

Public Health Ontario

2024–29 Strategic Plan



Public
Health
Ontario

Santé
publique
Ontario



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WHO WE ARE

What We Do

Public Health Ontario (PHO) provides expert scientific and technical advice and support to government, public health units and health care providers to protect and improve the health of the people in Ontario.

Our work sheds light on what affects health, while also quantifying the burden of disease and health inequities, to inform public health planning, programs and policy. We also operate the provincial public health laboratory, conducting critical clinical and reference testing for health care providers in primary care and hospitals as well as for public health units across Ontario.

Through our work, we help promote health and support effective and responsive public health action, while continuing to maintain our readiness to respond to and manage public health threats in Ontario, such as outbreaks and pandemics.

PHO's areas of expertise and services correspond with the objects outlined in our enabling legislation, the *Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Act, 2007*.

Areas of Expertise

- Chronic disease prevention
- Diseases of public health significance
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Environmental and occupational health
- Health promotion
- Immunization
- Infection prevention and control
- Injury prevention
- Knowledge exchange
- Microbiology and genomics
- Public health informatics

Services

- Analytics and data visualization
- Guidance and interpretation for laboratory testing and test results
- Library services
- Outbreak investigation and management
- Professional development and education
- Public health and reference laboratory services
- Public health ethics
- Research and evaluation
- Scientific and technical advice, consultation, and interpretation
- Surveillance and population health assessment

Our Partners

Our **primary clients** include: Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Long-Term Care and other ministries; public health units; health system providers and organizations across the continuum of care.

PHO's **partners for health** may be clients and can also include academic, research, not-for-profit, community-based and private sector organizations, and government agencies working across sectors that contribute to the people in Ontario achieving the best health possible.

Vision, Mission, Mandate

Vision, Mission and Mandate statements are integral to any organization. PHO's **Mission** describes what we do best every single day: our purpose. Our **Vision** is our aspirational statement of what the future will be like because we deliver on our Mission. Our **Mandate** articulates our role and services in pursuit of our Mission.

VISION	MISSION	MANDATE ¹
Internationally-recognized evidence, knowledge and action for a healthier Ontario.	We enable informed decisions and actions that protect and promote health and contribute to reducing health inequities.	We provide scientific and technical advice and support to clients working in government, public health, health care, and related sectors.

Our Values

Our **Values** are critical to shaping PHO's shared organizational culture. They underpin the way people approach their work, make decisions and interact with each other. PHO is committed to acting in accordance with our Values, which are connected and interdependent.

.....
We live our Values as a shared promise to each other, our clients and our partners.
.....



- Credible
- Innovative
- Responsive
- Collaborative
- Integrity
- Respect

¹ PHO's mandate is described in further detail under section 1 (Purpose) and section 6 (Objects) in the [Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Act, 2007](#).

CONTEXT SETTING

Our new Strategic Plan was developed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had profound and long-lasting impacts on public health and the broader health system.

In consideration of the lessons learned from the pandemic, we have developed our plan for the next five years. We know that it is critical for public health to be ready to take action, whether it is in response to the next pandemic or another public health issue.

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The pandemic exacerbated persistent health inequities, having disproportionate health impacts on racialized and other marginalized communities and populations.

We are committed, across all areas of our expertise, to **focus efforts on identifying and addressing inequities in health and disease with our public health and health system partners.**

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Our 2024-29 Strategic Plan preserves the Mission, Vision, Mandate and Values as articulated in our last strategic plan. Our new strategic directions were shaped through comprehensive consultations with our stakeholders from local, provincial and national levels, as well as engagement with our staff. While we work to implement our new plan, we will continue to deliver services and provide expertise—as described in the above section “Who we are”—in support of public health and the health system as part of our ongoing operations. In the years ahead, we will remain responsive to feedback from our stakeholders to ensure that all of our work continues to be relevant, credible, and aligned with the needs of public health in support of a healthier population.

As part of our new Strategic Plan, we will develop a **dedicated Indigenous Strategy** for our organization that aims to enable improved health outcomes for Indigenous peoples and communities in Ontario. We will take the time needed to build trust and relationships with Indigenous partners for effective engagement.

Building on PHO’s contributions to date, over the next five years, we will make vital and transformative advancements to better enable PHO and our public health and health system partners to improve the health of the people in Ontario. Through the implementation of our Strategic Plan, we will enhance the ability of public health to proactively detect and rapidly mobilize in response to public health threats and emerging issues, while driving the implementation of evidence-informed solutions and monitoring for quality improvement. In this plan, we articulate our strategic directions through which we will drive positive change for public health in Ontario, as we work together collectively with our public health and health system partners to promote population health, prevent disease and address health inequities.

STRATEGIC PLAN AT A GLANCE

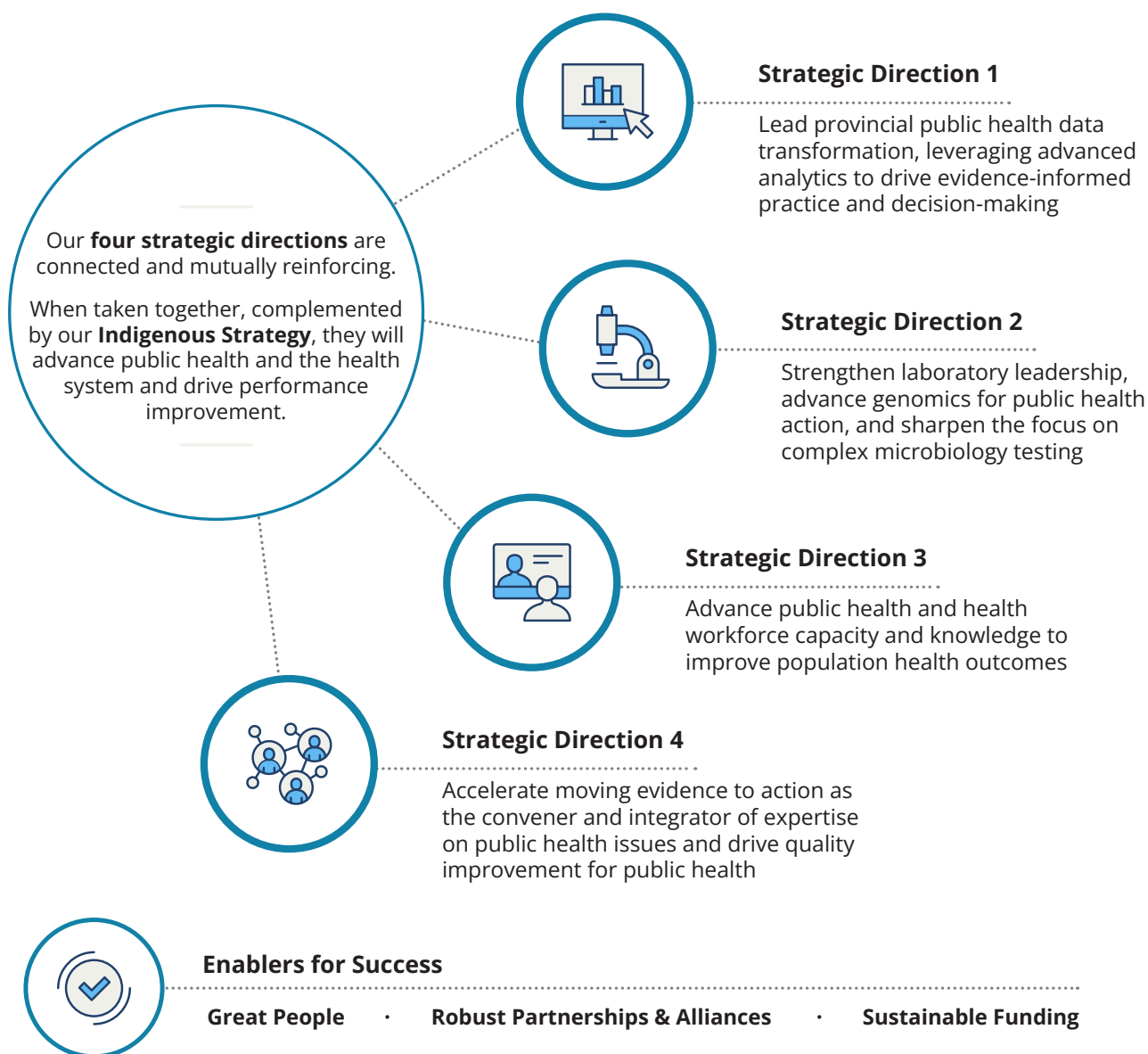
Vision: Internationally-recognized evidence, knowledge and action for a healthier Ontario.

Mission: We enable informed decisions and actions that protect and promote health and contribute to **reducing health inequities**.

Mandate: We provide scientific and technical advice and support to clients working in government, public health, health care and related sectors.

Values:

- Credible
- Innovative
- Responsive
- Collaborative
- Integrity
- Respect



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

1

Lead provincial public health data transformation, leveraging advanced analytics to drive evidence-informed practice and decision-making



Why it Matters

Expectations with respect to the accessibility, transparency and timeliness of public health data have dramatically changed over the last several years. To keep pace with an increasingly digital world, there is an urgent need to modernize and streamline provincial public health data platforms and information systems, making them more powerful and flexible for stakeholders across the province.

A critical component of this work is enabling system interoperability and data integration with other health and non-traditional data sources, including socio-demographic data. High-quality public health and laboratory data integrated with other sources will enable PHO to generate the public health intelligence, including research, needed to drive evidence-informed practice and decision-making to reduce inequities and improve the health of the people in Ontario.

Where We Will Focus



Streamline systems: Accelerate the modernization of key provincial public health information systems, with a focus on enhanced flexibility and efficiency through system interoperability and platform integration.



Strengthen data governance and integration: Establish PHO as the provincial custodian for centralized public health information, providing oversight through data management and governance activities to enhance data quality, enable data integration, and promote data use.



Innovation to inform action: Harness the power of advanced analytics, including predictive modeling, to unlock insights from integrated data to identify health inequities and inform targeted public health action.

What Will Success Look Like in Five Years

As we make progress towards an interoperable public health digital platform, Ontario will have a vaccine registry and demonstrated success in streamlining data sharing and access.

Through the development of a new public health analytics environment, we will be able to leverage integrated public health and genomics data, along with other data sources, to perform advanced analytics.

Enabled by PHO's advanced public health intelligence, our public health partners will be better equipped to: deliver and monitor the impact of targeted public health programming; predict and respond to public health threats; and, ultimately, reduce health inequities and contribute to a healthier population.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

2

Strengthen laboratory leadership, advance genomics for public health action, and sharpen the focus on complex microbiology testing



Why it Matters

Public health microbiology and applied scientific leadership are fundamental to PHO's identity as the public health laboratory for Ontario. As such, we play a critical role in establishing methodologies and tests to detect emerging pathogens that can be rapidly deployed. This includes the use of advanced technologies, particularly in the area of genomics, which are quickly transforming the approach to infectious disease surveillance and outbreak confirmation and tracking worldwide.

As learned through the pandemic, it is important for PHO to provide strong public health leadership within the provincial laboratory system to drive a coordinated and responsive diagnostic network, supported by applied research and evidence-based practices.

By strengthening PHO's leadership role for public health in the provincial laboratory system, we will ensure readiness to support day-to-day public health needs and rapidly respond to emerging threats.

Where We Will Focus



Lead applied public health microbiology: As the provincial leader in applied microbiology for diseases of public health significance, PHO will conduct applied research and drive new test development, innovation and standards across Ontario's laboratory system.



Lead genomics for public health action: Expand PHO's genomics program in multiple domains to enhance our surveillance capabilities, pathogen discovery, and rapid response to outbreaks, and continue to provide provincial leadership on genomics for public health action.



Provide laboratory system leadership: Be the essential voice of public health in advancing a coordinated and modernized provincial laboratory system that is nimble and responsive to public health threats.



Modernization of PHO's laboratory: Streamline PHO's laboratory and advance digital modernization in alignment with our laboratory system leadership role.

What Will Success Look Like in Five Years

PHO will be the public health leader in Ontario's laboratory system, with a test menu aligned with our role.

In response to emerging public health threats, we will drive the rapid development and deployment of testing strategies to be scaled and coordinated across the provincial laboratory system.

As Ontario's leader for applied public health genomics and advanced testing methods, PHO will enable public health and the health system to respond to and manage outbreaks more effectively, while making visible contributions to national and global infectious disease surveillance and outbreak tracking.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

3

Advance public health and health workforce capacity and knowledge to improve population health outcomes



Why it Matters

Following the pandemic, there is a renewed need for professional development and capacity building for the public health and health workforce.

Applied learning, which is an established area of PHO's expertise, is an important and practical complement to academic education and other professional development and training programs.

Applied learning can take many forms, such as hands-on workshops, observerships, just-in-time training, and practicum placements, and it supports the development of practical skills and the retention of knowledge.

Through the expansion of PHO's applied learning offerings, we will advance the public health and health workforce in moving knowledge and evidence to action to improve population health outcomes and address health inequities.



Where We Will Focus



Support career-long learning: Build on PHO's strength as a provider of applied professional development and educational offerings that align with learning needs across different stages of the career journey.



Grow experiential learning: Advance the development of work-based and hands-on-learning opportunities as well as non-traditional learning methods, including expanded support for student placements and applied leader development in collaboration with academic partners.



Make connections: Strengthen collaborations and partnerships to help connect the workforce to the learning and professional development opportunities best suited to their needs.



Enhance workforce readiness to respond: Support the cross-training of public health professionals to maintain workforce readiness, and provide focused support and coaching in emergencies.



What Will Success Look Like in Five Years

The public health and health workforce in Ontario will be more knowledgeable with respect to public health core competencies, including inequities in health, as well as standards, best practices, scientific evidence and research. Leaders and professionals in public health and the broader health system will look to PHO as the first point to access applied learning offerings on public health topics and up-to-date research, in addition to just-in-time training and enhanced support in emergencies.

We will also make it easier for the workforce to connect with a diverse range of educational and training programs, beyond PHO's offerings, through our robust network of partners in education and professional development, including academic institutions.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

4

Accelerate moving evidence to action as the convener and integrator of expertise on public health issues and drive quality improvement for public health



Why it Matters

There are a number of current and emerging issues—such as climate change, substance use and poverty—which will have a significant and inequitable impact on the health of the people in Ontario.

Due to their complex nature, these issues require input from a diverse range of roles and fields, including internationally-recognized experts, to find practical and evidence-informed solutions. To be effective, these solutions need to be implementable and scalable. In our

convener role, PHO will lead bringing together the perspectives of different experts from within our organization and beyond to tackle critical issues from a variety of angles.

We will support the generation of applied research and the implementation of evidence-based solutions, while monitoring the impact of the work of public health in Ontario, with a view to drive quality improvement.



Where We Will Focus



Convener on complex issues: Rapidly convene thought leaders, including researchers, practitioners and policy-makers to define and address emerging and complex public health issues, and identify practical, evidence-informed solutions that are ready to implement.



Strengthen response readiness: Strengthen provincial readiness to respond to public health emergencies through our network of expertise and by fostering connections with key system partners.



Deepen connections with peer agencies: Establish formal partnerships with peer public health agencies across Canada to enhance information sharing and leverage each other's networks of expertise.



Drive quality improvement for public health: Bring together key partners to develop shared goals and metrics to measure the performance of public health in Ontario, to drive continuous quality improvement.



What Will Success Look Like in Five Years

Local public health programs, based on practical and contextually appropriate evidence, will have a measurable impact on population health outcomes and reduce health inequities. With strong connections with a wide-range of experts and leaders across fields, we will be able to quickly mobilize our network, including partnerships with academic institutions and peer-agencies in Canada and internationally, to respond to a variety of public health issues and emergencies.

Working in partnership with local public health units, we will have implemented a performance scorecard that reports on metrics that show the impact of public health and supports continuous quality improvement of public health programs.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Our four strategic directions, the pillars of our Strategic Plan, are clearly connected and mutually reinforcing.

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Our ability to leverage integrated and high-quality public health and health data will enable the development of practical and actionable evidence ready for implementation that is produced in collaboration with our convened networks of expertise. The expansion of our genomics program will produce valuable data that is ready to be integrated with public health and health data sources, advancing our ability to generate public health intelligence for the province. Building public health and health workforce capacity through applied educational offerings is an opportunity to reinforce and mobilize knowledge and evidence derived through all of the other domains covered in our plan. These are just some examples of how we anticipate our strategic directions will intersect to support the advancement of work across all the pillars of our plan and help us realize PHO's Mission and Vision.

When taken together, the four strategic directions and our Indigenous Strategy will advance PHO's work in supporting public health and health system readiness to respond to public health emergencies and threats, such as pandemics, while improving health outcomes and reducing inequities in health and disease. We will produce actionable evidence to drive public health planning, programming, and policy in the province, for which we will be able to monitor and track the impact and support the implementation of improvements.

Through the successful achievement of our strategic directions over the next five years, there will be a positive impact on public health, the broader health system and the health of the people in Ontario.

ENABLERS FOR SUCCESS



As we evolve our organization through the implementation of the 2024-29 Strategic Plan, the following enablers will be critical to our success.

Great People

Our people will be instrumental in realizing our new Strategic Plan. We appreciate the passion that our people bring to their work every day and their ongoing contributions to improving the health of the people in Ontario. In support of our people, we are committed to the creation of a **People Strategy**, which will reflect a strengthened focus on equity, diversity and inclusion, and enhancing the employee experience.

We also recognize that to achieve our strategic goals, we will need to **build our team** in key domains. This will include supporting the growth and development of the talented people who are already at PHO, in addition to attracting top-notch leaders and experts to join our organization.

Robust Partnerships and Alliances

The work of public health is very broad and safeguarding the health of people in Ontario takes many interdependent partners working together. A common theme throughout our plan is the need to **build and strengthen relationships** with our partners in public health and the broader health system, in addition to non-traditional partner organizations, academic institutions, internationally recognized experts and thought leaders. We will leverage partnerships and collaborations to gather the best knowledge, and bring the **collective expertise to problem solving** while avoiding duplication of effort and cost.

We will continue to foster and strengthen our relationships with our Ministry of Health and public health unit colleagues through our Strategic Plan implementation. We will reset how PHO works with local public health units, by forging active and dynamic partnerships that will **drive performance and quality improvement**, resulting in improved health outcomes for the people in Ontario.

Sustainable Funding

Another critical enabler is having the **sustainable funding** in place to succeed in achieving our long-term strategic directions, while continuing to support our ongoing operations and core services. To fully realize our Strategic Plan, new financial investments from government, alongside the reallocation of existing funds will be required to grow our resources, technology and infrastructure accordingly.

With the implementation of the strategic directions, we will demonstrate a return on investment through performance improvement for public health. Beyond the five-year horizon of our plan, we anticipate further returns through improved population health outcomes and reduced health inequities.

NEXT STEPS

Over the next five years, we will work to deliver on the directions presented in our 2024-29 Strategic Plan.

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We will embed the implementation of this plan into our annual organization-wide planning activities, with early priorities identified in our next Annual Business Plan.

We will also complete a foundational review and refresh of our organizational performance measurement in consideration of our new plan, which will enable us to measure our success in its implementation and highlight areas for improvement or adjustment.

Due to the rapidly changing context in which we operate, our 2024-29 Strategic Plan is a living document that we are committed to revisiting and revising if necessary. This will ensure our plan remains relevant and responsive to the challenges and opportunities that arise as part of the ever-changing public health landscape.

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