welcome and respect a broad range of ideas and perspectives. We build trust through our commitment to open communications, valuing everyone's unique background and contributions, and celebrating and sharing successes. We achieve greater impact by leveraging the diversity of our people, clients and partners.



# Planning for the Future

Any strategic plan looks ahead, but is also a product of its time. The complex world in which PHO operates continues to evolve and become more connected – with enormous impacts on the spread of health threats, as well as the ability to share information and learn from approaches in other jurisdictions, both near and far from Ontario. We have to respond to the changing environment, anticipate needs, and remain a leader in preparing and responding to public health emergencies, promoting optimal health, and preventing disease.

Many trends and considerations helped to inform this refreshed plan’s development. Ontario, and indeed the entire world, has mobilized an unprecedented response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with public health measures expanding into and impacting an extensive array of domains of social and economic life for Ontarians. In addition to their roles in the pandemic response, the provincial public health and health care sectors continue to undergo structural change and planning for additional transformation. Some notable changes in the past few years include:

- In early 2018, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released a new version of the Ontario Public Health Standards that identify the minimum expectations for public health programs and services to be delivered by Ontario's local public health units.
- In March 2018, the Ministry of Health discontinued funding for the 14 Health Promotion Resource Centres, two of which were hosted at PHO.
- In mid-2019, the government separated the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care into two separate ministries: Health and Long-Term Care.

- Ontario Health, a new agency within the Ministry of Health, and Ontario Health Teams began operations in late 2019. They are responsible for coordinating and connecting health care and are ramping up their roles as key components of the province's health care system.
- As is described in more detail in Strategic Direction #1, the Ministry of Health is in the midst of examining options for restructuring the public health system, with changes anticipated to organizations and accountabilities at municipal and regional levels.

The results from our latest five-year review highlighted several areas for increased attention and efforts. Recognizing the key roles that other sectors play in actions that influence the determinants of health, PHO will work to expand our relationships with ministries and partners beyond public health and health care. We will aim to continue our leadership in advancing laboratory science and testing technologies, modernizing laboratory operations, and applying public health genomics.

PHO will also renew our focus and enhance our collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations to address the significant health risks and inequities they continue to face and to support Indigenous health research in Ontario. Our engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations and work to address health issues facing Indigenous communities and individuals will honour the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and respond to its calls to action, including partnering with Indigenous organizations and individuals to identify, develop, and implement initiatives, as well as adopting Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) principles.

With the explosion of available information, we strive to collect and supply the most useful and credible data. There is a growing demand for timely data to inform decisions and policies and transparency in how data are being used in decision-making, especially in the response to emergent threats to health that require substantive and coordinated public health measures. We aim to support continued development and application of innovative analytic technologies, including artificial intelligence. Strong inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaborations create new ways of improving health and clinical and public health practice.

From new technology to integrated approaches, we see opportunities. There are challenges too. Economic circumstances and pandemic-related deficits demand that all publicly-funded services, and the health system in particular, demonstrate value for money. Health services need to show both improved health outcomes and economic sustainability. Demographic changes continue to transform health human resources. The workforce must continually adapt to rapid technological innovations, increased demands for outputs, as well as the current economic context. In addition, COVID-19 has required significant adjustments to onsite and work-from-home arrangements that are likely to continue to evolve over the course of the pandemic and beyond.

We also see opportunities to learn from our previous work. Building on our strong track record, we will improve how we facilitate our clients' access to relevant and useful supports and services, better align programs, strengthen our partnerships to meet PHO's mandate, and support advancement and modernization of Ontario's public health system.

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Provide scientific and technical expertise to strengthen Ontario's public health sector and support the achievement of its goals in the context of health system change, public health modernization, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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### Why it Matters

#### Provincial Public Health Modernization

In the context of significant changes in the health care system in Ontario and as the province promoted work to improve coordination and connection of services to improve patient experiences and outcomes, the Ministry of Health released a discussion paper on public health modernization in November 2019. This document created a framework for consultations and upcoming decisions about how to restructure and renew Ontario's public health sector. Within the province's stated goals for public health modernization, PHO is highlighted as a key partner that provides essential scientific and technical advice to the other components of the public health sector working alongside the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Long-Term Care, and local public health units. PHO will continue to work with the sector to achieve the aims and outcomes articulated in the plans for public health modernization and any additions or adaptations to these as a result of the response and recovery from COVID-19.

#### **Public health modernization: goals**

The Ministry of Health sets out six key outcomes for public health modernization:

1. Better consistency and equity of service delivery across the province.



2. Improved clarity and alignment of roles and responsibilities between the province, Public Health Ontario and local public health.
3. Better and deeper relationships with primary care and the broader health care system to support the goal of ending hallway health care through improved health promotion and disease prevention.
4. Improved public health delivery and the sustainability of the system.
5. Strengthened collaboration and engagement with Indigenous and First Nations communities and organizations.
6. Improved planning, delivery, and evaluation of public health programs and services to Francophone populations.

Consistent with our mandate and our role within the sector, PHO will provide scientific and technical advice and support to our public health sector partners as they work to achieve these goals. PHO will generate new public health knowledge, support population health monitoring, and drive policy and practice action. Our expertise will support the sector in taking actions to achieve its goals through activities that include developing appropriate tools, knowledge products and professional development programs and collaborative opportunities. Responding to the results of public health modernization, we will work to align our roles and responsibilities and support the coordination of public health functions, programs, and services with our partners across the sector.

## The COVID-19 Pandemic

The global COVID-19 pandemic has required the public health and other sectors to reframe and realign their goals, as efforts to control the spread and societal impact of this novel virus have taken precedence over previously articulated plans and priorities. As an agency created in the wake of and as part of the evaluation of the provincial response to an earlier public health emergency caused by a new pathogen, PHO has played many essential roles, both in helping the sector prepare for future health threats and in supporting and strengthening the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the critical role we play in diagnostic testing and serosurveillance, we have provided advice and support for laboratory testing methodologies, strategies, and operations across the province. We have implemented programs and supported the development and roll-out of systems to strengthen case and contact management. We have provided data, evidence synthesis, consultation, and education on outbreak management and infection prevention and control. We have facilitated data entry and conducted epidemiological analysis to ensure the province and local public health units are making decisions based on current, high quality evidence.

As the development and clinical trials of potential COVID-19 vaccines proceed around the world, PHO has launched work to provide scientific expertise and advice to support the upcoming rollout of a COVID-19 vaccination program, which will be a primary focus of the province's public health sector during the period of this strategic plan. We are synthesizing evidence, developing resources and tools,

and ramping up our services to inform and support the public health and health care sectors as they prepare for and implement Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination campaign. PHO will continue to apply our extensive expertise in vaccine research, vaccine safety, and vaccine coverage to the challenges that emerge as COVID-19 vaccination programs are delivered. We will also continue our research and programmatic work on emergency and pandemic preparedness to support the sector to apply learnings from our experiences with COVID-19 for effective response to and recovery from novel pathogens and public health emergencies in the future.

While the current pandemic has resulted in a focus and mobilization of resources to address infectious disease, the impacts of non-infectious diseases and other health issues remain of utmost importance. Besides baseline levels of chronic diseases and other risks to the health and well-being of Ontarians, there are grave concerns about the correlated effects on mental health, alcohol and substance use, and chronic health resulting from changes to individual behaviours and effects on the availability and accessibility of health services during the pandemic. PHO's analytics, research, and initiatives to address the determinants of health and chronic disease risks to Ontarians, particularly to racialized, marginalized, and other vulnerable communities and populations across the province, continue to be crucial contributions to the public health and health sector.

## Where We Will Focus

### Goal 1.1

Provide scientific leadership and expertise in public health and laboratory sciences to support the public health and health systems sectors in Ontario to achieve objectives related to COVID-19 response and recovery.

### Goal 1.2

Actively participate in public health modernization efforts, supporting stakeholders across the sector to achieve their respective goals.

## How We Will Measure Success

In taking action, we will be guided by the public health modernization plan set out by the Ministry of Health and the ongoing provincial and local actions to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. As the public health sector develops specific actionable targets, we will map and measure our activities to each of the goals and targets.

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# Accelerate integrated population health monitoring

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## Why it Matters

Monitoring a population's health status and the factors determining health is a longstanding and essential public health function, critical during public health emergencies, as well as more stable times. Science and technology are evolving rapidly, creating many exciting opportunities to combine traditional and emerging sources of data and enable more complete health monitoring.

The wide range of factors that influence our health do not work in isolation. Increasingly, we are called upon to understand the dynamic relationships between them, as well as their individual and collective impacts. This requires a greater degree of integration in our approaches to population health monitoring.

Exciting opportunities to monitor health more comprehensively are emerging. We have the potential to access and analyze data from across society – digital history of consumer behaviour, social interactions, environment, work and play. At the same time, the rapid expansion of genetic and molecular testing has created a virtual explosion of data in laboratory science.

We can consider these data in new ways to protect and promote health. This may shift how we monitor population health and its complex determinants. We increasingly recognize the differences in our health, or in the potential for health, across our society. Integrated analytic approaches may allow us to examine health inequalities in more sophisticated ways.

# Where We Will Focus

## Goal 2.1

Accelerate the development of centralized public health information tools and resources, in collaboration with our public health and health care partners, facilitating streamlined access to data and enabling integrated population health monitoring.

- Continue to work on PHO solutions to enable large scale, cross-platform public health and laboratory data linkages and a self-serve data model utilizing advanced business intelligence and analytic tools.
- Establish innovative and effective processes and continue to work with key partners to organize, integrate, analyze and interpret public health and laboratory data.
- Increase the transparency and promotion of data products for Ontario's public health priorities.
- Assess gaps in current data, contribute our own data, support the acquisition of new data sources, and incorporate data from areas traditionally unavailable to public health and the health care system to understand the complexity of factors influencing the population's health.

## Goal 2.2

Produce and disseminate tools and resources which transform data to information and knowledge that guide public health action.

- Create standardized tools and methodologies and analyze and interpret data to support decision-making and action at local and provincial levels across sectors.
- Find innovative ways to introduce and integrate genomic, microbiologic, and sociodemographic data into clinical and public health practice.
- Identify health inequities through measuring, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, including health data about racialized and other marginalized populations. Integrate health equity and social determinants of health information into existing and upcoming reporting and knowledge products.
- Provide educational and other resources concurrent with data to support broad access and interpretation.

## Goal 2.3

Provide leadership in advancing and applying analytic and presentation methodologies that inform population health monitoring.

- Use centralized analytic approaches to achieve system-wide efficiencies in the collection, analysis, and reporting of aggregated data. This will allow clients to monitor population health in their own jurisdictions and compare themselves to others using well-accepted and generally-available technology.
- Maintain the capacity to analyze data at the biologic, individual, and neighbourhood levels to investigate the complex linkages between health determinants.
- Employ effective data visualization strategies to ensure clear communication of complex information and interactions, permitting investigation of potential linkages across health topics.

## How We Will Measure Success

We will continue to focus on bringing together traditional public health and health care data with emerging sources to create a strong base of information and deepen our understanding of health status and what affects health in Ontario.

In the next two years, PHO will have accelerated integrated population health monitoring by:

- Creating centralized laboratory and public health information accessible to our stakeholders that synthesizes data from multiple sources and reflects the complex interactions between determinants of health.
- Enabling more consistent access to quality data for assessing the health of the population and health inequalities and leading to improved identification of priority populations.
- Producing analytic products and tools and compelling representations of data that are easily understood and can be used to interpret and understand data and support real-time action.
- Supporting more consistent data collection, analytics, and communication throughout the public health sector.
- Supporting local research and surveillance projects by providing public health stakeholders with increased access to PHO's ethics review board.

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# Enable policy, program and practice action

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## Why it Matters

Several decades of research show a gap between the emergence of new knowledge and its implementation as best practice by health professionals. In the context of rapidly evolving infectious disease threats, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unabated increase in harms from substance use, chronic diseases, and injuries, we need streamlined mechanisms to effectively share evidence with those who design and implement public health policy and programs.

As a trusted source of high quality, relevant and credible information, PHO can be a catalyst for action. PHO can guide decisions with the latest evidence and decrease the time between discovery and implementation. We will look to various sources— practitioners and policy makers, as well as the evidence and knowledge base— to understand, evaluate, integrate, and disseminate practice-based innovations. In short, we will help turn knowledge into action.

## Where We Will Focus

### Goal 3.1

Synthesize and disseminate knowledge and evidence-based practices in public health and laboratory science to accelerate their application into practice.

- Provide expert advice, consultation, and interpretation of results, data, and evidence to advance and support laboratory, clinical, and public health practice.
- Continue to support the province, clinicians, and hospital and community laboratories in improving high quality testing by providing scientific and technical guidance for the design, application, and interpretation of public health testing programs and individual clinical results.
- Develop knowledge products tailored for different audiences that synthesize and appraise the best evidence within the Ontario context, epidemiology, and practice.

- Foster change in individual practice, in organizations, and at the system-level with innovative approaches, supportive leadership, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Build on existing initiatives supporting local public health units to enhance culturally appropriate and meaningful engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and organizations.

## Goal 3.2

Provide evidence and tools to influence policy and program development.

- Identify potential and evaluate existing policies and programs intended to protect and promote the health of Ontarians and reduce inequities.
- Support policy makers and advocates for healthy public policy by contextualizing, packaging, and increasing the transparency of and access to evidence for consideration in policy and program development and change.

## Goal 3.3

Build skills, capacity, and competencies in Ontario's health workforce to face tomorrow's public health issues.

- Champion leadership development among Ontario's public health and laboratory workforces. Inspire and develop the next generation of professionals, ensuring they have skills and expertise to meet the current and future needs for advanced laboratory and public health science.
- Be a leader in professional development and continuing education. Collaborate with other organizations on innovative delivery and content, including virtual platforms for consultation and learning.
- Expand training offerings for public health professionals to support the improvement of cultural safety within their organizations and advance meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations to improve population health in Indigenous communities.

## How We Will Measure Success

With our expert staff and continuing focus on knowledge and evidence, we will inform policy and program development and support practice change. By engaging and supporting our partners and clients, we will continuously learn how to better enable informed decisions and informed actions.

In the next two years, PHO will have enabled policy, program, and practice action by:

- Meeting provincial needs for high quality laboratory testing, leading advancements in laboratory science, and interpreting test results to inform clinical care and public health program decisions.

- Implementing an expanded catalogue of professional development and continuing education offerings that support increased knowledge and skills for public health professionals.
- Empowering decision-making, innovation, and change management at all levels of the sector, demonstrating measurable change in practice.
- Influencing evidence-informed policy and program development.



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# Advance public health evidence and knowledge

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## Why it Matters

Today's public health issues are increasingly complex. There is increasing evidence for and attention to socio-political and historical mechanisms and structures that define hierarchies of power and disadvantage racialized people and communities. Our health is also impacted by: our individual biology, the family in which we grew up and with whom we currently live, our communities and society, the geographic and environmental features where we live and work, the stressors we experience, our lifestyle, and our education and role models.

We need new systematic approaches to explain the intricacies, connections, and interactions between the many variables that contribute to health.

There are many gaps in our knowledge, and many challenges on the path from knowledge to policy action and practice change. Research and development will allow us to better apply existing knowledge in public health policy and practice. New discoveries will advance knowledge where there are outstanding questions and lead to improved disease prevention, detection, management and control.

Meeting these challenges requires innovations in research and program evaluation across many disciplines, and integration of many perspectives. PHO's interdisciplinary scientific staff and depth of partnerships bring a breadth of expertise and opportunities unique in Ontario – and with few peers globally – to address these challenging issues.

## Where We Will Focus

### Goal 4.1

Lead the generation of new public health knowledge in priority areas.

PHO will leverage its strengths and opportunities across the many disciplines of public health and topic areas to select major research and evaluation programs in areas of focus. Our research and evaluation initiatives will capitalize on our resources and facilities across Ontario, as well as our head office and the

public health laboratories at MaRS in Toronto's Discovery District and regional laboratories across the province, including our new laboratory in London that opened in November 2020. Our proximity to major teaching hospitals, research institutes, and universities and our infrastructure will advance methods in key areas: diagnostics, pathogen discovery, managing outbreaks, detecting drug resistance, environmental assessment, program evaluation, and public health genomics. Growing partnerships with Indigenous communities and with academics engaged with Indigenous communities and organizations will advance knowledge of effective strategies to prevent chronic disease and promote health for Indigenous people and communities.

PHO will:

- Strengthen Ontario's laboratory response by providing expertise in microbiology, high quality diagnostics, reference testing, and innovation for the detection and characterization of emerging or re-emerging pathogens.
- Lead, conduct, and support relevant and impactful program evaluation and research that contributes to the body of public health knowledge.
- Strengthen and create new interdisciplinary collaborations to pursue innovative population studies of disease determinants, including biological, environmental, behavioural and social factors, including through our important partnership with ICES and its University of Toronto site (ICES@UoT), as well as with academic organizations across Ontario.

## Goal 4.2

Develop innovative approaches and methodologies for advancing public health evidence.

- Validate and make scientific and technical recommendations about deployment of new laboratory technologies and infectious disease tools and approaches to detect and control emerging pathogens of public health significance.
- Engage communities in research on topics such as: opioids, alcohol, tobacco and other substance use, harm reduction, chronic disease and antibiotic prescribing.
- Advance work to measure the application and impact of our products and services in public health practice, policy, and programs.

## Goal 4.3

Evaluate and enhance complex population health interventions.

Population health interventions are policies, programs, and resource distribution approaches that are intended to impact a large number of people by changing the underlying conditions of risk and reducing health inequities. Such interventions require broad action across sectors and disciplines, across society

(individual, family, community), and across levels of government. This type of research and evaluation depends on methods that are more comprehensive than those used to address clinical interventions.

PHO will:

- Produce knowledge about population health policy and program interventions that operate within or outside the health sector.
- Conduct research that fills knowledge gaps in areas that are fundamental to the success of high-impact population health interventions, with a particular focus on racialized and other populations experiencing health inequities.
- Develop new approaches and innovate existing methods to advance and evaluate the implementation and outcomes of multi-level and multi-sectoral population and public health interventions.

## How We Will Measure Success

In the next two years, PHO will have advanced public health evidence and knowledge by:

- Establishing and contributing to innovative methods and approaches of high relevance to public health.
- Advancing laboratory science and developing and supporting implementation of laboratory technologies to detect and control existing, emerging, and re-emerging pathogens.
- Achieving academic excellence by traditional peer review metrics of scientific and academic performance.
- Improving understanding of complex public health issues, inter-sectoral collaboration and participation in solving public health problems.
- Collaborating with leading academic partners to achieve broader impact.

# Great people, exceptional teams building a stronger PHO

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## Why it Matters

Since beginning operations in the summer of 2008, PHO has evolved rapidly. Through recent restructuring, we realigned and improved inter-organizational collaboration, efficiency, and impact of our work. This refreshed strategic plan represents a significant opportunity to continue to build on and improve our cohesive workplace aligned with PHO's mandate.

Especially through this era of reimagined work arrangements as a result of COVID-19, we will continue to focus on what joins us together as an organization. Our shared understanding of our Vision, Mission, Mandate, and Values and our Human Resources strategy will continue to help us attract and retain great people, boost employee engagement, increase organizational efficiency, and improve services for our internal and external clients.

In the past five years, we have found that aligning our strategic directions, operational goals, and performance has benefited our clients and partners. It has ensured more consistent knowledge and awareness of PHO programs and services across the organization, facilitated referrals within the organization, and brought a broad perspective of PHO's strengths and assets together in response to client needs. Building on our established record, we will continue to facilitate a seamless client experience, bringing the best of PHO to meet clients' needs.

# Where We Will Focus

## Goal 5.1

Increase connectedness and belonging to cultivate a strong and cohesive organizational culture.

- Continue to foster organizational values into PHO's policies, programs, and processes to guide acceptable behaviours and enhance employee well-being.
- Strengthen our organizational culture to continue to integrate, align, and connect the organization – one PHO that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Implement innovative organizational processes and technologies for continuous improvement.
- Enhance internal communication to reduce silos, improve alignment across the organization, and build trust.
- Provide opportunities for employees to participate in initiatives for organizational planning and improvement.

## Goal 5.2

Develop a PHO-specific diversity and inclusion strategy.

- Draw on emerging best practices to review current and develop new policies to enhance the degree to which our organization is safe, inclusive, and supportive to all employees.
- Continue to enhance the diversity of our workforce and support development and leadership opportunities for our employees, including those who are Indigenous, Black, and people of colour.
- Implement employee training on racism and Indigenous cultural safety to foster a more inclusive workplace.

## Goal 5.3

Support learning, individual and team development, and build leadership capacity.

- Continue to advance PHO's leadership framework based on LEADS Framework.
- Embed a culture of learning to enhance individual, team, and organizational performance.
- Develop and implement a proactive approach to workforce and succession planning that enhances diversity and inclusion and improves continuity and consistency of services.

## Goal 5.4

Foster a culture of health, safety, and wellness that enhances the quality of work life and organizational performance.

- Expand the reach of our wellness strategy to inspire our people to be the healthiest they can be by providing comprehensive health information and promoting healthy choices.
- Develop a workforce support and resilience training program.
- Continue to build a preventative safety culture where we identify and act on risks before incidents occur.
- Develop and implement a work strategy that welcomes flexibility and adaptive work arrangements in the context of pandemic response and recovery and other health, demographic, and economic changes.

## How We Will Measure Success

A clear, consistent focus on our people and our organization will result in better service and support to our *partners for health*. PHO will continue to have great people and exceptional teams building a stronger PHO by:

- Improving employee engagement levels across the organization.
- Increasing talent attraction and retention levels.
- Increasing diversity of our workforce and leadership.
- Improving staff health.
- Fostering an energized and productive workforce that shares information and enables effective and efficient decision-making across a variety of adaptive on- and off-site work arrangements.
- Enhancing the experience of safety and inclusion in the workplace for employees who are Indigenous, Black, and people of colour.



## Enablers for Success

What will it take to realize our Strategic Plan? As we continue to evolve our organizational culture, implement change and advance toward our goals, we will rely on our people, our infrastructure and the following enablers to remain agile and responsive.

### Governance, Accountability and Performance

We adhere to the highest standards of good governance, accountability and careful management of public funds. We ensure that PHO has the right systems and oversight, and gives careful consideration to the use of its resources and assets to advance its Mission. We continuously measure our performance, seeking to demonstrate success, find value for money and improve quality.

### Transparency

We are committed to enhancing the availability of the scientific and technical advice and evidence we develop to support public health program and policy decision-making and clinical care. We increase access to and facilitate use and application of public health and laboratory data to support the public health and health care sectors.

### Change Management

Our early years brought considerable growth and change. Looking ahead, we will apply the tools of change management to improve our foundations and deepen our connections. We will draw on our roots and our histories while also deepening ties, strengthening relationships, aligning structures and processes and influencing/affecting culture change.

## Privacy and Information Management

Our information technology infrastructure ensures that data is accurate, secure and available. Our privacy framework is founded on internationally-recognized practices and legislation to protect the data we use and hold.

## Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

We partner with a broad range of organizations and governments in Ontario and beyond. Our collaborative approach seeks to build capacity, mutual benefit and innovative solutions to complex public health challenges. We rely on partnerships to gather the best knowledge, and bring the collective expertise to problem-solving while avoiding duplication of effort and cost.

Better integration of regional perspectives and diverse capacity

We must draw on the expertise and expanse of the organization as we develop new approaches and solutions. Our reach across Ontario's regions and diverse health sectors positions us to succeed. Our ability to enrich, integrate and align with local, regional and provincial perspectives will be key to success.

Organizational capacity, systems and infrastructure investments

Realizing our Strategic Directions and our Vision, Mission, Mandate and Values will require alignment of our human, physical and virtual assets. We will bring the right mix of people, systems and infrastructure together to meet our ambitious agenda





## Fulfilling Our Mission

As we look ahead to our next two years and beyond, Public Health Ontario will build on our foundations and achievements, relying on our partnerships and the incredible talents of our people. Our evidence and knowledge will enable informed decisions and actions by those working in public health, health care and government– the very Mission of our agency and the purpose for which we were created. Our partners will design, deliver and evaluate their practice, programs and policy, drawing on our advice, research, best practices, data, tools, and evidence. The health of Ontarians will improve and inequities will be reduced as they have access to evidence-informed public health and health care services, accompanied by healthy public policy at local and provincial levels.

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