

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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Medical Officer of Health Update

The Value of Public Health

At the start of the new year, and with the presentation of the draft 2026 budget to the Board of Health this month, it is a good time to call attention to the value that is delivered by the Health Unit. Public Health is everywhere in the community - from schools, camps, and recreational pools, to businesses, the streets, clinics, and homes. We plan our work with a health equity lens and employ evidence-based practices to ensure the most effective use of resources.

Spending on public health units is less than 2% of the overall health care budget,¹ so public health must do a lot with a little, and increasingly so as funding for public health has not kept up with inflation. One reason for low prioritization of funding to public health may be that our work is largely “invisible” to the public because it is preventative. It is difficult to measure the impact and tell the story of averted illnesses or emergencies to generate public support for robust public health spending.

In my update this month, I aim to shine a light on the varied and extensive work of public health, though by no means provide a comprehensive list.

Through our services in the community, small drinking water systems, personal services settings, restaurants, camps etc., are inspected and receive advice to ensure compliance with regulations under the Health Protection and Promotion Act to keep patrons safe. We monitor mosquito populations for West Nile Virus, we track vector-borne disease such as Lyme Disease, and we respond to animal bites to reduce the risk of rabies transmission. We ensure that local businesses comply with the Smoke Free Ontario Act. Residents who are not on municipally supplied water can drop off private well water samples for bacterial testing, and our public health inspectors provide information and advice on drinking water safety and treatment options, among many other topics. We provide cold weather alerts to community partners operating shelters, and recommendations to the public on coping with heat events and poor air quality. We respond to and give advice related to human health hazards. We participate in emergency responses and are available to assist municipalities with Emergency Management and Community Safety and Wellbeing planning.

The Health Unit also provides many services to support young families. Consenting at-risk families across the district receive home visits from our Family Home Visitors and Public Health Nurses in the Healthy Babies and Healthy Children program. We offer breastfeeding classes, online prenatal classes, and supports for parents and caregivers. We staff a Family Health information line to answer parent and caregiver questions. We provide educational

¹ Seabrook, M., Pakes, B., Pawa, J., Roerig, M., Tan, S., & Allin, S. (2025). A Case Study of Public Health System Financing in Ontario. Toronto: North American Observatory on Health Systems and Policies

opportunities for other community health providers to enhance their skills in supporting parents to raise healthy children.

The Sexual Health Clinic is available to those without a primary care provider and to priority populations for family planning and to reduce spread of sexually transmitted Diseases of Public Health Significance (DOPHS). Public health regularly visits local schools to provide enhanced access to this priority population. We distribute harm reduction supplies to those in need as well as community partners and we provide naloxone kits and training.

Public Health Nurses perform case and contact management related to DOPHS, and we conduct surveillance to identify and respond to local health trends and outbreaks of DOPHS. Public Health Nurses and staff with certification in infection control support hospitals, group homes, long-term care facilities and retirement home in applying best practices in infection control. The Health Unit provides immunization clinics to support seasonal respiratory vaccinations and routine childhood vaccinations. We manage inventory of publicly funded vaccines to distribute to primary care providers across the district. We annually review the vaccine records of elementary and high school students and childcare attendees to ensure they are up to date with vaccination and comply with the Immunization of School Pupils Act and the Child Care and Early Years Act.

We operate dental clinics in North Bay and Parry Sound to deliver services to low-income seniors, children, and adults. We also contract with dentists in the community to deliver dental services, to increase access. We assist people with enrolling in the Canadian Dental Care Program and with other oral health system navigation questions. We visit schools to promote oral health and perform screenings to identify children in need of dental services.

Much of the work public health does to promote health is at a population level: advocating for policy change; sharing health promotion messaging, and working with partners such as hospitals, school boards, HANDs, DSSABs, social service providers and others to coordinate efforts, with a particular focus on reducing health inequities and improving Social Determinants of Health. Our work with community and health partners often has the aim of coordinating efforts for greater collective impact. Some areas of focus of our collaborations include children and youth, homelessness, climate change and the environment, food security, mental health and substance use, health system planning, and gender-based violence.

All of this work is supported by the internally-facing services that ensure we are being financially accountable, employ capable staff to do the work, and have the necessary technology, facilities, and policies and procedures to work effectively as an organization. The dedicated work performed by public health units is critical to delivering a healthy community for all and saving billions of dollars in emergency and health spending.

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Facilities Operations

North Bay

- Coordinated the installation of new vaccine refrigerators, including shortened counters and cupboard in the vaccine room, calibration, monitoring sensors, and coordination with movers). The old unit was removed and recycled.
- Installed a replacement vaccine refrigerator for the Occupational Health and Safety Nurse.
- Replaced LED strip lighting in waiting room area.
- Coordinated the purchase and replacement of cabinets for Oral Health.

Parry Sound

- Installed a new vaccine refrigerator; the old unit was donated.
- Installed an evacuation chair for use during fire emergencies.
- Installed a dimmer lighting switch in the staff office area, per staff request.
- Completed electrical installations in Oral Health operatories in preparation for x-ray displays installation.

Information Technology

- Replaced printers for main reception, Oral Health, and Foundational Services. Old devices were returned to the vendor for recycling.

Human Resources

Employee and Labour Relations

Following ratification of the collective agreements with the Ontario Nurses' Association and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, as well as the Management/Non-union Employment Policy, applicable documents are being updated and changes are being implemented.

Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellness

The Holiday Season Celebration, held on December 10, 2025, was well attended by staff. Funds totaled \$1,677 and will be used to purchase items for the Giving Trees located in the North Bay and Parry Sound offices. Items will be added throughout the year for clients in need, of such as hats, gloves, socks, travel-size toiletries, and feminine products.

Following the event, the staff toy drive continued in both offices, with donations provided to Low Income People Involvement (LIPI) in North Bay and the Salvation Army in Parry Sound.

Personnel influenza immunization requirements resulted in 100% compliance.

Professional Development

Recent compliance training offerings included:

- Basic Life Support (full certification) – 7 participants
- Basic Life Support Instructor Certification – 2 participants

Staffing

In addition to filling temporary positions, the following permanent positions were recently filled:

- Public Health Inspector, Environmental Health (1.00 FTE), effective October 30, 2025.
- Registered Dental Hygienist, Oral Health (1.00 FTE), effective November 19, 2025.

There has been no net increase in permanent positions.

Finance

The Finance Team has submitted the following documents:

- 2026 Financial Budget Proposal to the Board of Health
- 2025-26 Q3 Infection Prevention and Control Hub Report
- 2025-26 Q3 Planet Youth Report
- 2025 Healthy Babies Healthy Children Interim Report

Year-end activities for 2025 are underway, including account reconciliations, source deduction reconciliations, and T4/T2200 preparation.

KPMG will begin audit work for 2025 in March.

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

Influenza

As of January 3, 2026, and since the start of the 2025-2026 influenza season, 356 cases of influenza A and no cases of Influenza B have been reported in the district, which is experiencing widespread influenza activity.

Between December 1, 2025, and January 3, 2026, a total of six confirmed influenza A outbreaks were reported, including six in long-term care homes and retirement homes, and three in hospitals. No outbreaks were reported in other congregate living settings.

Handwashing Project 3rd Year Nursing Students 2025

Children are more likely to get infections, especially common colds and stomach illnesses. Since 80% of common illnesses and infections are spread by hands, teaching children how to wash their hands properly is an important part of keeping them healthy.

Children are taught the basic principles of hand washing very early in life, but it's important to remind them regularly to develop good life-long habits. Studies have shown that teaching children to wash their hands can reduce stomach illnesses like diarrhea by about 30%.

To encourage children to wash their hands, the Communicable Disease Control program partnered with Canadore College's 3rd year Nursing students. The Nursing students offered handwashing lessons to children in childcare centres in the area, including North Bay, West Nipissing, East Nipissing, South East Parry Sound and West Parry Sound from September to December 2025. The program was offered and delivered in English and French.

The goal was to make sure that children understood when, how, and why to wash their hands to prevent illness.

In total, over 350 children across 20 childcare centres learned about germs, how they are spread, and how to protect themselves and others by properly washing their hands. When done correctly, handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of illness.

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is an infection transmitted through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. Most human cases result from exposure to areas where infected ticks are established. These established tick populations are expanding across Ontario, increasing the risk of exposure in more regions of the province.

Early symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, and an expanding red rash often referred to as a "bull's-eye" rash. In Ontario, blacklegged ticks can also transmit other diseases, including anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and Powassan virus.

As of December 28, 2025, a total of 2,930 cases of Lyme disease have been reported in Ontario. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has reported 14 cases to date in 2025. From 2005 to 2024, the highest number of annual cases was four.

Oral Health

Partnerships & Collaborative Initiatives

Over the past quarter, the Oral Health program has continued to advance oral health promotion and prevention through several strategic collaborations. We are working closely with Vaccine Preventable Disease and Sexual Health to support the upcoming Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination awareness campaign, ensuring consistent messaging and coordinated outreach to the community. In addition, we partnered with Healthy Families, who have been instrumental in distributing the Growing Healthy Smiles Packages to support early prevention and parent engagement.

Oral Health is collaborating with Indigenous Engagement & Development and Foundational Services to develop culturally safe and effective oral health promotion strategies that reflect community priorities and align with best practices for Indigenous engagement.

We have continued our partnership with Peel Public Health to jointly plan an Oral Health Month campaign, aiming to increase awareness, promote preventive care, and enhance access to oral health resources to be shared across the province through the Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry.

Sexual Health

The Health Unit has implemented changes to its sexual health clinical services as part of ongoing efforts to align with the Ontario Public Health Standards. These changes are intended to better serve priority populations and to support broader discussions on how to meet the needs of these groups.

The service realignment ensures that sexual health services remain within the scope of public health practice by maintaining capacity for infectious disease surveillance, case and contact management, and upstream health promotion and prevention. At the same time, the changes improve access for individuals without a primary care provider and for those seeking care related to sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI) risks or low-cost contraception options.

Updates have been made to the Health Unit's website, and communications were distributed to healthcare providers in January to ensure awareness of the service changes.

Harm Reduction Services

The Parry Sound Drug Strategy hosted its second annual event at the Parry Sound Friendship Centre in recognition of National Addictions Awareness Week, held from November 17-21, 2025. Staff from Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Services and Communicable Disease Control participated throughout the week, providing access to naloxone training as well as HIV and Hepatitis C testing.

Each day featured sessions led by member organizations of the Parry Sound Drug Strategy, addressing topics such as Indigenous services, community safety, harm reduction, and substance use treatment. The event was well attended and provided meaningful opportunities for engagement, learning, and connection. Building on this success, the Parry Sound Drug Strategy hopes to host the event again next year, further strengthening partnerships and expand its impact within the community.

On December 1, 2025, staff from SHRS joined a World AIDS Day gathering hosted by the AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area (ACNBA). The event featured speakers from ACNBA, the North Bay Indigenous Hub, and individuals with lived experience, who shared powerful stories of courage, resilience, and strength. This year's theme, *Rethink, Rebuild, and Rise*, highlighted the importance of community in the ongoing response to HIV/AIDS. Following the presentations, staff participated in the Red Scarf Project by hanging scarves in public spaces and distributing them to clients through the Harm Reduction Service office, symbolizing awareness and support for those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Seasonal Vaccines

Demand for seasonal vaccines, including COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), has been high across the district. New this year was the availability of the RSV vaccine for the general population aged 75 years and older.

Eleven Health Unit clinics offering all three vaccines, including targeted health equity clinics, were hosted in communities across the district, with consistent and substantial uptake. To accommodate individuals unable to attend a community clinic, the Health Unit offered private appointments at both the North Bay and Parry Sound offices on Fridays from mid-October to the end of November.

In late December, we added three additional walk-in clinic dates were added in response to widespread influenza activity. These clinics were fully booked and served more than 300 clients.

In January 2025, seasonal vaccines will continue to be available by appointment during regular clinic hours in both North Bay and Parry Sound for individuals unable to access a vaccination through a local pharmacy or primary care provider.

Secondary School Immunization Program

December marked the start of secondary school immunization clinics across the district. This year, with support of Foundational Services, the program expanded its automated immunization notice process to improve operational efficiency. To date, this enhancement has resulted in an increase consent form return rate, higher vaccine uptake among secondary school students, and a notable reduction in staff time required to administer the process.

Secondary school suspension is scheduled to take effect on February 2, 2026.

Community Services

Environmental Health

Environmental Health is preparing to launch an enforcement disclosure webpage, marking a significant step toward transparency and compliance with the Ontario Public Health Standards. The webpage page will include tickets, summons, orders issued under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and drinking water advisories. Disclosure will span multiple program areas, including food safety, tobacco control, infection prevention and control, health hazards, recreational water, safe drinking water, and tanning beds.

On November 19, 2025, Public Health Inspectors participated in a community information session on polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at the Best Western in North Bay. The session was held in collaboration with the City of North Bay, the Department of National Defence, and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks. The event attracted significant public interest and provided opportunities for one-on-one discussions with Health Unit inspectors regarding PFAS-related health concerns.

To assist residents in making informed choices, two new resources were introduced:

- PFAS Information Sheet, outlining current knowledge about PFAS and associated health effects; and
- Reducing PFAS in Your Drinking Water, offering practical guidance on selecting and maintaining home water treatment systems.

Healthy Families

The Nipissing–Parry Sound Perinatal Mental Health Committee has begun sharing its newly developed care pathway for managing perinatal mental health to local health care providers. Presentations have been completed for West Parry Sound Health Centre grand rounds and the Mattawa Family Health Team. Feedback from providers was positive, with many expressing appreciation for the clarity of the pathway and surprise at the breadth of existing supports and resources available to perinatal families.

Planning is underway to present the pathway at grand rounds at North Bay Regional Health Centre and West Nipissing General Hospital, and to further expand dissemination through virtual community presentations, on-site visits to health care providers, and written communications supported by supplementary resources.

The committee will continue to meet monthly through 2026, building on current momentum to strengthen collaboration, support early identification, and improve response to perinatal mental health concerns among pregnant and postpartum families.

Community Health

Planet Youth Nipissing has launched a promotional video series to showcase the collaborative in a way that resonates with viewers. The series is designed to:

- Increase awareness about Planet Youth Nipissing;
- Inspire audiences and encourage action by offering clear ways to get involved;
- Elevate youth voices and engagement;
- Introduce the Icelandic Prevention Model; and
- Demonstrate how local data informs and drives the work

Produced in collaboration with a local videographer, the series includes two English and two French videos and features youth, volunteers, and members of the Steering Committee and Action Teams. Closed captions have been carefully edited to increase accessibility.

The series is available at www.youtube.com/@PYNipissing

Emergency Management

The Health Unit continues to monitor the Ontario Vigilance Bulletins from Environment Canada for extreme cold weather events. In accordance with policy, an Extreme Cold Weather Alert is issued when:

- Environment Canada forecasts a temperature of -15 degrees Celsius or colder, or
- Wind chill values reach -20 degrees Celsius or colder.

Alerts are communicated to Community Emergency Management Coordinators and the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board's Cold Weather and Housing Response Program. In December 2025, 12 days met the conditions of an Extreme Cold Weather Alert.

Organizational Effectiveness

Quality, Practice, and Relations

Student placements for the winter academic semester have begun. Quality, Practice, & Relations and Human Resources are working collaboratively to plan and manage these placements. Sixteen third-year nursing students are contributing to projects within Communicable Disease Control, Foundational Services, and strategic plan priority groups to advance initiatives related to mental health, substance use prevention, and harm reduction. One Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) student is completing their final full-time placement with Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, and two Bachelor of Education students have started practicums in Oral Health and Community Health.

The Health Unit continues to support the provincial Best Practice Guideline Development Group led by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. This work has progressed from the literature review phase to refining guidance, with anticipated publication in late 2026 or early 2027.

A presentation on the health unit's Registered Nurse Prescriber pilot was recently delivered to the College of Nurses of Ontario Employee Resource Group.

The Health Unit participated as the Northern Health Unit representative with the Ontario Public Health Nursing Leaders Association in the accreditation process for a Nursing Program at a local post-secondary institution.

Indigenous Engagement

The Indigenous Wellness Circle reconvened this month for its first meeting, bringing participants together both virtually and in person at the Health Unit. For the first time, the Circle opened with a smudge at the Health Unit in the newly retrofitted Mattawa Room, which has been adapted to safely support smudging practices as part of the Health Unit's commitment to culturally safe spaces. The meeting began with a welcome and meaningful land acknowledgement, followed by a smudge led by a Circle member who also serves as a Knowledge Keeper, helping to ground the group in ceremony and shared purpose.

By bringing together diverse Indigenous voices, the Circle helps ensure that programs, services, engagement efforts, and public health strategies are shaped by Indigenous voices, worldviews and grounded in Indigenous rights. The ongoing work of the Circle aims to strengthen relationships with Indigenous health and social service partners; advance reconciliation through meaningful and sustained action; reduce health inequities across the region; and support the Health Unit in remaining accountable to the Indigenous communities and peoples it serves. This work is grounded in the understanding that Indigenous public health initiatives must be led by Indigenous peoples in the development of policies, procedures, and programming that affect them.

During the meeting, members also provided initial guidance for a new mural will be created in the Mattawa Room. Their insights will help ensure the mural reflects the Circle's vision, mission, and purpose, and symbolizes the values of Indigenous wellness, and community connection. This effort supports the broader goal of creating Health Unit spaces that honour Indigenous identities, teachings, and ways of knowing.

Communications

Communications have been collaborating with the Medical Officer of Health and Environmental Health leads to facilitate accurate, timely, and informative responses to media inquiries related to Perfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). Materials have also been developed to inform populations at higher risk of PFAS exposure about steps they can take to protect their health. Work continues to focus on coordinating and reviewing public-facing information to support consistent and timely responses across the organization.

Communications has been engaged to support Planet Youth Nipissing in enhancing its digital content and identifying cost-effective marketing and advertising opportunities to better reach their target audiences.

The campaign promoting community influenza and COVID-19 vaccines clinics has concluded, generating 8,311 webpage views, 119,472 social media views, and local coverage through six news articles and a radio interview. Announcements to promote the clinics aired regularly on Moose FM, Jet FM and Country 90.5.

The Health Unit's social media presence continued to grow across Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, the account reached 9,271 followers, with total engagement of 5,317 actions, including 77 comments and 194 shares. Content generated 189,108 views, 885 interactions, and a net gain of 21 new followers. Instagram showed steady performance, with 733 followers,

17,546 views, and 88 interactions. These metrics reflect ongoing audience interest and provide a strong foundation for future engagement strategies.

In collaboration with the Health Promotion Planner and Oral Health, Communications has redesigned dental health packages to better support priority groups. These packages integrate oral health messaging into existing touchpoints, such as information provided to new parents and guardians during vaccination visits. Oral Health has used this approach for over a decade; this initiative represents an update to both the information and visual design of the materials being distributed.

Foundational Services

Population Health Assessment & Surveillance

- Analysis of local substance-related emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and mortality data was coordinated and finalized quickly to support an emergency funding grant submission by a community partner.
- Staff attendance at the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council's *In Good Relations* gathering will support implementation of the forthcoming updates to the Ontario Public Health Standards, ensuring appropriate and meaningful public health unit engagement with Indigenous populations and respectful use of their data.
- The Muskoka-Nipissing-Parry Sound Data Collaborative, chaired by Foundational Services, in partnership with the Muskoka-Nipissing-Parry Sound Child and Youth Planning Table, has published a new Learning and Development dashboard, found [here](#). The dashboard summarizes key indicators related to the learning journey of children across Muskoka, Nipissing, and Parry Sound.
- An epidemiologist attended the PFAS Fall Forum/Public Information Session in North Bay on November 19, 2025, to respond to community questions related to recent kidney cancer analyses. A lay summary of these analyses is being developed for the [PFAS page](#) of the Health Unit website.

Effective Public Health Practice

- Thirteen staff from multiple programs and services participated in a regional Quality Improvement Educational Initiative, led by Public Health Ontario in collaboration with other northeastern health units. The initiative aimed to build capacity in quality improvement methods, leadership, and systems thinking to support evidence-informed decision-making.

Strategic Planning

- Strategy workgroups that requested staff input through the strategic plan staff survey have received their summary reports and are using the data to inform work plan activities.

Health Equity

- A submission was prepared and provided on behalf of the Health Unit for the 2025-2030 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation. Recommendations included strengthening social assistance programs, increasing funding for safe and affordable housing, improving minimum wage levels, and setting a target to reduce household food insecurity. These recommendations were framed within the Health Unit's [strategic priority](#) of advancing health equity, and the strategy related to reducing poverty and homelessness. The full submission is available on the [Food Insecurity page](#) of the Health Unit's website.