Strengthening Public Health

August 2023



Context

There are long-standing challenges within the public health sector in Ontario related to capacity, stability and sustainability (along with implications for inequitable health outcomes for Ontarians) that have been identified through multiple reports over the past 20 years.



Since the SARS pandemic in 2003, there have been a series of reports that have consistently called for strengthening public health to address critical challenges such as a lack of capacity and critical mass, structural governance challenges and skills gaps in boards of health, misalignment of public health with other health and social services, as well as challenges with the public health workforce, including with recruitment, retention and leadership.



The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the critical importance of a robust public health sector. Key lessons from the pandemic included: the importance of Local Public Health Agencies (LPHAs, often referred to as PHUs) having sufficient capacity to respond in a crisis, the benefit of collaboration across the health care system, the need for stability and sustainability to allow for LPHAs to plan for and be able to respond to ongoing and future crises and challenges.



What we want to achieve

Goal

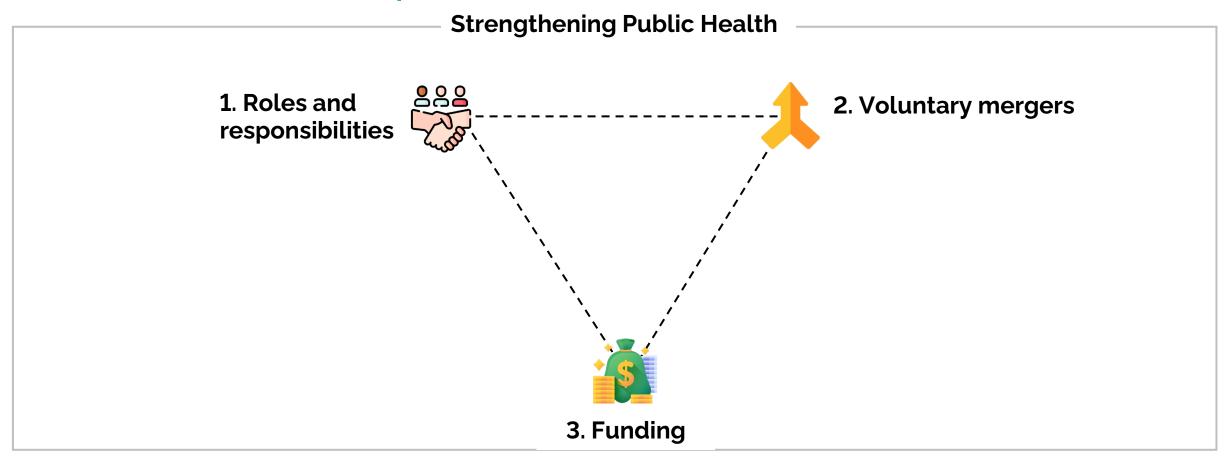
To optimize capacity, stability and sustainability in public health and deliver more equitable health outcomes for Ontarians:

Desired Outcomes

- Clarified and refined **public health roles and responsibilities** that result in:
 - Stronger connections to and relationships with key health system stakeholders (e.g., OHTs, primary care).
 - Core public health functions being performed either locally, regionally, or provincially, informed by a prioritization framework.
 - Reduced variability in prioritization and decision-making and public communications (especially during crises) while remaining responsive to local needs.
- 2. A system that has **fewer LPHAs but with greater capacity** to deliver **core public health services** and **better alignment** with broader health system structures.
- 3. Stability for the sector and **sustainability in funding for the longer term** to support program planning and consistent, more equitable program and service delivery.
- Improved frontline programs and services to Ontarians at the local level.

Strategy

The Ministry of Health is proceeding with a **three-pronged**, **sector-driven strategy** to optimize **capacity**, **stability**, **and sustainability** in public health and deliver **more equitable health outcomes** for Ontarians





#1 | Roles and responsibilities

Clarify and strengthen the role of LPHAs by refining, refocusing and re-leveling roles and responsibilities



- Conduct a routine, sector-driven review of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), against a prioritization framework.
- Work with partners to identify roles and responsibilities that can be refined or stopped, and/or 're-leveled' to a regional or provincial level.
- Implement the full revised OPHS beginning in January 1, 2025.



#2 | Voluntary Mergers

Optimize capacity by encouraging mergers between LPHAs through a time-limited voluntary, sector-driven process



- Re-engage with LPHAs that have **identified interest in mergers** and work with sector partners to identify other merger candidates.
- Leverage sector relationships (e.g., alPHa, AMO) to co-develop a voluntary merger approach, including objectives, parameters, and accountability mechanisms with time-limited funding supports to facilitate the merger process.
- Mergers to take effect January 1, 2025.



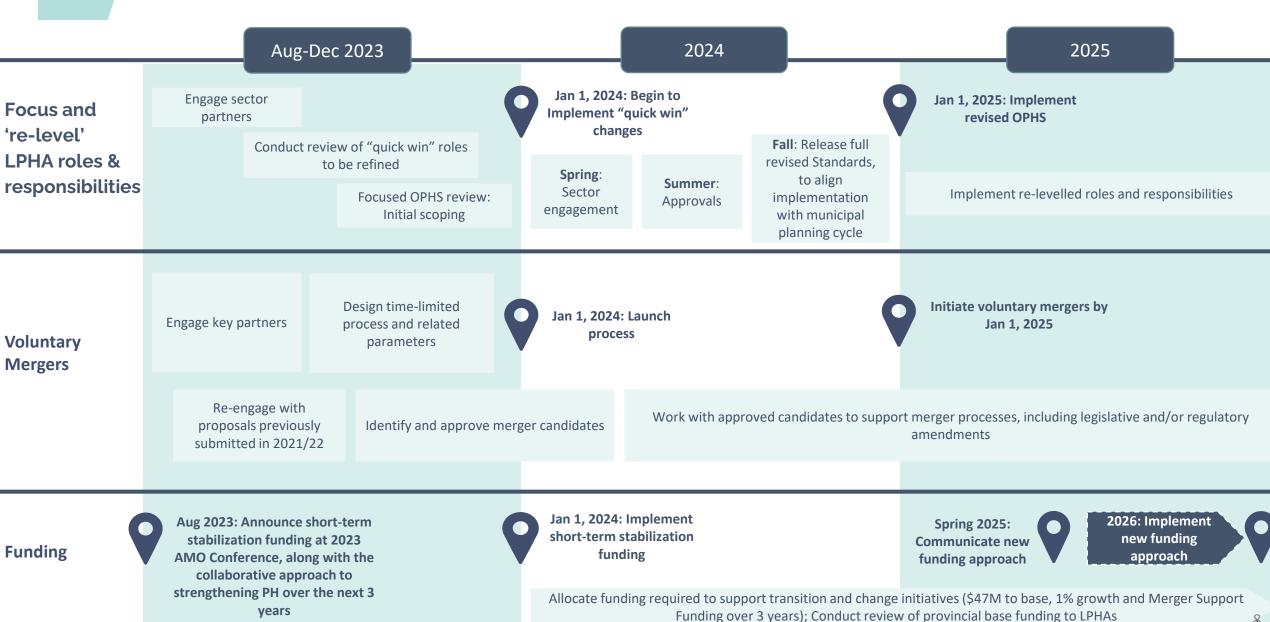
#3 | Funding

Provide **3-year funding** to LPHAs that addresses the urgent need for stabilization while change processes are underway, support voluntary mergers by providing one-time transition and stabilization costs; and review longer-term base funding needs



- Restore provincial base funding to the level provided under the 2020 costshare formula (\$46.81M), effective January 1, 2024.
- Provide growth base funding of 1% for each of the next 3 calendar years (2024 2026).
- Establish a dedicated, three-year Merger Support Fund to support change.
- Undertake a review of the ministry's funding methodology for public health.

Implementation Timeline





Working together on next steps

We are committed to working in partnership to maximize opportunities for local improvement and system impact

- We will be working closely with our partners to support design and implementation of this strategy. Your expertise and insights will be invaluable as we move through this process.
- Initial ministry engagement with sector partners, including AMO, alPHa, MOHs & CEOs, Business Administrators, etc., will occur in late August / early September.
- We will follow up on next steps regarding how we will collectively work together in the coming months once we have finished these consultations.