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## BACKGROUND

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Ministry of Health

### **PAN-CANADIAN PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM**

One of the principal recommendations made in the aftermath of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) was that Canada should invest in a new generation of surveillance systems to track infectious diseases and immunizations.

In 2004, the federal government and Canada Health Infoway asked public health and information technology experts from across the country to determine what information management tools would be required to help manage communicable disease outbreaks and immunization programs on a national scale.

These experts created a set of requirements for communicable disease and immunization management tools that will be necessary to support the public health community in protecting Canadians from disease outbreaks.

This pan-Canadian Public Health Surveillance System is a result of those recommendations and will be a critical tool for public health practitioners across Canada.

#### **How the system will work – scenario**

- A staff member in a local or regional public health agency/health authority is notified by a physician or via receipt of a laboratory test result that there is a new case of a communicable disease in the region.
- The staff member, typically a public health nurse, uses the case management functionality of the system to enter details about the case, including symptoms, onset dates, treatment, testing, and contacts, etc. Epidemiologists and other public health practitioners view this information, in conjunction with other available data, to decide if there is an outbreak of a disease.
- If an outbreak is declared, the public health practitioner, through the use of the outbreak management functionality, is able to link the multiple cases together and manages the outbreak, using the system to help with assessment, diagnosis, monitoring and control tasks.
- The notification and alerting function can be used to send information to appropriate authorities through numerous channels (text messages to cell phones, voice messages, electronic mail, pager messages, etc.). Medical officers of health can develop their own content for the alerts.
- The system will make immunization and vaccine inventory information accessible to public health practitioners who deliver immunizations – whether the vaccine is routine or part of the control measures for an outbreak. The system will also collect information on immunizations when they are given by private practitioners.

### **Information sharing**

By embedding technical and business standards into the system for electronic exchange of structured messages, the system will facilitate:

- Electronically receiving and processing laboratory test results confirming a diagnosis of a communicable disease;
- Exchanging communicable disease case files among jurisdictions when necessary;
- Sharing information on communicable diseases and immunizations between the public health surveillance system and Electronic Health Record systems such as those in hospitals or doctors' offices; and
- Relaying agreed-upon information on reportable diseases from provinces and territories to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Provinces and territories can set up secure, Internet-accessible networks, based upon their own network infrastructures.

### **Privacy and security**

Jurisdictions will be able to adapt the system based on their respective privacy laws and regulations.

The system will include sophisticated encryption/decryption capabilities, as well as elaborate authentication/permission controls that tightly restrict access and protect privacy.

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