



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health / CEO
DATE: 2017 September 21

EXPERT PANEL ON PUBLIC HEALTH: INFORMATION SESSION UPDATE

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1. Receive Report No. 050-17 for information, and*
- 2. Direct staff to work with local municipalities on a joint submission to the current consultations.*

Key Points

- As part of the Patients First healthcare transformation project initiated in 2015, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care established an Expert Panel on Public Health to develop recommendations on how to establish “strong public health within an integrated [health] system.”
- The report, released in July of this year, recommends a new system of governance for public health which would dissolve the 36 existing Boards of Health, and establish new Boards that serve boundaries matching those of the 14 Local Health Integration networks (LHINs).
- Other significant changes recommended include separating the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) roles in these new entities, and ensuring that Board of Health members have relevant skills and diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous and Francophone.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the new proposed model have been identified, and concern has been expressed about these changes by public health and municipal leaders locally and elsewhere.
- The City of London has inquired about preparing a joint submission to the current consultations on the Expert Panel’s recommendations.

Background

When the [Patients First Discussion Paper](#) was first circulated in 2015, it included the establishment of an Expert Panel on Public Health to develop recommendations about how to establish “strong public health within an integrated [health] system.” The panel’s report became public in July of this year, and includes a number of recommendations that would significantly change the governance, boundaries, and administration of public health units in Ontario. The Expert Panel’s report is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this report.

The Expert Panel was asked to consider how to ensure organizational structure and governance in public health, with the goals of: quality control (on dimensions such as accountability, transparency, and equity); and integration of public health within the health care system.

Highlights of the Expert Panel’s recommendations include:

- Dissolving all current Boards of Health in Ontario and establishing new public health units with boundaries matching those of the 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs);
- Separating the MOH and CEO roles in these new entities and having the MOH report to the CEO; and
- Establishing new criteria for Board of Health members, including representation from Indigenous and Francophone communities as well as other diverse groups.

Under the recommendations, local public health delivery areas would exist within each new LHIN-shaped public health unit, with the goal of ensuring a local presence and effective relationships with municipalities.

The public consultation period ends October 31 of this year.

Strengths

The Expert Panel's report identifies potential strengths of the proposed model, including allowing public health units to:

- Centralize administrative and specialized public health functions at the regional level;
- Be accountable for provincially-set public health standards;
- Collaborate with LHINs and other partners to plan and tailor health services in their regions;
- Establish local public health service delivery areas within regions, based on population and geography; and
- Locate public health programs and services in local communities to maintain local engagement.

Other strengths include the potential for some cost savings, addressing areas that lack capacity for key public health functions, and reducing the likelihood of breakdowns in crucial governance functions.

Weaknesses

Potential weaknesses of the proposed model have been identified by public health and municipal leaders locally and elsewhere, including:

- Loss of local autonomy and authority
- One-size-fits-all structure that may not meet local needs
- Unclear justification and inaccurate framing of the challenges faced by the current system
- Significant expenditure of human and financial capital in transition costs for uncertain gain
- Some boundaries that would encompass vastly different communities with vastly different needs, and others that would create artificial divisions within existing communities
- Focus on healthcare at the expense of partnerships with municipal and other partners
- Changes that are at variance with established best practices in organizational structure
- As much as \$80 Million in increased annual costs in harmonized contracts

Next Steps

While there are real issues to be addressed in various parts of the public health system, addressing these using the Expert Panel's recommendations could result in some negative impacts. Other approaches may address existing challenges and be less risky.

The Board of Health has the opportunity to provide input as part of the public consultation process regarding the Expert Panel's recommendations. Both the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) are currently developing their own responses to these recommendations. By working with the County of Middlesex and The City of London, the Health Unit may increase the impact of any submission.

This report was submitted by the Office of the Medical Officer of Health.



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