

## Board of Health Briefing Report

**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health  
**Date:** December 2023  
**Topic:** **Public Health Strengthening and Chronic Disease Prevention**  
**Submitted by:** Dr. Glenn Corneil, Acting Medical Officer of Health/CEO  
**Prepared by:** Amanda Mongeon, Manager Community Health  
**Reviewed by:** Erin Cowan, Director of Strategic Services and Health Promotion

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### RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Timiskaming Board of Health endorse Public Health Sudbury and District's [Motion #60-23](#) "Public Health Strengthening and Chronic Disease Prevention" (Appendix A) and send a letter indicating this endorsement to Premier Ford and Ministers Jones and Tibollo.

### Overview

Local health promotion work is key to addressing the high impact that chronic disease has on length and quality of life in Timiskaming. This briefing note builds on collaborative work undertaken in fall 2023 by a group of public health professionals under the leadership of Health Promotion Ontario to develop a [White Paper on the Value of Local Health Promotion in Ontario](#).

### Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023 Links

This work directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Ontario Public Health Standards (2021) and supports all four of the THU 2019-2023 Strategic Directions:

1. We infuse our work with learning and passion
  - We develop and engage all people in our organization to make effective use of our collective skills and experience
  - We are a resilient, cohesive and responsive team of skilled professionals
  - We support the wellbeing of our workforce
  - We apply a health equity lens in all our work
2. We create, share and exchange knowledge
  - We use the best available information, including local lived experience, to inform local programs and services
  - We exchange information with communities and partners to broaden our understanding of local needs
  - We create quality data to address gaps in knowledge and to identify changing local needs
  - We share our knowledge with stakeholders to understand the causes and impacts of health inequities
3. We collaborate with partners to make a difference in our communities
  - We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health
  - We mobilize diverse and inclusive community resources in addressing the Social Determinants of Health and climate change to reduce health inequities
  - We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities
4. We adapt to address the diverse and changing local needs
  - Our programs and services are evidence-informed, customized and evaluated to ensure they address local needs
  - We clarify roles with partners and allied agencies to reduce duplication, fill gaps and maximize our collective impact to create healthy populations
  - We engage in meaningful relationships that respect and respond to our cultural and linguistic diversity

## **Background**

Ontario is facing multiple competing crises, including an opioid epidemic and crises related to mental health, homelessness, and climate change. We are also witnessing the unsustainable burden of chronic diseases on our healthcare system and the populations we serve. In Ontario, chronic diseases are the leading cause of mortality, accounting for approximately 75% of all deaths (1) and direct healthcare costs of \$10.5 billion per annum. Additionally, the four leading risk factors for these chronic diseases (i.e., tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating) cost Ontario \$19.7 billion in direct and indirect costs (1). The burden of chronic diseases and chronic disease risk factors also disproportionately impacts those with the lowest socioeconomic status (1). This is important, as the main risk factors for chronic diseases are modifiable, and therefore their prevalence and subsequent impact on the healthcare system and society are reduceable.

## **Issue**

Local public health plays a critical role in promoting and protecting health in local populations. Health promotion can be leveraged to enhance responses to current crises while strengthening local resilience to future threats. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant pause in health promotion work due to the reassignment of public health staff to disease prevention and health protection measures, resulting in low completion rates of OPHS programming related to areas such as healthy eating and physical activity, mental health, and substance use (2). This pause, and the increase in health inequities seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (3–12), will have measurable effects on the health of Ontarians.

## **The Value of Health Promotion**

A sustained response to current and future threats is needed to ensure the health of our local populations. Health promotion is uniquely suited to address such threats, offering a multi-faceted approach to support healthy behaviours and healthy communities at the local level by building healthy public policies, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services (13). Such upstream efforts could prevent 40% of cancer cases, 90-94% of first myocardial infarction, 65-90% of CVD incidence, and 50-60% of Type 2 Diabetes incidence (1). Additionally, health promotion efforts forge strong links with the social service system, working with diverse partners outside the healthcare system to address the underlying factors that shape health, healthy communities, and healthy populations. It is an evidence-based, well researched, and cost-effective strategy with demonstrated success in local public health units across Ontario (14).

## **Local Relevance**

Chronic diseases and injuries are responsible for the majority of deaths in Timiskaming, including those for individuals under the age of 64 (15). Timiskaming's life expectancy is statistically lower than Ontario's and health risks such as smoking, alcohol use, physical activity and nutrition are associated with decreased life expectancy (15). Furthermore, Timiskaming's residents are more likely than within any other Ontario health unit area to die from preventable causes (53% of male and 60% of female deaths are due to preventable causes) (15).

The local nature of health promotion and chronic disease prevention is of special importance to Timiskaming's largely rural population; rural communities have distinct geographical, social, and government characteristics that require place-based approaches (16).

THU currently employs seven public health promoters and one Registered Dietitian to carry out the comprehensive health promotion work described above that aims to prevent early death due to chronic disease and injury. Their connections to local community, deep knowledge and strong health promotion skills make them uniquely positioned to identify and address the factors that lead to chronic disease and injury in Timiskaming. Their work to lead collaborative, intersectoral work to address local issues related to active travel, substance use and community safety and wellbeing is essential to the wellbeing of residents in Timiskaming.

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**Appendix A PHSD Motion #60-23**

## **Public Health Strengthening and Chronic Disease Prevention (Motion #60-23)**

*Moved by Noland – Signoretti*

*Approved by Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts, October 19, 2023*

### **60-23 Public Health Strengthening and Chronic Disease Prevention**

*WHEREAS the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts is committed to ensuring it addresses the public health needs and health equity in its catchment area, as aligned with board of health requirements under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and Ontario Public Health Standards; and*

*WHEREAS Health Promotion Ontario's White Paper on the Value of Local Health Promotion in Ontario recommends strong and sustained investment in local health promotion by public health units to ensure that health promotion is prioritized on an ongoing basis; and*

*WHEREAS the Board recognizes that there are opportunities for system improvements as part of the review of board roles and responsibilities announced under the government's Public Health Strengthening initiative, including an assessment of its role in chronic disease prevention through health promotion interventions; and*

*WHEREAS chronic diseases are mostly preventable, are the cause of 75% of deaths in Ontario, and incur \$10.5 billion in direct health care costs in the province; and*

*WHEREAS as the scope and intensity of infectious disease risks increase in the context of finite resources, there is a risk of under-resourcing public health actions that work on longer horizon chronic disease prevention;*

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT in the context of the Public Health Strengthening roles and responsibilities deliberations, the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts urges all health system actors to remain committed to maintaining appropriate investments in health promotion and chronic disease prevention, while ensuring health risks associated with its health protection work are managed;*

*AND FURTHER THAT the Board request that the Chief Medical Officer of Health ensure proactive local engagement in the sector-driven review of the Ontario Public Health Standards.*

**CARRIED**