

## Middlesex-London Board of Health External Landscape Review – February 2024

The purpose of this briefing note is to inform MLHU Board of Health members about what is happening in the world of public health and impacts to the work of the MLHU and Board. This includes governance and legislative changes, news from other local public units, external reports on important public health matters, learning opportunities and MLHU events. **Please note that items listed on this correspondence are to inform Board members and are not necessarily an endorsement.**

### Local Public Health News

#### Committee explores merging Kingston-area public health units

The Tri-Board Merge Committee, formed in late 2023, is made up of representatives from KFL&A Public Health, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health and Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit to explore a business case for merging the three health units. Dr. Piotr Oglaza, Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer for KFL&A Public Health noted that the draft business case from the Committee will be presented to the respective Boards of Health by March 27.

To read the full article, please [visit the Kingston Whig Standard website](#).

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

On August 22, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Health (through Minister Sylvia Jones) announced their plan to invest in a stronger public health sector. One of the avenues was to provide financial incentives to public health units wishing to begin a voluntary merger process. The Tri-Board Merge Committee will provide a recommendation for a business case to merge three health units and the respective Boards of Health will decide on proceeding.

### National, Provincial and Local Public Health Advocacy



#### Association of Local Public Health Agencies Winter Symposium

On February 16, the Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Chief Executive Officer and Associate Medical Officer of Health will be attending the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA) Winter Symposium.

Topics of discussion include:

- The new ALPHA Strategic Plan
- Lessons Learned from Prior Mergers
- Population and Health Indicators Interactive Dashboard
- Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010 (ONCA) Update
- Update from Public Health Ontario
- Update from the Chief Medical Officer of Health
- Public Health and the Political Landscape

To learn more, please [visit ALPHA's website](#).

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

ALPHA provides many resources, networking and advocacy opportunities for board of health members in the province.

### Sault city council opposes merger of Sudbury and Algoma public health units

On January 29, the City of Sault Ste. Marie [moved a motion](#) to oppose the potential merger of the Sudbury & Districts and Algoma public health units.

Sally Hagman, Chair, Algoma Public Health sent correspondence to the City of Sault Ste. Marie to advise of potential merger plans. The City previously opposed the modernization discussions from the provincial government in 2019 to have public health units in Northern Ontario merged. Council had concerns of the importance of public health, especially in Northern Ontario where resources and accessibility are already limited.



## SAULT STE. MARIE

To read the full article, please [visit the Sudbury Star website](#).

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

On August 22, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Health (through Minister Sylvia Jones) announced their plan to invest in a stronger public health sector. One of the avenues was to provide financial incentives to public health unit wishing to begin a voluntary merger process. Merger decisions are a governance level decision of a Board of Health; however some municipal partners are not supportive due to the concerns of public health services being compromised. It is crucial for Boards of Health and municipal partners to continue conversations on the importance of local public health.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

#### Federal Government Standing Committee on Health – Study on Opioid Epidemic and Toxic Drug Crisis in Canada

On February 1, the Federal Standing Committee on Health (HESA) [met to discuss the Opioid Epidemic and Toxic Drug Crisis in Canada](#). The epidemic continues to be a serious concern in communities across Canada, with all aspects of the health care system (including public health) being involved. This study of the Standing Committee hears evidence briefs on the epidemic, and calls experts to discuss the epidemic and what the federal government could do to alleviate pressures.

Witnesses at this committee meeting included:

- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
  - Dr. Samuel Weiss, Scientific Director, Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction
- Department of Health (Health Canada)
  - Dr. Stephen Lucas, Deputy Minister
  - Eric Costen, Associate Deputy Minister
  - Jennifer Saxe, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Controlled Substances and Cannabis Branch
- Public Health Agency of Canada
  - Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada
  - Nancy Hamzawi, Executive Vice-President

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board has supported the Middlesex-London Health Unit in working with community partners and advocating for support regarding the opioid drug crisis in the region. The Board has most recently heard impacts of this epidemic previously in [Report 58-23](#).

## Pricey groceries, low wages and a new battleground for public-health officials

At the January 25 Southwestern Board of Health meeting, the Board of Health [heard a report regarding food insecurity](#) in Elgin and Oxford counties. One in five households in Oxford and Elgin counties and St. Thomas experienced food insecurity in 2021-2022. For Middlesex County, this number is one in six households. Food insecurity can have negative health effects to an individuals' health and wellbeing.



To read the full article, please [visit the London Free Press website](#).

### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

Southwestern Public Health is a neighbouring public health unit to the Middlesex-London region, and faces similar challenges with members of the community struggling with food insecurity. Middlesex-London has reported to the Board through [Report 69-23](#) on local food insecurity.

## Canada 400,000 seniors approved for dental care program as applications set to open for more Canadians

On February 1, Service Canada will begin sending letters for eligible seniors between 72-76, inviting them to apply for the [Canadian Dental Care Plan](#), which provides dental coverage for Canadians without dental insurance if their family income is less than \$90,000. In January, those aged 77 to 86 were invited to apply, and in March, seniors aged 70 to 71 will be able to apply. The program is set to begin in May 2024.

### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board of Health has supported regular oral health as having a positive health impact to members of the community. The Health Unit has been the successful recipient of the Ontario Seniors' Dental Care Program, to support low income seniors with oral health support. With the new federal program, some seniors may be able to access care who are on the waitlist for services. It is as yet unknown how the Federal dental program will impact the Health Unit's dental services.

## Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs – Transcript

As noted during the January 18, 2024 Current Public Health Issues update by Dr. Alex Summers, Medical Officer of Health, the Middlesex-London Health Unit was invited to participate in the Provincial Pre-Budget (2024) Consultation in London.



Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario

The full transcript of the meeting has been [posted for the public](#).

### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board of Health has supported health unit staff in engaging in stakeholder consultations, in order for public health to be identified as an important investment for members of the community.