

Middlesex-London Board of Health External Landscape Review – May 2024

The purpose of this briefing note is to inform MLHU Board of Health members about what is happening in the world of public health and impacts to the work of the MLHU and Board. This includes governance and legislative changes, news from other local public units, external reports on important public health matters, learning opportunities and MLHU events. **Please note that items listed on this correspondence are to inform Board members and are not necessarily an endorsement.**

Local Public Health News



BRANT COUNTY HEALTH UNIT

Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit and Brant County Health Unit to pursue merger

The Boards of Health for the Brant County Health Unit (BCHU) and

Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit (HNHU) have reached a decision to pursue the next step by signing a letter of intent to merge.

Following the Ministry of Health's August 2023 announcement offering one-time funding, resources, and support for local public health agency mergers by January 1, 2025, the BCHU, HNHU, as well as Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) began exploring potential alignments and options.

A Joint Board Merger Working Group, including representatives from each health unit, worked with the consulting firm Sense & Nous to prepare a comprehensive Feasibility Assessment Report. This report was recently presented to each health units' Board of Health to aid in their decision-making process.

During BCHU's meeting on April 17, 2024, the Board of Health voted to proceed with a business case for a prospective merger with HNHU. On April 23, 2024, the HNHU Board of Health also decided to pursue a business case for a merger with BCHU.

To learn more, please read the media releases from April 26 on [Haldimand-Norfolk](#) and [Brant](#) Public Health websites.

SWPH Board votes against voluntary merger

The Southwestern Public Health Board of Health has voted against voluntarily merging with Brant County Health Unit and Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit after completing a comprehensive feasibility assessment into a proposed three-way merger.



The three health units began exploring potential alignment options in connection with Ontario's Strengthening Public Health Strategy. An independent consulting firm prepared a feasibility assessment report and presented it to all three Boards of Health to aid in their decision-making process.

While the study identified opportunities to enhance collaboration that exists between the three health units, the Southwestern Public Health Board of Health found no clear indication that the merger would result in improved health outcomes for communities in Elgin County, Oxford County, and the City of St. Thomas. The SWPH previously went through a merger of Oxford and Elgin Public Health units in 2018.

To learn more, please read the media release from April 26 on [Southwestern Public Health](#)'s website.

Boards of Health not Proceeding with a Merger in Northwestern Ontario

On April 17, the Boards of Health for Northwestern and Thunder Bay District announced that they would not be proceeding with a voluntary merger of their public health units.



The Boards of Health for NWHU and TBDHU decided to form a Voluntary Merger Assessment Committee in November 2023, and retained a third-party consultant, MNP LLP, to explore the viability of a merger for the two health units in the province's northwest.

The merger assessment considered the benefits and risks of a merger with respect to programming, service delivery, financial integration, information technology, human resources and capital infrastructure. The assessment did not demonstrate a level of benefit over risks that could justify the significant disruption and cost of a merger. In addition, it would be a challenge in ensuring that the 34 municipalities within a merged entity had a voice and adequate representation within its governance structure.

TBDHU covers an area of 230,000 square kilometers with over 153,000 residents. This area includes 15 municipalities, 25 First Nations, and unorganized communities and areas in the Thunder Bay District. NWHU serves 19 municipalities across an area of 173,828 square kilometers with a population of approximately 82,000.

To learn more, please read the media releases from April 17 on [Thunder Bay District](#) and [Northwestern Public Health websites](#).

Impact to MLHU Board of Health

On August 22, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Health (through Minister Sylvia Jones) announced their plan to invest in a stronger public health sector. One of the avenues was to provide financial incentives to public health units wishing to begin a voluntary merger process.



Canadian Dental Care Plan begins May 1

Starting on May 1, the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) will begin providing dental coverage to those aged 70 and meet eligibility requirements. The CDCP is a new federal dental program that provides dental coverage to eligible Canadians who file taxes, have incomes below \$90,000 and don't have access to private dental insurance.

Most routine dental care will be covered under the CDCP, including cleanings, X-rays, fillings, root canals and dentures. The CDCP will pay for dental services first, before Ontario's programs (Seniors Dental Care and Healthy Smiles) if the individual is eligible.

To learn more about the Canadian Dental Care Plan, visit the [CDCP website](#).

Impact to MLHU Board of Health

Oral health is health, and it is acknowledged that many members of the Middlesex-London community do not have access to oral health care due to financial barriers. The Board of Health looks forward to the coordination of providing dental services to those who need them through federal and provincial programs.



alPHA's Workplace Health and Wellness Month this May

May is here and it's the start of alPHA's Workplace Health and Wellness Month! This is an opportunity to start improving your physical and mental well-being.

alPHA members are encouraged to engage in various activities to improve their physical and mental health for 30 minutes per day during the month of May.

Home: Work in the garden or mow the grass. Rake leaves, prune, and dig. Go out for a short walk before breakfast, after dinner or both! Why not start the day off with meditation? Start with 5-10 minutes and work up to 30 minutes.

Work: Many of us have sedentary jobs. If you can, use active transportation to get to and from your workplace. Go for a walk at lunchtime. Incorporate these activities into your workday. Start with short walks and work up to longer trips. Practice mindfulness. Engage in fun team building exercises.

Play: Play and recreation are important for good health. Look for opportunities to be active and have fun at the same time: Plan activities that include physical activity (hiking, backpacking, swimming, etc.). Do your favourite physical activities and regularly go walking, jogging, or cycling. Start with achievable goals and work your way up to regular exercise routines.

Anytime: Prepare a healthy snack or meal, take a picture, and share it with the recipe.

Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board of Health supports active living, especially during May's Workplace Wellness Month. You can participate in Workplace Health and Wellness Month by sharing your progress on X (formerly known as Twitter). Include a picture, tag [@PHAgenies](#) and use the hashtags #PublicHealthLeaders and #alPHA2024.

National, Provincial and Local Public Health Advocacy

Ontario Cracking Down on Cellphone Use and Banning Vaping in Schools

On April 28, Minister of Education Steven Lecce announced that Ontario will be banning vaping and cellphone use in schools starting in September 2024.

Specifically, for vaping, the following rules are to be created by schools for vape, tobacco and nicotine products:

- Every school will have uniform policy to have students immediately surrender vape, tobacco and nicotine products in their possession with parents/guardians notified immediately.
- Strengthening existing mandatory learning on cannabis and vaping within the Health and Physical Education curriculum.
- Investing \$30 million over three years to provide schools with critical safety infrastructure funding for security upgrades, such as vape detectors.
- Providing \$500,000 to community partners to provide education and supports related to student use of vape, tobacco, nicotine and cannabis products.
- Public Health agencies to continue to be utilized to support education and enforcement where necessary for reoccurring problems, including supports through the STOP program (smoking cessation) through CAMH and the Quash program through the Lung Health Foundation.



Ministry of Education

To learn more, please read the [backgrounder](#) and [media release](#) from the Ontario Government newsroom.

Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board of Health has heard from staff on the negative impacts that vaping has on young people and supported the advocacy efforts on advising the government of impacts of vaping on young people. So far in 2024, the Board has heard [Report No. 05-24](#), [Report No. 15-24](#) and [Report No. 16-24](#) which discuss negative impacts of vaping on youth.

Canada

Canada's 2024 Budget

On April 16, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, released Budget 2024: Fairness for Every Generation.

Related to public health, the following highlights of the 2024 budget include:

- Providing nearly \$200 billion over ten years to strengthen universal public health care for Canadians, including \$1.7 billion to support wage increases for personal support workers and related professions, and \$5.4 billion for long-term care and home and community care to help people age with dignity close to home
- Rolling out the Canadian Dental Care Plan to provide dental coverage for uninsured Canadians with a family income of less than \$90,000
- Launching the first phase of the National Strategy for Drugs for Rare Diseases to help increase access to, and affordability of, effective drugs for rare diseases for patients across Canada
- Expand enrollment in health care education programs by over 700 spots
- Modernize digital infrastructure, including information reporting, collection, and sharing
- Make health care more convenient, connected, and patient-centered by expanding the availability of electronic health information and increasing the number of health professionals who can securely access and share it.
- Budget 2024 proposes to provide \$4 million over two years, starting in 2024-25, for the Public Health Agency of Canada to continue supporting initiatives through the Mental Health of Black Canadians Fund that aim to increase health equity and address mental health and its determinants for Black Canadians.
- Budget 2024 proposes to provide \$7.5 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support Kids Help Phone in their work providing mental health, counselling, and crisis support to young people
- Budget 2024 proposes to provide \$150 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to Health Canada for an Emergency Treatment Fund, open to municipalities and Indigenous communities to help provide rapid responses to emergent, critical needs related to the opioid crisis.

To read the entire 2024 federal budget, please visit the [Government of Canada's Budget website](#).

Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board of Health provided a submission in February 2024 ([Report No. 09-24](#)) for the 2024 federal budget consultation. The submission highlighted advocating for increased funding to support local public health services provided to newcomers due to increased work providing vaccinations, increased tuberculosis cases and supporting more infant screening.