

## Middlesex-London Board of Health External Landscape Review – March 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



**HKPR District Health Unit and Peterborough Public Health look to strengthen public health together**

On February 28, the Boards of Health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit and Peterborough Public Health (PPH) announced that they will seek provincial approval and funding to voluntarily merge. It was noted that both public health units have an extensive history of collaboration and share similar geographic, demographic, health status and population characteristics. Both organizations are also dedicated to reducing health inequities and addressing the most pressing public health challenges faced by the urban, rural and Indigenous communities that they serve.

An application will be submitted by the Province before April 2, 2024. Mergers of public health units require provincial legislative change. Both PPH and HKPR public health units will continue to operate independently during the provincial review period.

To read the full media release, please visit the [Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge \(HKPR\) District Health Unit](#) and [Peterborough Public Health \(PPH\)](#) websites.

#### **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 Boards of Health for Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge and Peterborough will be submitting a joint voluntary merger application to the Province of Ontario to proceed with a merger.

#### **Algoma Board of Health opposes merger, Public Health Sudbury & Districts supports merger**



*Algoma*  
**PUBLIC HEALTH**  
Santé publique Algoma



**Public Health  
Santé publique**  
SUDBURY & DISTRICTS

On February 20, the Boards of Health for Algoma Public Health (APH) and Public Health Sudbury & Districts voted on a motion regarding a voluntary merger with their public health units. The APH Board of Health voted against a merger and the PHSD Board of Health [voted in favour of a merger](#). Proposing a potential merger to the Ministry of Health requires agreement from both boards of health. As the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts voted to support the potential merger and the Board of Health for Algoma Public Health voted against, a merger proposal will not be submitted to the Ministry.

To read the full media release, please visit the [Algoma Public Health](#) and [Public Health Sudbury & Districts](#) websites.

#### **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 Boards of Health for Algoma and Sudbury & Districts will not be proceeding with a voluntary merger application.



### Halton Region appoints new Medical Officer of Health

Halton Regional Council (Board of Health) is announcing the appointment of Dr. Deepika Lobo as its next Commissioner of Health and Medical Officer of Health. Dr. Lobo has served as an Associate Medical Officer of Health since joining Halton Region in 2019 and has been Acting Commissioner of Health since September 2023.

Dr. Lobo completed her residency in Public Health & Preventive Medicine through the DeGroot School of Medicine at McMaster University and is a Fellow with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Dr. Lobo obtained her Doctor of Medicine from Kasturba Medical College at Manipal University in India, and has the degrees of Master of Public Health and Master of Business Administration from McMaster University.

To read the full media release, please visit [Halton Region's website](#).

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The Board supports collaboration and connection with other public health units in the province and encourages MLHU's Medical Officer of Health to work with other Medical Officers of Health as necessary for advocacy and idea sharing.

### National, Provincial and Local Public Health Advocacy

#### Multiple Ontario municipalities and boards of health advocating against public health labs being closed

In December 2023, the Ontario Auditor General released their [Report on Value-for-Money Audit of Public Health Ontario](#). One of the recommendations was to close 6 out of the 11 public health laboratories. The laboratories proposed to be closed are in Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Hamilton, Peterborough, Kingston, and Orillia.

To learn more, please read the following articles from:

- [The Sault Star – February 20, 2024](#)
- [The Peterborough Examiner – February 28, 2024](#)
- [The Kingston Whig Standard – February 29, 2024](#)

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

If laboratories are closed, there is a potential that wait times for pertinent public health results from public health units will be delayed, which could be detrimental for case and contact teams working to support the prevention of infectious disease spread within the community. Capacity could be limited for the laboratories that remain open.

### Public Health Ontario's (PHO) new Strategic Plan 2024-29



On February 28, Public Health Ontario released their 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. Strategic directions within this plan include:

1. Lead provincial public health data transformation, leveraging advanced analytics to drive evidence-informed practice and decision-making
2. Strengthen laboratory leadership, advance genomics for public health action, and sharpen the focus on complex microbiology testing
3. Advance public health and health workforce capacity and knowledge to improve population health outcomes
4. Accelerate moving evidence to action as the convener and integrator of expertise on public health issues and drive quality improvement for public health

To read the new Strategic Plan, please visit [Public Health Ontario's website](#).

#### Impact to MLHU Board of Health

The MLHU continues its relationship with Public Health Ontario and ways to collaborate on mutually beneficial goals. Public health also relies on laboratory support from Public Health Ontario when conducting case and contact management (test results) and supporting clients with this information.