

alPHA's members are
the public health units
in Ontario.

alPHA Sections:

Boards of Health
Section

Council of Ontario
Medical Officers of
Health (COMOH)

**Affiliate
Organizations:**

Association of Ontario
Public Health Business
Administrators

Association of
Public Health
Epidemiologists
in Ontario

Association of
Supervisors of Public
Health Inspectors of
Ontario

Health Promotion
Ontario

Ontario Association of
Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Association of
Public Health Nursing
Leaders

Ontario Dietitians in
Public Health

January 19, 2022

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, MPP
Minister of Finance
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

Re: Pre-Budget Consultation 2022

On behalf of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) and its member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations, I am writing to provide input on the public health response to COVID-19 and its resumption of routine mandates for your consideration as you prepare the 2022 Ontario Budget.

Every Ontarian continues to be deeply affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and we understand that this will continue to be a prominent context for the decisions you will make about how to invest Ontarians' tax dollars in the coming year. We also understand the ongoing importance of striking a balance between protecting people from the direct effects of the coronavirus and protecting Ontario's economy from the secondary ones. A healthy economy and healthy people are interdependent, and Ontario's public health sector is a critical link, notably where the priorities you outlined in the *2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Build Ontario* (safely reopening Ontario and managing COVID-19 for the long term, keeping schools safe, increasing access to dental health programs for seniors) are concerned.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, your government has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing financial certainty and resources to public health units to support their fundamental duty to protect the health of the people through case and contact management, outbreak control, implementation of public health measures and guidance, and leadership of one of the most comprehensive and complex vaccination campaigns in Ontario's history.

At the same time, these activities have placed such demands on Ontario's local public health resources that most of the routine programs and services mandated by the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) have all but ceased. This is the public health equivalent of the health care sector's "surgical backlog" and one that will have significant repercussions on population health in this province for years to come, especially as COVID response activities are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Many of Ontario's public health units have diverted up to 90% of their available resources to the pandemic response, even after significant human resource expansions and reallocations. With the strong likelihood of COVID-19 becoming a permanent part of public health's daily business, attention needs to be turned to restoring capacity to return to existing OPHS-mandated health protection and promotion activities, which are also the basis for the Annual Business Plans and Accountability Agreements that are required by the Province each year.

Examples of these include the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, which provides outreach to vulnerable families; school vaccination programs; smoking cessation supports; food safety inspections; mental health promotion; addressing substance use including the opioid crisis; and the wide range of other activities that are aimed at preventing chronic diseases, which remain responsible for most deaths in Ontario and account for an estimated \$10B in direct health care costs as part of a total economic burden of over \$20Bⁱ. Restoring public health's capacity to deliver the totality of the OPHS will be analogous to ensuring that hospitals have the capacity to provide essential surgeries and diagnostic procedures while maintaining their own capacity to respond to the pressures of COVID-19.

This crisis continues to prove the worth of local public health and has clearly demonstrated that a healthy economy is not possible without healthy people. The imperative of sufficient, stable, and predictable investments to ensure that Ontario's boards of health can carry out the comprehensive range of health protection and promotion programs and services that are outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards is evident, and plans should be made for a comprehensive review of the public health pandemic response after the emergency is over with a view to making specific improvements.

The welcome financial commitment that your government has made to local public health to support its response to this crisis needs to be entrenched and reinforced to ensure that our public health system is able to carry out each of its health protection and promotion duties, both routine and extraordinary, to ensure a healthy population. To achieve this, we present the following recommendations for your consideration as you formulate the 2022 Ontario Budget.

Continued support for an ongoing pandemic response

Maintain ongoing provincial investments in public health science, measures, structures, and resources to support the multi-sector effort to effectively manage COVID-19. The 2022 Ontario Budget should

- Plan for additional one-time COVID-19 funding allocations for 2022 to support the COVID-19 response and ensure adequate resources and staffing levels for case/contact management, vaccination programs, data collection and analysis, and public communications.
- Synchronize new funding announcements and their allocation to ensure that local public health agencies have immediate access to the resources required.
- Enhance central support for local public health implementation, communication, and enforcement of provincial policy directions.
- Strengthen Public Health Ontario's capacity to provide timely evidence-based scientific and technical advice on public health related topics to government, public health, health care, and related sectors.

Enhanced support for local public health recovery and sustainability

Commit to health protection and promotion for all Ontarians through sufficient and sustainable financial investments in local public health that are clearly communicated and committed early in the fiscal year. The 2022 Ontario Budget should:

- Ensure that the total funding envelope is sufficient for all local public health agencies to deliver their entire Ontario Public Health Standards mandate, including consideration of the additional resources required to ensure the ongoing capacity to control COVID-19.
- Provide additional funding to support recovery efforts and the resumption of routine programming, including closing the gaps for services that have not been provided for nearly 2 years (e.g. routine childhood immunizations, oral health and vision screening programs, substance use).

- Immediately revert to the 75% / 25% provincial-municipal public health cost-sharing formula with assurances that no further changes will be made without extensive analysis and consultation.
- Consider additional strategic public health investments that should be funded entirely by the Government of Ontario. Low-income oral health programs and enforcement of the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017* for example were funded this way until 2019.

Provincial support for evaluation and renewal:

Ontario needs to plan for expenditures related to the eventual evaluation of its COVID-19 response and subsequent systemic improvements. It must be prepared to work with Ontario's public health stakeholders (Public Health Ontario, Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Local Public Health Agencies) to develop a vision for a strong, responsive and resilient public health sector with the capacity to address population health needs. The 2022 Ontario Budget should:

- Ensure that Ontario has the capacity to undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of all aspects of the pandemic response to inform strategies for improvement.
- Ensure that public health stakeholders have the capacity and resources to participate fully in the review and in formulating recommendations.
- Ensure that a health equity lens is carefully applied to the analysis, knowing that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected communities with lower socioeconomic status.

Preserve the integrity of Ontario's locally based public health system to protect its excellent return on investment.

For more than 180 years, Ontarians have enjoyed a strong, locally based public health system that puts their health and wellbeing at the front and centre. Medical officers of health, boards of health and managers of the major public health disciplines are on the front lines of delivering the upstream programs and services that prevent disease and promote health in every community in Ontario every single day at a fraction of the cost of treating illness.

According to the 2018-19 Ministry Expenditure Estimates, the operating estimate for the entire Population and Public Health Program (which includes internal Ministry expenses, funding for Public Health Ontario and the local grants) was \$1.267 billion, or about 2% of the total Ministry operating expenses. This demonstrates a tremendous return on investment given the significant benefit to the health of the people of Ontario. The integrity of this successful and cost-effective system must be maintained and reinforced. The 2022 Ontario Budget should:

- Recognize that investments in health protection and promotion yield enormous returns on investment including reducing the burden on Ontario's costly health care system.
- Recognize the differing mandates of public health and health care and ensure that they remain organizationally separate.
- Recognize the value of public health's existing local community partnerships (e.g. school boards, municipalities, community services) and ensure their preservation.

We know that even modest investments in public health generate significant returns, including better health, lower health care costs, and a stronger economy. Public Health's broad efforts in the areas of health protection and promotion touch upon where we live, work and play, improving our quality of life and promoting healthy communities across the province. Further investments in these efforts will only strengthen their contributions to your Government's goals of safely reopening Ontario and managing

COVID-19 for the long term, keeping schools safe, increasing access to dental health programs for seniors, cutting hospital wait times and ending hallway health care, and even putting money back in people's pockets by keeping them healthy and able to contribute to the prosperity of the Province of Ontario.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to present this information as you deliberate on how Ontarians' tax dollars are to be spent in the coming year. We would be pleased to discuss our submission with you further. To schedule a meeting, please have your staff contact Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, alPha, at loretta@alphaweb.org or 416-595-0006 ext. 222.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Paul Roumeliotis
alPha President

COPY:

Hon. Doug Ford, MPP, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Christine Elliott, MPP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Hon. Merrilee Fullerton, MPP, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. Stephen Lecce, MPP, Minister of Education
Ernie Hardeman, MPP, Chair, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Health
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery
Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (A), Public Health Ontario
Matt Anderson, CEO, Ontario Health

Encl: alPha information sheet: *Why Public Health Matters:*

ⁱ Public Health Ontario, July 2019: Burden of Chronic Diseases in Ontario. Retrieved from

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/chronic-disease/cdburden#:~:text=The%20total%20annual%20economic%20burden,inadequate%20vegetable%20and%20fruit%20consumption>



Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Speaking Points
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Re: 2022 Ontario Budget
Wednesday, January 19, 2022

- Good morning, Mr. Chair, Committee members and fellow deputants.
- I am Dr. Robert Kyle, Treasurer of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, better known as alPHA, and Durham Region's Medical Officer of Health.
- alPHA represents all of Ontario's 34 boards of health, medical officers of health (MOHs) and senior public health managers in each of the public health disciplines – nursing, inspection, nutrition, dentistry, health promotion, epidemiology, and business administration.
- For nearly two years, alPHA's members have distinguished themselves on the front line of the pandemic response, preventing COVID-19 infections, transmission, hospitalizations, and death through
 - enactment and enforcement of public health measures
 - case and contact management
 - outbreak management
 - infection prevention and control in institutions
 - communication of credible advice to the public
 - response coordination with local and provincial partners
 - leadership of the most complex vaccination campaign in Ontario's history

- The Ontario government is to be commended for the financial commitments that have been made to local public health to support its response to this crisis and to defray numerous extraordinary costs.
- This resource-intensive work has unfortunately come at the near total expense of public health's "regular" mandated programs and services, which are defined in the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS) under the following categories:
 - Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
 - Emergency Management
 - Food Safety
 - Health Equity
 - Healthy Environments
 - Healthy Growth and Development
 - Immunization (non-COVID-19)
 - Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
 - Population Health Assessment
 - Safe Water
 - School Health
 - Substance Use and Injury Prevention
- Our inability to deliver these programs is the public health equivalent of the health care sector's "surgical backlog". Failure to catch up will have significant impacts on population health - with increased burdens of illness on the health care system - for years to come.
- Avoiding these impacts will require an infusion of resources that will allow us to clear the backlog, resume these regular activities noted above, and maintain an effective pandemic response.

- Local public health is on the front line of keeping people well at all times and results in an excellent return on investment. Its value has been demonstrated more clearly than ever throughout the ongoing pandemic.
- The commitment to local public health the government has demonstrated during this crisis needs to be entrenched and reinforced to ensure that our public health system can carry out each of its health protection and promotion duties, both regular and responsive, to ensure a healthy population. To achieve this, we make the following recommendations for your consideration as the 2022 Ontario Budget is prepared.
- Ontario must commit to stable and sufficient investments in public health to ensure:
 - Continued support for an ongoing pandemic response
 - Enhanced support for local public health recovery and sustainability
 - Additional support for COVID-19 response evaluation and improvements
 - Preservation of the integrity of Ontario's locally based public health system
- We have made more specific recommendations for each of these in our accompanying written submission, and I would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of these for the Committee.
- The 2022 Ontario Budget should:
 - Plan for additional one-time allocations to support the ongoing pandemic response
 - Plan for additional one-time funding to support recovery efforts and close the gaps for public health programs and services

- Ensure that the total funding envelope is sufficient for all local public health agencies to deliver their entire OPHS mandate in addition to responding to the pandemic
 - Immediately revert to the 75% / 25% provincial-municipal public health cost-sharing formula
 - Consider continuing to provide 100% provincial funding for provincial priorities, e.g., Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program
 - Make provisions for a comprehensive review and assessment of all aspects of the pandemic response and recovery
 - Recognize that investments in health protection and promotion yield significant returns on investment by reducing the burden of illness on Ontario's health care system
- We all look forward to emerging from the COVID-19 crisis, but a full recovery will not be possible without meaningful investments in local public health and the central supports that it relies on. A healthy economy is not possible without healthy people.
 - These investments will also be foundational to achieving certain priorities outlined in the 2021 "Build Ontario" Fall Economic statement, namely
 - Safely reopening Ontario and managing COVID-19 for the long-term
 - Keeping schools safe
 - Increasing access to dental health programs for seniors
 - aPHa values and appreciates Ontario's leadership, guidance and support throughout the pandemic response, including financial support for its pandemic-related extraordinary costs.
 - aPHa anticipates this continued commitment as we look forward to entering a new normal.
 - Thank you for your attention and I look forward to answering your questions.

Check against delivery.