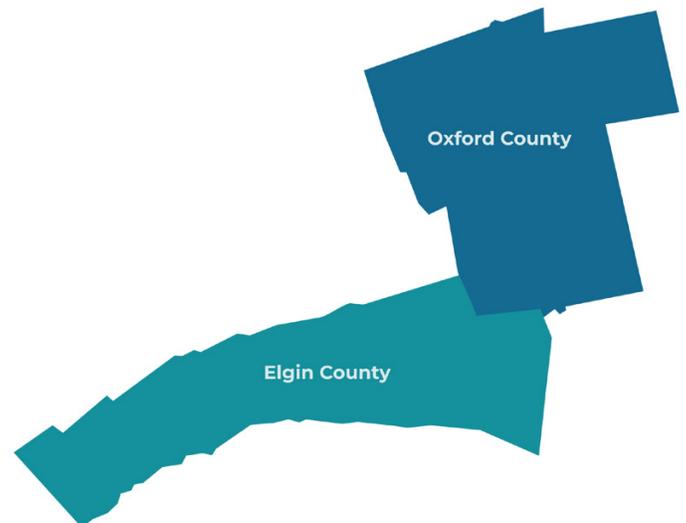


Public Health Modernization Consultation



Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) is excited about the Ministry of Health's review of the public health sector. We know that the Ministry values the important role that public health plays in helping Ontarians achieve optimal health and well-being.

Southwestern Public Health takes this opportunity to provide the Ministry with some key points for consideration as it modernizes public health. SWPH is in a unique position to participate in this consultation, not only because of its value in the communities that it serves, but also because of its recent amalgamation. We see benefits and challenges with the latter and we are pleased to share these in the spirit of assisting the Ministry in making needed changes in the system.



STRENGTHS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Maintain the strengths in the existing public health system:



Local presence that supports deep and diverse partnerships with municipalities, schools, community and social agencies; engagement with community leaders; for example, the Community Leaders' Cabinet and Healthy Communities Partnership



Comprehensive models of care delivery ranging from disease prevention (e.g. safe water) to health protection (e.g. vaccination) to health promotion (e.g. walkability)



Legislative authority under the HPPA that supports ability to protect and promote the health of the public



Access to support of Public Health Ontario for clinical decision-making, evidence-informed decision-making, coordination of response to public health outbreaks, laboratory services



Programs and services that meet a range of local client needs be they individuals, families, communities, priority populations, the system. Cradle to grave programs and services that support communities (e.g. the environment) and people to be healthier



Programs and services that focus more resources on areas of greater need and groups of people who face the greatest challenges getting what they need to be healthy



Programs and services that always include interventions that will support the community to be healthier. Even individual health interventions benefit the community e.g. vaccinating individuals contributes to building population immunity which protects everyone

LOCAL VERSUS PROVINCIAL

There are opportunities to strengthen the system by keeping some core functions local and other elements provincially coordinated and/or delivered.



Local (Current Health Unit Region)

- Data-sharing and affiliation agreements
- Planning and implementation of programs and services according to the Ontario Public Health Standards and local needs
- Customization/targeting of provincial responses to align with needs of priority populations
- Daily management of human resources, communications, finance, facilities and information technology services
- Emergency preparedness and response work with municipalities and first responders

Provincial

- Strategy and system design work in the areas of communications, procurement, information technology such as Electronic Medical Record development, databases to support program/service delivery, development of communications platforms, etc.
- Planning and oversight of specific elements of Human Resources, Communications, Finance and IT Support through best practices and resources e.g. workplace violence assessments, software maintenance, support and template creation
- Aspects of Foundational Standards, specifically population health assessments, evaluation, continuous quality improvement planning, performance measurement
- Healthy public policy initiatives
- Mandating a health-in-all policies approach across provincial Ministries
- Health education campaigns such as “Rethink Your Drink”
- Work of provincial associations like Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) and Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA) that unite public health units around shared issues and support advocacy beyond the public health system
- Expertise provided by Public Health Ontario that assists local planning and program/service delivery, evidence-informed decision making

PUBLIC HEALTH'S CONNECTION WITH THE HEALTH SECTOR AND BEYOND

While public health is not about the care of sick people, it needs to maintain and strengthen its connections with other sectors to achieve optimal health and wellbeing for all.

Public health has had significant success:

- Collecting, analyzing, and sharing local data with local partners
- Connecting with diverse groups of stakeholders. We work beyond the health care system to build a healthier society in partnership with others including government, non-government and citizen organizations
- Working with local Ontario Health Teams to develop these new entities in our communities
- Actively participating in citizen organizations at a local level e.g. Bridges Out of Poverty
- Participating in municipal planning and local initiatives i.e. age friendly strategy, walkability work, access to affordable public transit
- Forming relationships with priority populations and those involved in supporting them e.g. Low German-speaking Mennonites



How to better connect?

- Legislated cooperation with other sectors would assist significantly in our efforts to build a healthier society (e.g. reciprocal data-sharing with school boards that would provide us with better understanding of students' health needs and allow us to design and implement more tailored programs and services)
- Leverage technology to bridge rural and regional boundaries (e.g. video conferencing for internal meetings, community partner meetings)

BOUNDARIES/LEADERSHIP/GOVERNANCE

There are several previous Ministry reports that discuss this area. It is recommended that:

- Any Health Unit mergers be based in part on consideration of shared core attributes that they share (e.g. rural/urban/mixed)
- 100,000 – 500,000 population is ideal to achieve optimal public health performance
- Multimillion-dollar agencies require both a CEO position and a MOH position given they perform different functions and they require different competencies and qualifications
- Autonomous boards of health are optimal for governance allowing the Health Unit's sole focus to be on public health priorities
- "Pay for Say" – Contributing municipalities are represented within the boards of health based on their municipal levy percentage
- If a different model is chosen by the Ministry that doesn't have "pay for say," consider a new funding model that has public health 100% provincially funded



THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF AMALGAMATIONS

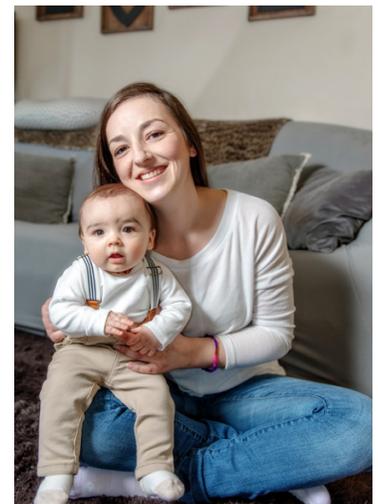
SWPH is in a unique position to offer its thoughts on the benefits and challenges of public health amalgamations given its recent experience.

Benefits

- Voluntary mergers that naturally make sense are much more effective and efficient than involuntary mergers
- Realized cost savings over time
- Increased capacity in program and services area as well as administrative areas
- Innovation and resetting of static ideas and approaches to organizing the work
- Sharing and expansion of best practices as diverse experiences inform program and service design and delivery

Challenges

- Change fatigue of staff and board is real
- Increased money and time required upfront to save money and time down the road
- Mergers are hard work. Greater energy, time and financial investment is needed initially at the administrative level (systems development, strategic direction, policies and procedures, organizational culture development, amalgamation of collective agreements) leaving less of these resources available to support program and service delivery, ongoing organizational culture development
- New local relationship development is time and resource intensive yet necessary for program and service success
- The bulk of the hard work happens after the merger and can take years to yield results (e.g. culture change)





VISION

Healthy people
in vibrant
communities.

MISSION

Leading the way in
promoting and protecting
the health of people in
our communities, resulting
in better health for all.

VALUES

Evidence
Collaboration
Accountability
Quality
Equity

Woodstock Site

519-421-9901
1-800-922-0096
info@swpublichealth.ca
410 Buller Street
Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 4N2

St. Thomas Site

519-631-9900
1-800-922-0096
info@swpublichealth.ca
1230 Talbot Street
St. Thomas, Ontario, N5P 1G9



www.swpublichealth.ca