

Operation Health Protection Update

Public Health Division
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A Message from Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health

I am pleased to provide you with the first of a series of updates on activities related to *Operation Health Protection: An Action Plan to Prevent Threats to our Health and to Promote a Healthy Ontario* (OHP). OHP is a three-year action plan that was released by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in June 2004. It was developed in response to recommendations from the final Report of the Expert Panel on SARS and Infectious Disease Control (Walker Panel) and the first Interim Campbell Report, both of which examined the impact of the SARS crisis on Ontario's health care system. In Justice Campbell's second Interim Report, released on April 11, 2005 he highlighted the importance of the work being carried out under Operation Health Protection.

Here are some of the initiatives currently under way:

The Agency Implementation Task Force was established to provide technical advice on the development and implementation of Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Agency and will confirm the mandate, core activities, structure and governance of the Agency.

The Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee was struck to provide expert advice to the CMOH, on prevention, surveillance and control measures necessary to protect the people of Ontario from infectious diseases.

The Integrated Public Health Information System is a web-based integrated database that will assist all health units in case and outbreak management and the reporting of communicable and reportable disease information.

The Capacity Review Committee (CRC) is reviewing the capacity of local public health units and how public health services and programs are delivered across the province. It will advise the government on options to improve the local public health unit systems.

This inaugural issue features the Capacity Review Committee of OHP. In subsequent issues, we will provide information on some of our other exciting initiatives.

CRC Sub-Committees Begin Work on Public Health Renewal

The Capacity Review Committee has established the following sub-committees to support the Public Health Capacity Review:

- *Public Health Human Resources*, chaired by Diane Bewick, Director, Family Health Services, Middlesex-London Health Unit.
- *Public Health System Accountabilities*, chaired by Lori Chow, Director, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention, Thunder Bay District Health Unit.
- *Research and Knowledge Transfer*, Co-chaired by Brian Hyndman, Citizen Representative, Toronto Board of Health and Jennifer Zelmer, Vice-President of Research and Analytical Service, CIHI. This sub-committee also works closely with the Agency Implementation Task Force.
- *Governance and Structure*, chaired by Alex Munter, Visiting Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa.
- *Public Health Funding*, chaired by Dr. Liana Nolan, Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health, Waterloo Regional Health Unit.

Focus on Capacity Review Committee

A strategic priority, as outlined in *Operation Health Protection*, is the renewal of public health, including: rebuilding public health capacity within the province; enhancing public health leadership and accountability; and, improving system collaboration and partnerships among public health and other parts of the health system.

The Capacity Review Committee (CRC), which was struck in January 2005, has been given the mandate to examine and address these issues within the public health system. The CRC is led by Dr. Susan Tamblyn (Chair), former Medical Officer of Health for Perth District Health Unit and Brian Hyndman (Vice-Chair), Citizen Representative with the Toronto Board of Health. The committee membership includes a variety of people from public health units and the academic sector.

The CRC will use various methods to communicate with and seek feedback from the public health field and groups during the next few months (see *Consulting with the Field*). An interim report is expected in the summer of 2005 with a presentation of final recommendations in December 2005.

Terms of Reference

The CRC will provide advice to the government through the Chief Medical Officer of Health in the following areas:

- Core capacities required at the local level to meet communities' specific needs and to effectively provide public health services.
- Issues related to recruitment, retention, education and professional development of public health professionals in key disciplines.
- Operational, governance and systemic issues that may impede the delivery of public health programs and services.
- Mechanisms to improve systems for programmatic and financial accountability, including compliance with the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, associated Regulations and the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines.
- Organizational models for public health units that optimize alignment with the configuration and functions of the Local Health Integration Networks, primary care organizations and municipal services.
- Staffing requirements and potential operating and transitional costs.

Consulting with the Field

The capacity review will include extensive consultations with public health units (PHUs), municipalities, professional associations, academics and other stakeholders through surveys, interviews and focus groups, reviews of best practice in other jurisdictions, a reference panel with professional associations and roundtable discussions with experts on key theme areas.

The first phase of data collection (May - June 2005) includes distribution of surveys to those working in public health:

- An organization survey to be completed by each PHU in Ontario.
- A general survey to all PHU staff and board of health members to be completed by individuals.
- Focused consultative questions to professional groups, public health associations and the municipal sector.

These surveys will identify issues and potential solutions in each of the following areas: human resources, accountability, governance, funding, as well as research and knowledge transfer.

The survey findings will be complemented by results from a capacity mapping initiative, recently completed by the Ontario Public Health Association, which examines selected human resource and training issues.

The results of the surveys will help to shape the next phases of the research, particularly key informant interviews and focus groups planned for summer/fall 2005. It is expected that public health units will play an active role in these latter stages as well. Other data collection efforts will be conducted through the Capacity Review Committee sub-committees and commissioned research.

For more information on the Capacity Review Committee and *Operation Health Protection*, visit the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care web site at www.health.gov.on.ca