

North Bay Parry Sound District

**Health Unit**



**Bureau de santé**  
du district de North Bay-Parry Sound

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# Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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# Acting Medical Officer of Health Update

## New Parry Sound Office

Progress continues toward preparing 90 Bowes Street in Parry Sound to house our new branch office. We anticipate a soft launch of services from this office by the second week of October. This new space is an approximately 8900 square foot purpose-built leased space. It represents a 35% expansion over our previous office site in the Parry Sound Mall and allows us to house two new Ministry-funded dental operatories.

## Fall Respiratory Virus Update

The focus this fall for the monitoring of respiratory viruses at the provincial level will be on COVID-19, influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). COVID-19 test percent positivity has been slowly increasing throughout the summer, while influenza and RSV activity remain low. COVID-19 related hospitalizations and outbreaks have been trending irregularly upward since the beginning of July. Death rates have not shown a similar rise over the summer. There is no indication that the strains currently gaining dominance in Ontario are causing more severe disease than we have seen with other recent waves. In our district and at the time of writing (September 15), we have not yet seen a bump in COVID-19 indicators since the last wave, but low testing rates impact our ability to see early trends in advance of an increase in hospitalizations or COVID-19 outbreaks.

Indications from the Southern Hemisphere's recently concluded respiratory season are that hospitalizations overall from Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) were lower in the 2023 season than is typical, however, most of the hospitalizations were seen in those younger than five years. The target strains included in this year's seasonal influenza vaccine were a good match for the viruses that circulated. This may partially explain the relatively low number of hospitalizations seen in individuals aged 65+ for influenza, as this older population were much more highly vaccinated than the children.

Similarly, the new XBB-specific monovalent COVID-19 vaccines that are going to be available this Fall are expected to provide enhanced protection against the SARS-CoV-2 sub-lineages that are showing the fastest growth in province.

The Health Unit anticipates receiving both COVID and influenza vaccines the week of September 25. We will first provide allocations to hospitals and long-term care homes, and then will start offering combined influenza/COVID vaccine clinics for individuals at highest risk starting the week of October 2, opening clinics to the general population around November. Pharmacies enrolled in the Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP) will also be administering both COVID-19 and influenza vaccines this fall.

Vaccines against RSV have also now been approved in Canada. We are aware that the Ministry of Health is planning to provide RSV vaccine for seniors over the age of 60 living in congregate care. The vaccine supply will likely flow through local health units, with implementation planned for the Fall, following the administration of COVID and flu vaccines in these facilities. At the time of writing, we are still awaiting further details about this rollout.

## COVID-19 Recovery Priorities – Second Quarter Progress Report

### Priority 1: Nurturing Mental Health Recovery

Key concepts important for the Health Unit in addressing this priority include improving mental health through the life span; recognizing an amplified need among equity-seeking populations, responding to increased stressors and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; promoting resilience and coping; and addressing the social determinants of health.

Current activities that are directed toward this priority include:

- Completion of a rapid review through the Knowledge Broker Mentoring Program where results will be used to inform future health promotion approaches. The research question was: *“What are evidence-based school, community or public health strategies to prevent, delay or decrease substance use in 12 – 24 year olds?”*
- Dissemination of a new report titled *Mental Health Promotion: An Evidence-Based Strategic Approach to Mental Health Promotion* developed by the Community Services Mental Health Leads Working Group to build staff awareness of the Health Unit’s Mental Health Promotion Framework.

### Priority 2: Prioritizing Equity-seeking Populations

Addressing this priority requires internal and external collaboration, and continued integration of this concept into program planning. Service gaps are being assessed and where needs align with public health program delivery, filling and bridging those service gaps. Holistic needs of equity-seeking populations when providing services are also being considered.

Current activities that are directed toward this priority include:

- In partnership with secondary schools, throughout the summer, public health nurses actively planned for reintegrating enhanced services to students throughout our district starting in September 2023. This will increase access to comprehensive sexual health services for youth across the district.
- Coordinated the Nipissing District Homelessness and Housing Partnership’s Anti-Stigma Work Group to plan a second phase of the *See the Person* anti-stigma campaign.

### Priority 3: Getting Children and Youth Back on Track

Healthy social, mental, and emotional growth and development all need to be considered in supporting our children and youth. To make progress on this priority, the Health Unit, in collaboration with partners, is supporting schools and childcare centres, positioning children and youth for better health outcomes, and responding to indirect impacts of COVID-19. New partnerships to support this priority are also being sought.

Current activities that are directed toward this priority include:

- Conducting immunization record assessments on all school-aged children and youth from grades JK-12 including both required and recommended immunizations under the Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA).

- Re-implementing the school suspension process for the 2023/24 school year with suspension notices being sent out in August and suspension dates in mid-September for students in grades 11 and 12.
- Ongoing catch-up clinics for all eligible students who have not completed their Hepatitis B (HB) and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines.

#### **Priority 4: Strengthening Community Development**

Concepts that are key to furthering this priority are advocacy, equity, upstream approaches to social determinants of health, community collaboration, healthy built and natural community environments.

Current activities that are directed toward this priority include:

- Ongoing community collaboration to increase capacity and access to the needle syringe program and naloxone for individuals who use substances. Most recently, the Parry Sound Friendship Centre – Biindigen Warming Centre has been on-boarded for needle syringe program distribution.

## **Programs and Services Updates**

### **Corporate Services**

#### *Communications*

Communications has been working with Facilities Operations to help ensure a smooth communicative process with external community members and staff about the Parry Sound move to 90 Bowes Street. Once official move-in dates have been determined additional information will be shared with the wider public.

Communications and IT have embarked on a project to update and streamline internal communications processes by utilizing Communities in Viva Engage, part of the Microsoft Office suite of tools.

Working with website editors, Communications has prioritized the need to make the website more AODA compliant. Website editors in each program have been working diligently to remove broken links on our site, edit Alt text, and ensure a more accessible website experience for those who use screen readers.

Discussions and planning are underway to reach new audiences with syphilis messaging. Communications has been supporting the following program activities: upcoming breastfeeding week promotion, development of an alcohol awareness digital campaign, back-to-school messaging and reorganization of webpages for school boards and educators.

In support of the respiratory activity dashboard to be launched in the fall, a communications plan has been developed to ensure a smooth transition from the existing dashboard for folks who visit the website.

Proactive planning for the respiratory season, with a critical review of COVID-19 webpages and preparation of media content to promote combined COVID-19/flu vaccine clinics.

To date in 2023, Communications has disseminated 24 news releases, supported 29 media inquiries, and put out 634 total social media posts across all platforms, with over 25,000 engagements (e.g., likes, comments, shares).

### *Facilities Operations (formally Building and Maintenance)*

#### **Parry Sound**

- Weekly on-site meetings in the new location with the architect and general contractor.
- Various new items were researched and purchased for the new location.
- Boxes and moving items delivered to staff to prepare for moving.
- Secured custodial services for the new location.

#### **North Bay**

- Cleaned and washed the roof of all debris.
- Painted the staff terrace pergola and outdoor benches by the main entrance.
- Exterior brick was painted by PermaTint.
- Windows were cleaned both floors inside and out.
- Painted the floor of the outdoor storage room with epoxy paint.
- Conducted HVAC maintenance and filter change to all units.

#### **COVID-19**

- Weekly monitoring of Personal Protective Equipment cleaning supplies for Covid 19 (sanitizer and disinfectant).

### *Information Technology*

Many activities related to the new building in Parry Sound. These include:

- Emergency paging system.
- Server Rack.
- Emergency button system for clinic rooms (ASCOM).
- Imaged and set up required computers.
- Network set up and configuration.
- Meeting room TVs/monitors.
- Video conference systems (Logitech Tap) for meeting rooms.

## *Planning and Evaluation*

### **Population Health Assessment and Surveillance**

- Planning and Evaluation continued to support outbreak and surveillance work throughout the summer. Updated analyses relating to the ongoing syphilis outbreak, including comparisons to provincial statistics and historical comparators, were provided to the urgent response team. A questionnaire largely on food and beverage items consumed at a local camp experiencing an enteric outbreak was created, utilized and the results analyzed to explore associations between consumption of any one item and the odds of illness. The effects of wildfire smoke and exposure to heat through high temperatures were monitored using syndromic surveillance as ascertained through emergency department visits made to local hospitals.
- A new local respiratory activity dashboard intended for public access is currently in the testing and review phase and is on track to be launched in the fall.
- The Nipissing Parry Sound Data Collaborative, which is currently chaired by the Health Unit) has accepted a project proposal to work alongside the Muskoka, Nipissing and Parry Sound Children and Youth Planning Table on indicator development to support local planning and service delivery. This collaboration will leverage the skillsets and expertise of both groups while working toward the collective goal of making data accessible to community partners.
- Data on opioid-related emergency departments and deaths in 2022 as compared to 2021 among residents of the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts was provided to the North Bay Recovery Day Committee for inclusion in their Recovery Day North Bay presentation material. Mortality data specific to deaths that occurred within the City of North Bay was provided as well.

### **Health Equity**

- An internal needs assessment was undertaken in the spring to understand what is needed at the Health Unit to strengthen and support current health equity work across groups and topics. Recommendations are being developed in consultation with the Executive Team based on the findings in the draft report, which will be disseminated to all staff in September. Based on the recommendations, work will be initiated this fall towards aligning health equity tasks across existing intersectional groups and topic areas and strengthening efficiency and coordinated action on shared intended outcomes.
- The Health Unit is continuing support for Pride 2023 through participation in the March for Equity and Inclusion on September 16, 2023, in North Bay. We will also host a booth at the post-march picnic that will include dissemination of knowledge and resources, the chance to participate in fun and educational activities and the opportunity to book appointments in our Sexual Health Clinic the following week.

- The Health Unit is represented on the Ministry of Health’s newly formed Health Equity Roundtable, with two meetings held to date. This roundtable was formed as a knowledge sharing network, supporting improved implementation of the OPHS Health Equity Foundational Standard and Guideline, and facilitating interaction and collaboration among public health unit health equity leads, Ministry of Health and Public Health Ontario.
- The Health Unit would like to recognize and support the work of community partners as they continue to respond to the unique needs of populations facing health and social disparities in the Health Unit region. Organizations and committees in our district that serve priority populations can apply for funds to use towards health equity specific professional development. The deadline to submit an application for funding was September 14 and successful applicants were notified by September 20, 2023.

### **Annual Operational Planning**

- The Health Unit will be completing a 1-year planning cycle for 2024. Programs and Services will submit their 2024 budgets to Executive Directors at the end of September and submit their organizational operational planning documents and accompanying health equity assessment tools in mid-October. Over the next several months, we will be assessing and re-developing our approach to organizational planning which will support long term planning timelines and integration of the strategic plan by next fall.

### **Strategic Planning**

- A Request for Proposal (RFP) was disseminated in mid-August for strategic planning services from an experienced consultant/firm to support the Health Unit with the development of a new multi-year strategic plan that will be launched in mid-2024. The RFP closed on September 11, and the successful proponent notified on September 20, 2023.
- The strategic planning process will cover four phases:
  - a) Vision and Commitment
  - b) Understanding – Internal and External Environmental Scan
  - c) Direction – Goal and Objective Setting
  - d) Strategy - Priority Setting and Communication.
- The first phase is to be completed in November 2023, and the second phase in March 2024. The final strategic plan is expected to be completed in June 2024.
- An internal Strategic Plan Advisory Committee is being established to guide the strategic planning process and to ensure the Health Unit commits to a process that is collaborative, transparent, accountable, evidence-informed, and effectively engages the community.



## *Quality Assurance*

### **Policies and Procedures**

- Between June 1 and August 24, 2023, a total of 87 policies, procedures, and associated documents were processed: 32 documents issued, 35 new numbers assigned, and 20 documents archived.

### **Quality Issue Reports (QIR)**

- A total of 29 QIRs were completed (closed) between June 1 and August 24, 2023. Eight were level 0 (near miss, no harm, loss, or damage), 19 were level 1 (incident did occur but no harm, loss, or damage), and 2 were level 2 (temporary or minor harm, loss, or damage – recovery in days/weeks).
- Twenty-seven QIRs were classified as related to professional/organizational standards, and two were related to resources.

## **Clinical Services**

### *Communicable Disease Control*

#### **Outbreak at Camp Kodiak**

On July 24, 2023, an outbreak of enteric illness was declared at Camp Kodiak located in McKellar ON when the CDC program was notified of 47 campers and 12 staff members experiencing symptoms of diarrhea, abdominal pain, vomiting, and/or nausea.

On July 25, 2023, Public Health Nurses and Public Health Inspectors were onsite at the camp to conduct an IPAC assessment, an inspection of the food preparation facilities and collect food and water samples as part of the investigation. Areas for improvement identified in the IPAC assessment were environmental cleaning and hand hygiene. Areas for improvement identified during the Food Premises Inspection were hand hygiene and keeping hazardous foods at safe temperatures during storage and preparation.

On July 26, 2023, three Epublic health inspectors and four public health nurses attended the camp and completed 54 food history questionnaires with campers and staff in an effort to determine the source of the outbreak.

On July 30, 2023, the outbreak was declared over. No causative agent or source were identified.

#### **Vector-borne Diseases**

In response to reports of emerging tick-borne diseases and an increase in black-legged tick populations across Ontario, amendments to Ontario regulation 135/18 (Designation of Diseases) to add anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and Powassan virus as Diseases of Public Health Significance (DoPHS) came into effect on July 1, 2023. CDC and P&E are working on a surveillance plan to monitor exposure locations for vector-borne diseases.

### **Fall/Winter 2023-24 Respiratory Season**

On August 2, 2023, the Health Unit participated in the **Fall/Winter 2023-24 Respiratory Season Readiness: Public Health Unit Exercise**. The exercise was co-facilitated by Ontario Health North and the Health Unit. The purpose of the exercise was to test plans/planning against two scenarios (a long season and a peak of activity season, similar to 2022). 28 individuals representing 15 organizations participated in the planning exercise.

### **Master of Public Health (MPH) Student**

From May 2023 to August 2023 an MPH student from Brock University completed a placement in the CDC program. The student completed a review of evidence-based infection prevention and control education methods for healthcare workers in long-term care and retirement home settings as well as an analysis of data from evaluations from participants at previous education sessions. This evidence review will be used to inform IPAC activities for 2024.

### *Professional Practice*

Work in the professional practice portfolio since the last update included:

- Supporting the Oral Health team to update policies and procedures, including those relating to reprocessing and storing sterilized equipment, emergency response, and supplying in-house emergency kit. Oral Health was also supported in creating liability waivers for clients who decline elements of a recommended care plan.
- Planning for the first in-person nursing professional resource group since the pandemic, which is scheduled for October 23, 2023. At this forum our public health nurses come together to discuss practice issues and practice standards related to the intersectionality of the practice of nursing and the practice of public health. The topic areas that will be discussed at the upcoming meeting include changes to the College of Nurses of Ontario Scope of Practice standards, professional liability insurance and the legal assistance program offered through the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, Duty to Report, and a presentation from a special guest to discuss community resources available for our clients experiencing intimate partner violence.
- Facilitating student placements. Our organization has agreed to take on five (5) project groups (each with 4-5 student nurses) to work on health promotion activities (e.g., HPV social media campaign, handwashing, etc.). Our organization will also be supporting 1:1 placements with various disciplines including Social Work, Dietetics, and Nursing.

### *Oral Health and Vision Screening*

#### **School Screenings**

Health units across Ontario are mandated under Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) to conduct oral and vision screening in schools. As the 2023/2024 school year commences, our school screening team has been meeting regularly and collaborating with the Healthy Schools team to plan school screenings in a way that best meets the needs of the approximately 55 schools across our district. We anticipate getting into the schools to begin screening mid-October.

As we work to recruit a new dentist for our Health Smiles Ontario (HSO) program, we are happy to share that a local dentist is working with us on a part-time contractual basis, to provide treatment to children who meet the criteria of the HSO program.

### *Sexual Health/Clinical Information*

#### **Sexual Health Update**

At the post-secondary level and collaborating with the Healthy Living Team, NBPSDHU was a checkpoint in Nipissing University's annual "Amazing Race." Through this event, we were able to promote and provide general sexual health and harm reduction education to over 300 university students. See the Healthy Living update for details on what health promotion activities were offered. To further increase access and decrease barriers for priority populations in our district, we are collaborating and partnering with the University of Ottawa to offer the "Get a Kit" sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing expansion program, which consists of mail out HIV self-test and online requisitions for Gonorrhea/Chlamydia/Syphilis.

#### **Enhanced Harm Reduction (EHR) & Needle Syringe Program (NSP)**

We will be piloting the integration of a Community Health Promoter (CHP) position in Sexual Health/Clinical Information to focus on enhanced harm reduction (EHR) work. This position will be temporarily re-allocated from Healthy Living to the Sexual Health/CI. We continue to meet our goal to increase access to NSP and naloxone through community collaboration for individuals who use drugs/substances. More recently, we provided CMHA East Nipissing with orientation to the Needle Syringe Program and train-the-trainer session for naloxone distribution through the Ontario Naloxone Program (ONP). In the past quarter, 27 people received naloxone training, bringing the 2023 total to 54 trained. A total of 154 people received sharps handling training to date in 2023.

#### **Surveillance**

Information collected through the Overdose / Negative Drug Reaction Reporting System was sent to more than 160 community partners in weekly updates through the Health Unit's interactive surveillance dashboard. From June 1 to August 31, 2023, within the Health Unit district, there were 48 overdoses / negative drug reactions reported with three resulting in death. Compared to the same time period in 2022, the total number of overdoses / negative drug reactions and deaths has decreased.

### *Vaccine Preventable Diseases*

#### **School Vaccinations**

During the summer months, all vaccine records were assessed for students from JK to grade 12 and letters sent to students who would become eligible for mandatory vaccines during the 2023/2024 school year. In all, 2,006 elementary students received letters and 892 secondary students received letters. The suspension process was initiated for students entering grades 11 and 12, with 443 students receiving suspension notices. Suspension dates are set for September 12 for Parry Sound students and September 21 for all other students in the district. Additional clinics were added to our in-house schedules to accommodate the influx in demand.

October 4 marks the start of the Grade 7/8 Hepatitis B (HB) and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) campaigns during which we will visit all 44 intermediate and secondary schools with grade 7 and 8 students. This will take place during October and November and will also target students who may have missed this opportunity in the previous year or those who may have missed completing the series.

### **Fall COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign**

The fall COVID-19 and influenza vaccine campaigns are slated to being in October. This year COVID-19 and influenza vaccines will be offered at all clinics in hub locations across the district. During the campaign we are planning to offer 11 clinics in October and 11 clinics in November to meet estimated demand of our residents. Those in a high-risk category will be prioritized in earlier clinic dates. Pharmacies, hospitals, LTC homes, EMS, and health care providers also contribute significantly to the COVID-19 and influenza vaccination campaigns.

### **Vaccine Fridge Inspections**

This summer, we were fortunate to have a summer student join our team. They completed all 129 of our vaccine fridge inspections for community partners who carry and store Ministry funded vaccine. This includes physician offices, pharmacies, hospitals, and paramedicine providers across the district. This is essential preparatory work and a requirement prior to the beginning of the annual COVID-19 and influenza campaign. It also provides an opportunity to educate partners regarding proper storage and handling of all vaccines.

## **Community Services**

### *Environmental Health*

In 2021, a Public Health Inspector laid charges against the operator of Britt Nursing Station for failing to properly operate a Small Drinking Water System in conformity with the Directive and other instructions given to him by a Public Health Inspector. Three sections of the Ontario Regulation 319/08 were violated. The operator took the matter to court. The Health Unit's legal counsel and the operator reached a negotiated resolution. On August 30, 2023, the matters were resolved. Both parties entered a joint resolution. The defendant entered a plea of guilty, which resulted in the conviction of offences with reduced charges. Charges relate to section 5 (1)(b); the Owner failed to notify M.O.H. - Directive complied with, and section 6(1)(c), the Owner failed to notify M.O.H. - change in the operator of O. Reg 319/08 of the HPPA. The total fine, including costs and victim surcharge, should be \$120.00, which the operator agreed to pay within 30 days. Given the operator's cooperation and the extenuating circumstance, the HU withdrew the third charge. These matters are now concluded.

On August 25, 2023, four Public Health Inspectors attended the second day of the Health Unit (M.O.H.) versus Ms. Stewart trial to testify over repeat violations of sections of the Reopening Ontario Act (ROA), and a section 22 order of the Medical Officer of Health under the Health Protection and Promotion Act during COVID 19 response of restrictions. The defendant's representative completed the cross-examinations of all PHIs involved. The matter was then adjourned to set one more day for the defence to present their case.

Public Health Inspectors and the Health Unit's legal counsel are preparing to attend court in October to process charges against the operator and Fox and Fiddle Restaurant Corporation.

Two Part I (tickets \$965.00) and 12 charges under Part III summons of the Provincial Offences Act were served to Mr. Nathan Taus after the PHIs observed failures to comply with several of the Ontario Food Premises Regulations on repeat occasions.

A Tobacco Enforcement Officer will be appearing in court in October with the Health Unit's legal counsel to prosecute a tobacco retail employee for failing to comply with the Ontario Smoke-Free Act, 2017 – subsection 3(1).

### *Healthy Families*

Healthy Families programs and services are offered under the 2018 Healthy Growth & Development Guideline and the 2018 Healthy Babies Healthy Children Protocol of the OPHS standards.

- The 2023 annual summary for Healthy Families will be provided at year end.
- Population-based activities are highlighted with each monthly report. See examples below.

#### **Spotlight on Some Specific Activities Underway:**

**Program planning for 2024:** Evidence-based strategy and activity planning is underway for Healthy Families. The overall goal is to support the optimal healthy growth and development of young children, emphasizing social-emotional development. Focus areas include reproductive health, breastfeeding, postpartum adjustment to early parenting, nutrition, growth and development milestones, positive parenting, and early infant and child mental health.

Target populations include caregivers with children under school age, especially those families facing social determinants of health challenges or other related risk factors. We offer direct services as well as participate in broader population-based interventions in collaboration with community partners.

**Outreach to Health Care Providers (HCPs):** Healthy Families has initiated a campaign to increase HCP awareness and referral to Healthy Families programs. The target population for this effort is physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, social workers, and hospital partners. Promotional materials, referral forms and a waiting room video has been created to support these objectives.

**Healthy Eating:** [Nutrition for a Healthy Term Infant](#) is a leading document by Health Canada that provides evidence-informed principles and recommendations for supporting healthy nutrition in infants for the first 2 years of life. The Healthy Families Dietician (RD) has been invited to contribute to the revision of this guidance document. An abstract has also been submitted for presentation at The International Confederation of Dietetic Associations to share research conducted provincially on the nutrition environment in childcare centers. The Healthy Families RD has also been recruited to join the executive committee for the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health.

The Healthy Families program is also contributing to a research project through the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. The research hopes to answer the question: Does losing weight prior to pregnancy lead to better maternal

and/or infant/child health outcomes? This will help inform key messaging and recommendations to our prenatal population.

## *Healthy Living*

### **Nipissing University's Amazing Race Frosh Event- August 29th**

After a three-year break due to COVID, the Health Unit was able to resume participating in Nipissing University's frosh event, the Amazing Race. This event took place on August 29, 2023, and despite the rain, more than 300 students visited the Health Unit that day.

The Healthy Living and Sexual Health/Clinical Information programs collaborated on Health Unit portion of the event which consisted of promoting Health Unit services and facilitating an entertaining relay race. There were 4 obstacles the students needed to complete to move on to the next location. They had to:

- Walk a straight line while modeling alcohol goggles (glasses that simulate alcohol intoxications at various levels);
- Catch distinctly coloured foam balls while modeling cannabis goggles;
- Answer sexual health related true or false questions; and
- Sort through condoms to find the non-expired (safe to use) one.

Additionally, students were offered a glow in the dark plastic cup with the standard drink measurements (12oz of 5% beer/cider, 5oz of 12% wine, and 1.5oz of 40% spirits) and condoms as a takeaway to encourage drinking in moderation and safe sex practices.

The event provided an opportunity for Health Unit staff to connect with new students and provide them more information on Health Unit services in a fun environment. The overall feedback from students attending was positive, with evidence that new information was learned through the experience.

### **ON Vape Tax Endorsement**

In September, Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario (ATFO) was seeking organizations to endorse their policy recommendation for the **"Government of Ontario to participate in the federal government's vape tax framework, to deter access to vape products among young people."** ATFO is comprised of the Canadian Cancer Society, Heart & Stroke, the Canadian Lung Association, the Ontario Medical Association, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, and the Lung Health Foundation. ATFO is committed to creating a province free of commercial tobacco and youth vaping.

Vaping has substantially increased among youth in recent years and continues to be a public health concern. In Ontario, between the 2016-2017 and the 2018-2019 school years, there has been a 145% increase in youth vaping, with 1 in 4 high school students currently vaping. Most Ontario youth have indicated that accessing vapes is easy due to their low cost to purchase. Price strongly influences youth choices, and research has shown that taxes on vape products deter consumption through both reducing initiation and improving quit rates.

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has endorsed the recommendation put forward by ATFO to support the Government of Ontario to participate in the federal government's vape tax framework.

### *Healthy Schools*

The Health Unit will be showcasing the positive impact partnerships can have when education and health come together as we present at the [2023 Healthy Schools National Forum](#) in November. A Community Health Promoter from the Healthy Schools team has been accepted to present on the [Outdoor Ways of Learning](#) alongside partners from Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic School Board, Near North District School Board, and the Canadian Ecology Centre. This opportunity to advance healthy learning environments will demonstrate innovative professional development, increased student learning and engagement with multiple years of evaluation.

Healthy Schools has been working with school boards and other community partners on activities to promote school attendance, specifically promoting the message *Every School Day Counts!* It takes a community approach to ensure all children attend school daily and arrive on time. Students should miss no more than 7 days of school each year to stay engaged, successful and on track for graduation. Frequent absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with schoolwork, dealing with a bully, or facing some other potentially serious difficulty.

With school attendance in mind, Healthy Schools program staff supported the VPD program over the summer by calling parents/guardians whose child(ren) would become eligible for mandatory vaccines during the 2023/2024 school year.

### **Finance**

The Finance team filed the following required reports with the Ministry of Health:

- 2023 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Financial and Statistical Report
- 2022 Annual Report
- 2023 Medical Officer of Health/Associate Medical Officer of Health Initiative Application

Also, the following reports were filled with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services:

- 2022-2023 Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Annual Report
- 2023-2024 Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Budget

The next year's budget process has been communicated to Managers, who are currently developing plans and financial requirements for 2024.

## Human Resources

### *Compensation*

We are successfully producing payroll in the new integrated Finance/Human Resources information system. Product development continues in order to finetune the system to meet our business needs.

We are preparing for year-end by reviewing payroll processes and procedures to remain compliant with legislative changes occurring in 2024.

### *Employee & Labour Relations*

The next Joint OPSEU/ONA/Management committee meeting is scheduled for September 22, 2023.

Human Resources continues to work with the Executive Team and Management Team on the Hybrid Workplace Procedure.

### *Occupational Health and Safety*

Human Resources has been challenged to meet the needs related to ability management. The number of employees using sick leave for more than five days or being accommodated in the workplace for medical reasons has increased significantly over the last three years, averaging 15-20 claims being managed at any given time. We are reviewing our strategy to manage this effectively in order to fulfill our employer obligations and ensure operational requirements are met.

The Internal Mental Health Workgroup in collaboration with Human Resources is working on the following activities:

- Developing a follow-up mental health survey for all staff to be distributed in Fall 2023. The purpose is to evaluate specific psychological health and safety factors in the workplace, and the workgroup will be using data from the survey to inform specific components of the internal mental health strategy.
- Increasing awareness amongst all staff of psychological health and safety factors in the workplace through various means.
- Implementing Telus Health EFAP promotional campaign internally.

Additionally, during July and August, the Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) [Your Health Space](#) provided the following sessions to all staff virtually:

- A. Exploring Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace- A total of 67 staff have participated.
- B. Embracing Mental Health - Flourishing in the Workplace- A total of 73 staff have participated.

The internal mental health workgroup will continue to work with CMHA to deliver additional workshops to all staff and specific programs and services as needed.



### *Professional Development*

Professional development sessions coordinated by Human Resources since the last report were related to Mental Health and are mentioned above. Meg Soper, a motivational speaker, was engaged to lead a workshop on personalities and culture in the workplace at the September All Staff Meeting. Twelve sessions of Basic Life Support training are scheduled to take place throughout Fall 2023.

### *Staffing*

Human Resources will continue to schedule casual nurses, COVax Assistants and COVID-19 Clinic Assistants to work at COVID-19 immunization and influenza clinics across our district until December 31, 2023.

The following temporary positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created because of leaves of absence, backfilling an employee assigned to a temporary job assignment, an internal transfer, and to assist with workload:

- Community Health Promoter (1.00 FTE), Healthy Schools from July 4, 2023 to December 29, 2023.
- Facilities Operations Assistant, (1.00 FTE), Facilities Operations from July 10, 2023 to September 8, 2023.
- Assistant Program Manager (1.00 FTE), Oral Health and Vision Screening from July 31, 2023 to September 30, 2023.
- Public Health Nurse (1.00 FTE), Communicable Disease Control from August 8, 2023 to March 29, 2024.
- Community Health Promoter (1.00 FTE), Sexual Health and Clinical Information effective date to be determined.

The following permanent positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created because of retirements, and an internal transfer:

- Public Health Nurse (0.80 FTE), Vaccine Preventable Diseases effective July 24, 2023.
- Registered Dental Hygienist (0.70 FTE), Oral Health and Vision Screening effective September 11, 2023.
- Executive Assistant (1.00 FTE), Office of the Executive Directors effective date to be determined.

The recruitment of the following permanent and temporary positions is currently under way:

- Service Desk Technician, Information Technology (1.00 FTE)
- Clinic Dentist, Oral Health and Vision Screening (1.00 FTE)
- Communications Coordinator, Communications (1.00 FTE)
- Senior Public Health Inspector, Environmental Health (1.00 FTE)
- Program Administrative Assistant, Finance (1.00 FTE)
- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Families (1.00 FTE)
- Community Health Promoter, Sexual Health and Clinical Information (1.00 FTE)

- Senior Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE)

There has been no net increase in permanent positions, however there were some positions eliminated and new positions created as outlined in the Operational Plan and Financial Budget Proposal 2023.

*Approved by*

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Carol Zimbalatti, M.D., CCFP, MPH  
Acting Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer  
North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit