



THU COVID-19 First Wave Response Evaluation

Health System and Municipal Partner Survey Results -Summary

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Background

On March 17, 2020 the Government of Ontario declared an emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To limit and delay the epidemic spread of COVID-19, several public health measures were enacted by the Ontario government to keep people at home including the closure of schools, childcare, restaurants, all nonessential businesses, public spaces, and the prohibition of events and gatherings.¹ Population-level public health measures also included asking everyone to practice physical distancing (previously referred to as social distancing).

Since the beginning of 2020, and more specifically since March, Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) has been leading the local public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On May 19, 2020 Ontario entered Stage 1 of the Framework for Reopening the Province, with most of the province entering Stage 2 on June 12 and stage 3 on July 24, 2020. With reopening underway THU began planning an evaluation to better understand the first wave response and to plan for ongoing improvements. This work would support effective public health emergency response and is in alignment with THU's 2019-2023 strategic plan. To accomplish this, THU sought feedback from various perspectives including a survey of health system and municipal partners in the THU area.

Overall, evaluation findings can be used to inform response efforts and protect our communities by building on aspects of the response that worked well and that should continue or be enhanced during resurgence and future waves. Furthermore, this data can help highlight experiences and lessons learned during the first wave to course correct where possible for effective and efficient response efforts during subsequent waves.

Methods

Survey Design and Distribution

Survey questions were developed drawing on survey tools from other Ontario Public Health Units.

Approximately 130 health system and municipal partners were invited to participate in the survey by email ([Appendix A](#)). The partners were those who received an invitation to the regular THU partner calls that began in March 2020 and were continuing at the time of the survey. The online survey (available via Survey Monkey) was open from July 14 to July 27, 2020 during which time partners also received a reminder email ([Appendix A](#)).

Analysis

The epidemiologist analyzed quantitative results and created figures to illustrate the findings.

Qualitative analysis was conducted by two reviewers, who sorted all comments into 'Successes' or 'Challenges/barriers' and then sorted them by broader theme (communication, coordination and support).

Consensus was used to agree on wording and resolve any discordant information regarding themes.

Analysis by Stakeholder Group

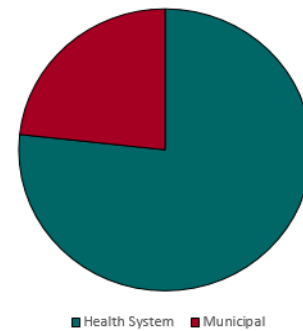
Upon analysis and review of the quantitative data, it was determined that there were not any significant differences between health system partners and municipal partners and their perceptions about THU's COVID-19 response.

However, differing opinions and perceptions about what worked best and areas of focus moving forward were noted in the open-ended questions. These differences are highlighted under the appropriate category, below.

Survey Audience

In total, there were 43 stakeholders who completed the questionnaire. Overall, **23%** of respondents indicated that they were a municipal partner and the remaining **77%** were health system partners (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Respondents by sector



Findings

Meeting Frequency

Participants were asked if the frequency of THU's COVID-19 partner meetings met their needs; **98%** responded yes.

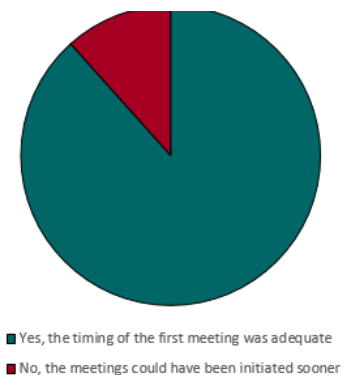
Meeting Format

Participants were asked if THU's partner meetings were conducted in a format that met their needs; **93%** responded yes.

Meeting Initiation

Participants were asked about the timeliness of the initiation of the partner meetings. Overall, **88%** of respondents believed that the timing of the first partner call/meeting in the district was adequate (*Figure 2*). Of those who believed that timing of the first meeting was not adequate, **80%** provided feedback suggesting initiating meetings 2–4 weeks sooner would have been desirable.

Figure 2. Timeliness of meeting initiation



Meeting Usefulness

In general respondents felt that THU partner meetings were adequate and helpful.

- **95%** responded that the information provided at THU weekly meetings was sufficient.
- **84%** indicated that the information provided was culturally and linguistically accessible.
- Nearly all respondents (**98%**) either agreed or strongly agreed that the THU partner meetings facilitated their agencies/organizations overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Figure 3*).
- Similarly **98%** of respondents also either agreed or strongly agreed that the THU partner meetings helped to clarify information received from other sources (*Figure 4*).
- Finally, **93%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the THU partner meetings contributed to a coordinated response across the region (*Figure 5*).

Figure 3. THU partner meetings facilitated my agencies overall response to COVID-19

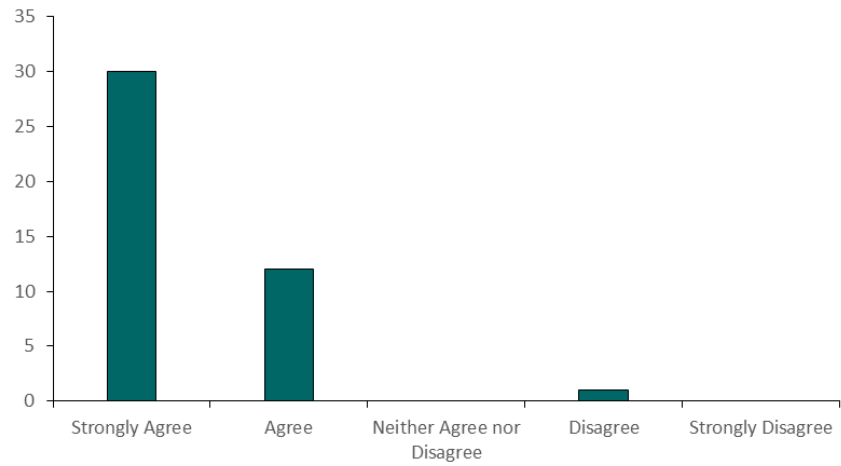


Figure 4. THU partner meetings helped to clarify information received from various sources

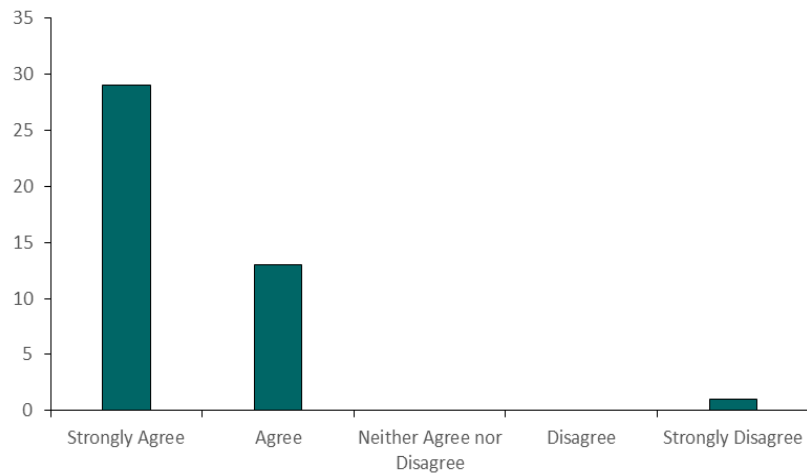
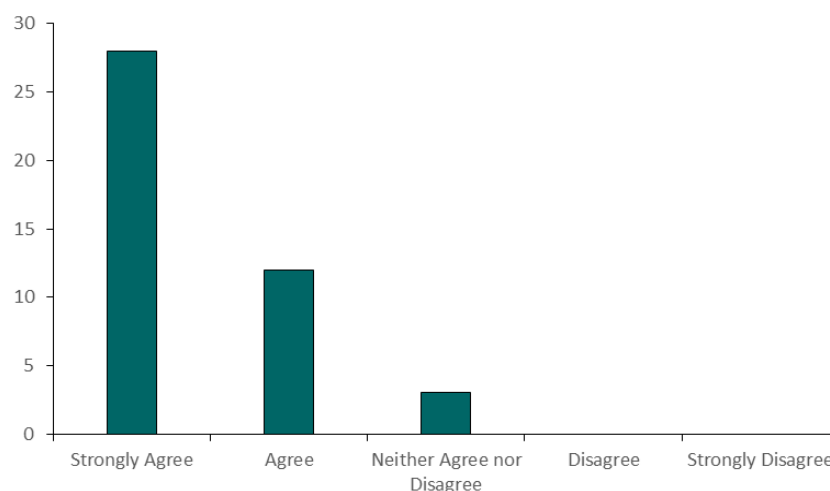


Figure 5. THU’s partner meetings contributed to a coordinated pandemic response across the Timiskaming Health Unit region



Response Coordination and Support and Successes and Challenges

Respondents were asked to share any additional comments for each question relating to timing, format, frequency and usefulness of the partner meetings. In addition, the survey included 3 open-ended questions regarding what worked well with THU’s coordination of the pandemic response and support of system partners during COVID 19; how THU’s pandemic response coordination and support of partners during COVID 19 can be improved; and any other additional comments.

The comments are summarized below.

Communication

Successes

- Messaging in both languages was appreciated
- Overall format was well received (Zoom was preferred over phone: **3 mentions**)
- Information discussed in meetings was also available offline
- Information was relevant and shared in a timely manner

Challenges or Barriers

- Request for additional French resources
- Technological difficulties during meetings
- Conflicting information between meetings & follow up emails/phone calls
- Lack of information publically available on the THU website

Although overall success and challenges related to *communication* were similar across both municipal and health system partners, **health system partners** believed there could be room for improvement in French communications/resources.

In addition, **municipal partners** believed that meetings could have helped to clarify information received from other sources better, that there was conflicting information received, and information on THU website was lacking.

Coordination

Successes

- Allowed for the identification of priorities
- Facilitated communication between relevant stakeholders
- Assisted in understanding Ministry guidelines/recommendations

Challenges or Barriers

- Other Ministries were missing from table
- Adjustment to meeting frequency (more or less often) didn't occur when necessary

Overall, there were similar opinions of the successes and challenges as they relate to *coordination* between municipal and health system partners.

However, the perception that meetings allowed for setting/identifying priorities was uniquely mentioned by **health system partners** only. Similarly, it was **health system partners** who identified a lack of adjustment of meeting schedule (when necessary/required).

Municipal partners made up the 7% of respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed about whether THU partner meetings contributed to a coordinated pandemic response across the Timiskaming District.

Support

Successes

- Ability to ask questions (in and off calls)
- Rationale for any decisions made were explained
- Resources to help answer staff questions

Challenges or Barriers

- Lack of enforcement support
- Lack of municipality-specific recommendations
- Lack of consistency in District (focus was on larger municipal areas e.g. Kirkland Lake and City of Temiskaming Shores)

In general, respondents felt their organization was well *supported* by the THU. **Municipal partners** commented on their appreciation of the ability to ask questions (in and off the calls). They felt that

partner calls could be improved by providing more municipality-specific recommendations, ensuring consistency across the entire district and information on enforcement support for provincial orders.

Health system partners on the other hand, appreciated the clear and transparent rationale for decisions made by the THU and the accessibility of resources to disseminate within their settings. There were no evident themes in terms of challenges and barriers specific to health system partners.

Conclusion

This evaluation report describes perspectives from both health system and municipal partners on the Timiskaming Health Unit's first wave COVID-19 response. Overall, the results indicate that THU's response and supporting processes during the first wave of the pandemic were adequate and effective. Additionally, stakeholders offered valuable insight regarding opportunities to improve and sustain the THU COVID-19 response.

Timiskaming health Unit must:

- provide current, clear, concise, communications and ensure resources are bilingual
- ensure that THU website is current
- ensure adequate collaboration and communication with community partners and stakeholders across the district to address new, changing, and complex challenges, and ensure consistency in coordination and support

THU is grateful that partners generously provided feedback. These findings will be helpful when building on aspects of our COVID-19 response as well as help in the planning and preparation for future waves and emergencies.

Limitations

The goal of this survey was to quickly collect feedback from local partners related to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the need to produce rapid results and recommendations to improve THU's pandemic response the results face limitations.

The survey was voluntary and anonymous. The responses collected only represent the opinions of those who responded, and therefore results may not be generalizable to all system partners.

Participants of the survey may also have suffered from *recall bias*, particularly due to the length of the pandemic response. Similarly, participants may have a *response bias*, giving answers they think are correct, or 'most acceptable'. The survey was designed to be anonymous, which may reduce the risk of response bias.

References

1. Nielsen, K. (2020). A timeline of the novel coronavirus in Ontario. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6859636/ontario-coronavirus-timeline/>

Appendix A

Invitation to Stakeholders sent July 14, 2020

Hello,

I hope everyone is doing well and finding some time to enjoy the summer weather. I am contacting you because we are conducting a review of our THU emergency response to COVID-19. Feedback from system partners at this time will help identify opportunities for us to improve for a second wave and also for future emergencies. You are receiving a request to complete a short survey because you were on the distribution list for one of my weekly system partner calls.

The overall survey findings will be used internally at THU. The survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. It will take up to 10 minutes to complete. We ask that you complete the survey found here <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H22CDY3> by **Monday July 27**. Thank you to those who tested the survey for us, this is a friendly reminder for you to also complete this version of the survey. If you have any questions, please contact Adrienne Gullekson gulleksona@timiskaminghu.com.

Thank you for your time and feedback.

Stay well,

Glenn

Stakeholder Reminder Email sent July 23, 2020

Hello

Sending along a friendly reminder that THU is seeking your feedback regarding our response to the first wave of COVID-19. **A link to our survey is below.**

Your feedback will provide valuable information to ensure our work is efficient and effective for future waves.

Participation in this survey is confidential. The survey will be open until end of day Monday July 27, 2020.

Thank you for your time and feedback.