



# HEALTH MATTERS

## Municipal Election Primer

September 2022



**Public Health**  
**Santé publique**  
SUDBURY & DISTRICTS

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# **PUBLIC HEALTH SUDBURY & DISTRICTS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FROM RISK TO RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE**

It has been two and half years since the first case of COVID-19 infection was confirmed in the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts. During this time, Public Health Sudbury & Districts (Public Health) continues to provide leadership and essential services to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and guide individuals, families, congregate care settings, businesses, and communities on how to best protect themselves during this unprecedented and ever-changing crisis.

We take seriously our responsibility to understand, communicate, and implement the best-available evidence, including extensive and ongoing reviews of science and local epidemiology. However, our dedication to COVID-19 has meant that we had to pause or scale back on many other essential public health programs and services during this period, which created a backlog of services and unmet needs.

And so, while Public Health continues to manage the pandemic to support the communities that we serve, it has also been critical that we refocus and re-engage in our other programming activities moving forward. We will assess and address ongoing and emerging health needs that require public health intervention so that we remain an active partner in the local recovery endeavour—creating and contributing to strong and resilient post-pandemic communities.

# HEALTH MATTERS

As part of this effort, members of municipal government play an important role in shaping policies that impact all aspects of our lives, including our health. While health care and lifestyle behaviours are important, health is also the result of social and economic factors and conditions that influence the daily environments in which we live, work, play, learn, and grow. Public Health looks to our representatives to create policies that address the social determinants of health, promote health equity, and provide opportunities to build a sustainable path forward and support the health of all.

Access to health care and the sustainability of the health system is an important issue for voters. **Did you know that investments in public health, including health promotion and preventive measures are less costly and help keep people out of hospitals and clinics in the first place?** Addressing income, social status and supports, education, and literacy can impact individual health and be important influences on how well the health care system manages and responds.

Learn more about the issues and the actions municipal leaders can take to protect and promote the health of communities locally.

**Get informed. Get involved. Go vote.**

# PUBLIC HEALTH RECOVERY PRIORITIES

The pandemic has affected different people in different ways. Those who experienced systemic barriers to health and well-being prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (stemming from oppression, racism, and other forms of discrimination as key examples) have continued to face disproportionate impacts during the pandemic, intensifying underlying health inequities. Understanding how impacts are experienced unevenly across the communities that we serve is critical to informing how public health can support the path to recovery for all. Public health practice includes actions to reduce health inequities to provide everyone with the opportunity to achieve their full health potential without disadvantage due to social position or other socially determined circumstances beyond individual control.

The prolonged and intense response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on local public health capacity. This has included direct impacts to our programs and services, including the suspension or major reduction of most non-COVID-19-related public health programs required under the Ontario Public Health Standards. We have been working to strike a balance between ongoing pandemic supports and resumption of the rest of our core public health programming. To this end, we have identified four recovery priorities that will have the greatest impact for individuals and groups facing the greatest marginalization and fewest opportunities for health. The priorities bring us back to the core business of public health and the mandate to level up opportunities for health and create healthier communities for all.

The identified priorities are getting children back on track, levelling up opportunities for health, fostering mental health gains, and supporting safe spaces. To learn more about the recovery priorities, visit <https://www.phsd.ca/health-topics-programs/%20diseases-infections/coronavirus/reports-and-infographics-covid-19/public-health-sudbury-districts-and-the-covid-19-pandemic-from-risk-to-recovery-and-resilience-february-2022/>.

The recovery priorities also provide nine key issues and related actions that we believe must be considered during the election and beyond.



## Mental Health

- » Just like physical health, mental health and well-being are influenced by the social, economic, and physical environments in which people work, live, and play. Populations with socio-economic disadvantages are disproportionately affected by mental health problems and challenges. **There is no health without mental health.**
- » Mental well-being is a concern with an increasing percentage of Ontarians who report their mental health as fair or poor, and who have experienced mental health challenges or illnesses, especially since the pandemic began. Almost half of Ontarians believe that COVID-19 played a major role in worsening of their mental health.
- » The social determinants of mental health are key factors that impact mental health on a population level, and include:
  - freedom from discrimination and violence
  - social inclusion
  - access to economic resources

### Key Recommendations

1. Promote infant, child, and youth mental health through public health programming including school health, healthy families, and healthy communities while increasing access to mental health services and decreasing wait times.
2. Support strategies that target the social determinants of mental health across the lifespan of individuals, with a focus on reducing stigma and increasing inclusion and support.



## Food Insecurity

- » Not having enough money to buy food and other necessities of life affects about 16% of households in Ontario and is a serious public health problem<sup>i</sup>. Adults who do not have enough money for food are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and anxiety. Children and teenagers living in households that do not have enough money for food are more likely to experience mental health problems<sup>ii</sup>.
- » Current unprecedented levels of inflation will make this problem worse<sup>iii</sup>.
- » The main source of a household's income is a strong predictor of whether the household will have enough money for food. In Ontario in 2021, 67% of households who rely on social assistance do not have enough money for food<sup>iv</sup>.
- » Female single-parent families, those who rent rather than own their housing, and people who identify as Indigenous or Black have a greater probability of not having an adequate income for food<sup>v</sup>.

### Key Recommendations

1. Advocate for federal and provincial government policies and programs to ensure adequate incomes for all.
2. Facilitate local level initiatives that increase economic resilience for individuals/families living with very low incomes such as free income tax filing assistance and targeted support for access to and training for jobs with livable wages and benefits<sup>vi</sup>.



## Housing

- » Safe, affordable, quality housing is important for health, wellbeing, and inclusion <sup>vii</sup>.
- » Affordable housing means having enough money after paying for housing to spend on other necessities of life like food, transportation, childcare, and other basic needs <sup>viii</sup>.
- » In 2018, more than 1.6 million Canadian households were spending more than 30% of their before-tax income on housing <sup>ix</sup>.
- » In 2021, the rental vacancy rate in Greater Sudbury fell to 1.8% - its lowest in 10 years. This drove the cost of rental accommodation up 8.4% for a two-bedroom unit<sup>x</sup>.
- » In 2021, almost 70% of those who are homeless in Sudbury say that high rents are preventing them from being housed <sup>xi</sup>.

### Key Recommendations

1. Advocate for federal and provincial government funding and policies to enable the approval and building of more affordable housing.
2. Develop and implement a strategy to ensure affordable, accessible, and supportive housing for all.



## Indigenous Health and Well-Being

- » 12.5% of Sudbury & Districts population identify as First Nation, Inuit or Métis <sup>xii</sup>.
- » Approximately 53% of Registered First Nations reside in rural and urban settings in Sudbury and districts <sup>xiii</sup>.
- » First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals, families, and communities experience disproportionate health concerns linked to processes of racism and discrimination.
- » Some of these health concerns include increased rates of diabetes, hypertension, substance misuse, mental health concerns, and overall morbidity and mortality.

### Key Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a plan to provide municipal employees with cultural safety training.
2. Develop and implement a plan to support responsibilities as treaty partners of the Robinson Huron Treaty and Treaty 9.
3. Advocate for federal and provincial funding and support strategies for improved social determinants of health for Indigenous peoples.



## Anti-racism

- » In Sudbury, as across Canada, discrimination is commonly experienced by racialized groups. Although it may be more common among Black or Indigenous people, it is also increasing among those who are Chinese or South Asian. Racism against members of this population have been recently reported on social media in Sudbury.
- » Systemic racism and discrimination lead to unequal distribution of resources, including income, education, employment, housing, and health care. These inequities impact the mental and physical health of racialized populations. Despite an increased awareness of the effects of systemic racism, concrete progress is needed to make Canadian communities more equitable and inclusive for all.

### Key Recommendations

1. Ensure that hate-motivated crime and hate-bias incidents are investigated and result in appropriate consequences.
2. Develop and implement municipal anti-racism initiatives that are informed and led by racialized populations.
3. Encourage the creation of inclusive community spaces for all in municipalities.
4. Promote the collection and reporting of socio-demographic and race-based data in the social and community health services to identify and correct inequities in the access of the resources.



## Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

- » Infectious diseases disproportionately affect health outcomes of individuals who live in retirement homes, long-term care homes and other congregate living settings.
- » The Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Hub model enables Public Health to strengthen the local network of IPAC experts and provide specific and timely life-saving guidance.
- » In the first six months of 2022, Public Health's IPAC Practitioners provided proactive infection prevention and control assessments, trainings and recommendations and responded to more than 70 outbreaks in retirement homes, long-term care homes and other congregate living settings <sup>xiv</sup>.

### Key Recommendation

1. Support Ontario's IPAC Hub model as a sustained initiative to ensure that highest risk settings are adequately supported in enhancing resident health and preventing tragic outcomes.





## Substance use/drug poisoning epidemic

- » According to preliminary estimates received from the Office of the Chief Coroner, there were 36 opioid-related overdose deaths among residents of Sudbury and districts from January to March 2022. This represents a rate of 18 deaths per 100,000 population, which is the highest rate of any health unit in the province. The corresponding rate for Ontario overall was 4.3 deaths per 100,000 population <sup>xv</sup>.
- » Unregulated drug supply, mainly fentanyl, has greatly contributed to opioid-related deaths in recent years. Since the beginning of the pandemic there has also been an increased incidence of unregulated substances such as benzodiazepines, methamphetamines and cocaine contributing to the complexity and severity of drug poisonings <sup>xvi,xvii</sup>.
- » The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to an increase in the disparities experienced by marginalized communities, especially people who use substances <sup>xviii,xix,xx</sup>. Drug poisonings rose 38% within the first 3 months of the pandemic compared to the previous 3 months prior <sup>xxi</sup>. This increase in drug poisonings is influenced by an array of factors including more people using alone due to barriers to harm reduction programs, and treatment services, in addition to social-distancing requirements <sup>xxii,xxiii</sup>. Now, three years into the pandemic, we continue to see the drug poisoning epidemic worsen and lives being lost.

### Key Recommendation

1. Advocate for funding of evidence-based programs (such as safer supply, harm reduction and diverse treatment options) led and/or directed by people who use substances. Ensure a dedicated focus on stigma and discrimination is embedded in all programming.



## Climate Change

- » The transportation sector is the leading source of climate emissions, responsible for 35% of Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions <sup>xxiv</sup>.
- » Many people do not drive because of their age, income, ability, or choice. Access to efficient public transit provides an independent way to access jobs and essential services and allows people living on lower incomes to direct more of their earnings to food, clothing, and rent <sup>xxv</sup>.
- » In rural areas, transit solutions can take innovative forms including on-demand services, publicly-owned ride shares, and volunteer community car-pooling <sup>xxvi</sup>.
- » The effects of public transit are even more impactful when transit vehicles are electric powered and emit no pollutants <sup>xxvii</sup>.
- » Physical activity is a well-known benefit to mental and physical health. Active transportation (replacing car trips with walking or cycling) is an ideal way for busy people to build healthy activity into their lives <sup>xxviii</sup>.
- » Neighbourhoods and streets that are more walkable and cycle-safe in their design benefit people of all ages and income levels <sup>xxix</sup>.

### Key Recommendation

1. Invest in public transit and active transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thereby creating healthy and green communities that increase physical activity.



## Public Health

- » Public health continues to play an essential role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging infectious diseases. Our efforts reduce community spread and protect health. While we remain committed to this important work, we must refocus our energies to our other responsibilities.
- » It is clear, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing health inequities. Locally, many marginalized individuals and groups disproportionately experienced the negative impacts of the pandemic resulting in an even greater need for ramping up other critical public health programs and services outside those from the pandemic response.
- » Public Health is inextricably connected with the local municipal government. Municipal-Public Health partnerships and collaborations are vital to many upstream public health initiatives targeting the social and structural determinants of health. These actions, in turn, contribute to thriving, resilient, and economically prosperous communities where everyone has an opportunity for health.

### Key Recommendation

1. Ensure adequate funding and investments to support recovery efforts to reduce the backlog in Public Health programs and services to meet community needs, including the ongoing supports to prevent and reduce transmission of infectious diseases, foster the health and well-being of individuals and communities, and reduce the burden on our local health care system.

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