

Congratulations on Your Success in the 2014 Municipal Election



The job you've taken on is extremely important. As an elected official, you are a leader in your community and an advocate on behalf of your constituents. You are part of a local government that plays an essential role in building a vibrant and sustainable community. You will make meaningful decisions that impact everyone who lives, works, learns and plays in your community. It's a big responsibility and we want you to know that your local public health unit shares your enthusiasm for ensuring everyone living in your community is as healthy as possible.

We're Asking You to Focus on Health

Why focus on health promotion and illness prevention? At the turn of the twentieth century, local governments focused on the provision of clean drinking water, sewers and garbage disposal as major contributors to disease prevention. In that century public health had a strong focus on delivering vaccines in the community to prevent infectious diseases like small pox, diphtheria, typhus, cholera and tuberculosis, polio, and mumps. A century later, these diseases are nonexistent or minimal in Ontario.

Today the health threats in our communities are not so much infectious diseases, but chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

What influences our health?

Why Focus on Health?

- Two-thirds of Ontarians over the age of 45 have one or more chronic disease(s)
- Over 50% of adults in Ontario, and about 20% of youth, are overweight
- Obesity has a direct effect on the rate of type 2 diabetes and heart disease
- Nearly half of all cancer deaths are related to tobacco use, diet and lack of physical activity
- As much as half of the functional decline between the ages of 30 and 70 is due not to aging itself but to an inactive way of life

Local governments have a unique role in shaping the local conditions that have an impact on the health of individuals and communities. For example, elected officials make important decisions that impact the health of their citizens in

- Community planning and the built environment
- Parks and recreation facilities and their programming
- Health-related policies

It is now understood that good health comes from a variety of factors and influences, 75% of which are not related to the health care delivery system. These determinants of health are interconnected and contribute to the health of the population as illustrated below.

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|---------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| • Income & Social Status | 50% | • Personal Health Practices |
| • Social Support Networks | | • Early Childhood Development |
| • Education & Literacy | | • Culture & Language |
| • Employment/Working Conditions | | • Gender |

25% Health Care System

15% Biology & Physical Endowment

10% Physical Environment

Boards of Health

Municipal elected officials have an essential role in to play in supporting public health unit activity and possibly becoming a member of a local board of health.

Role of a Board of Health

The role of a board of health is to provide public health programs and services in the areas specified in the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#).

Responsibilities of a Board of Health

The responsibilities of a board of health are to:

- uphold legislation governing the mandate of the board of health under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#) and others
- meet the government of Ontario's expectations for governance and administrative practices as outlined in the [Ontario Public Health Organizational Standards](#)
- be aware of changing community trends and needs in order to develop policies to protect and promote the health of the community based on local needs
- be familiar with local resources and represent the health unit in the community
- work as a team and attend board meetings and actively participate including service on committees and as officers
- acquire a clear understanding of the financial position of the health unit and ensure that the finances are adequate and responsibly spent
- hire a medical officer of health who is responsible for the management of the health unit



The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) is a non-profit organization that provides leadership to Ontario's boards of health and public health units. The Association works with governments and other health organizations, to advocate for a strong and effective public health system in the province, as well as public health policies, programs and services that benefit all Ontarians.

For more information:

info@alphaweb.org or www.alphaweb.org

What is Population Health?

Your public health unit and the board of health which governs it use a population health approach.

As an approach, population health focuses on the interrelated conditions and factors that influence the health of populations over the life course. It involves an emphasis on the following

- identifying the root causes of a problem, and developing an evidence-based strategy to address it
- improving aggregate health status of the whole community, while considering the special needs and vulnerabilities of sub-populations
- working through partnerships and intersectoral cooperation
- finding flexible and multidimensional solutions for complex problems
- encouraging public involvement and community participation



A good example of the population health approach at work is the [Healthy Kids Community Challenge](#). Forty-five communities across Ontario have been provided with provincial funding to build healthier communities. Meeting the challenge involves making political commitments, adopting healthy public policies, engaging citizens and working with public health and other community partners. For you as an elected official, meeting the challenge means taking a leadership role in health promotion, thinking about the health impacts of the decisions you make, and knowing that the most effective results will be achieved through working in partnership with multiple sectors.

Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.