



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health  
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

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## FOODNET CANADA ONTARIO SENTINEL SITE UPDATE AND MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

### **Recommendation**

*It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 40-22, re: “FoodNet Canada Ontario Sentinel Site Update and Memorandum of Agreement” for information.*

### **Key Points**

- Since 2014, the Health Unit has participated in the Public Health Agency of Canada’s FoodNet program as the sentinel site for Ontario. This partnership has been mutually beneficial for the Health Unit, provincial public health stakeholders, and the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- FoodNet Canada is a multi-partner sentinel surveillance program for food- and water-borne illnesses. Surveillance results have generated evidence that changed federal food regulations.
- The FoodNet Canada Memorandum of Agreement has been renewed for another two-year term (2022 – 2024), with associated federal funding in an amount up to \$289,655.

### **Background**

The Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) has been the Ontario sentinel site for the Public Health Agency of Canada’s (PHAC) FoodNet Canada (FNC) program since 2014. Currently there are a total of four sentinel sites across Canada, located in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec.

FNC is a multi-partner, enhanced surveillance program for food- and water-borne illnesses with the purpose of determining what foods and other sources are making Canadians ill. FNC is the PHAC surveillance program with the ability to examine trends in enteric illness and to assess risk over time to determine public health impact. FNC considers enteric illnesses from a unique perspective which integrates enhanced follow-up of human cases of selected enteric diseases, testing of retail food products of interest, sampling of manure from local farms and collection of surface water for infectious agents that can cause illnesses.

MLHU is responsible for carrying out three of FNC’s program components: enhanced follow-up of human cases reported among Middlesex-London residents, purchase of retail food items, and collection of water from the Thames River. The food and water samples are tested for infectious pathogens. Participation in the FNC program has been a great success and one that continues to be mutually beneficial for MLHU, its provincial public health partners, and PHAC. Health Unit staff collaborate with an expanded network of local, provincial, and federal public health partners, enhancing knowledge and practice through access to evidence-based research and knowledge exchange activities. MLHU continues to be recognized as a provincial leader in infectious disease surveillance.

Access to FNC’s enhanced surveillance data, including expanded laboratory analysis, has allowed the Health Unit the opportunity to better understand the nature and causes of food-borne illnesses in the Middlesex-London region, and was used in the investigation of local *Salmonella* outbreaks in 2018, 2020 and 2021.

## Food Safety Success

In recent years, Canadian outbreaks of *Salmonella* infection have been linked to the consumption of frozen breaded chicken products (nuggets and strips). FNC data, collected through enhanced case follow-up and ongoing retail product sampling, have provided compelling evidence regarding the possible burden of illness associated with these products. After FNC presented this evidence, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced new industry standards whereby instances of *Salmonella* must be below detectable limits in all frozen breaded chicken products. FNC's ongoing surveillance activities will be used to assess the effectiveness of this new food safety policy.

## 2022 – 2024 Memorandum of Agreement

PHAC is pleased with MLHU's ongoing success as the program's Ontario sentinel site and has offered to extend funding until March 31, 2024. PHAC funding to MLHU includes a 1.0 FTE Site Coordinator and a 0.2 FTE Retail Sampler to conduct weekly food sampling across the Middlesex-London region. Funding is also provided for office expenses, administration, and staff training, as outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement (see [Appendix A](#)). Total federal funding for the entire program is \$289,655.

## Next Steps

In serving as the FNC Ontario sentinel site, MLHU will continue to collect high-quality data and make an important contribution to reducing the burden of food- and water-borne illnesses at the local, provincial, and federal levels.

This report was prepared by the Environmental Health and Infectious Diseases Division.



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