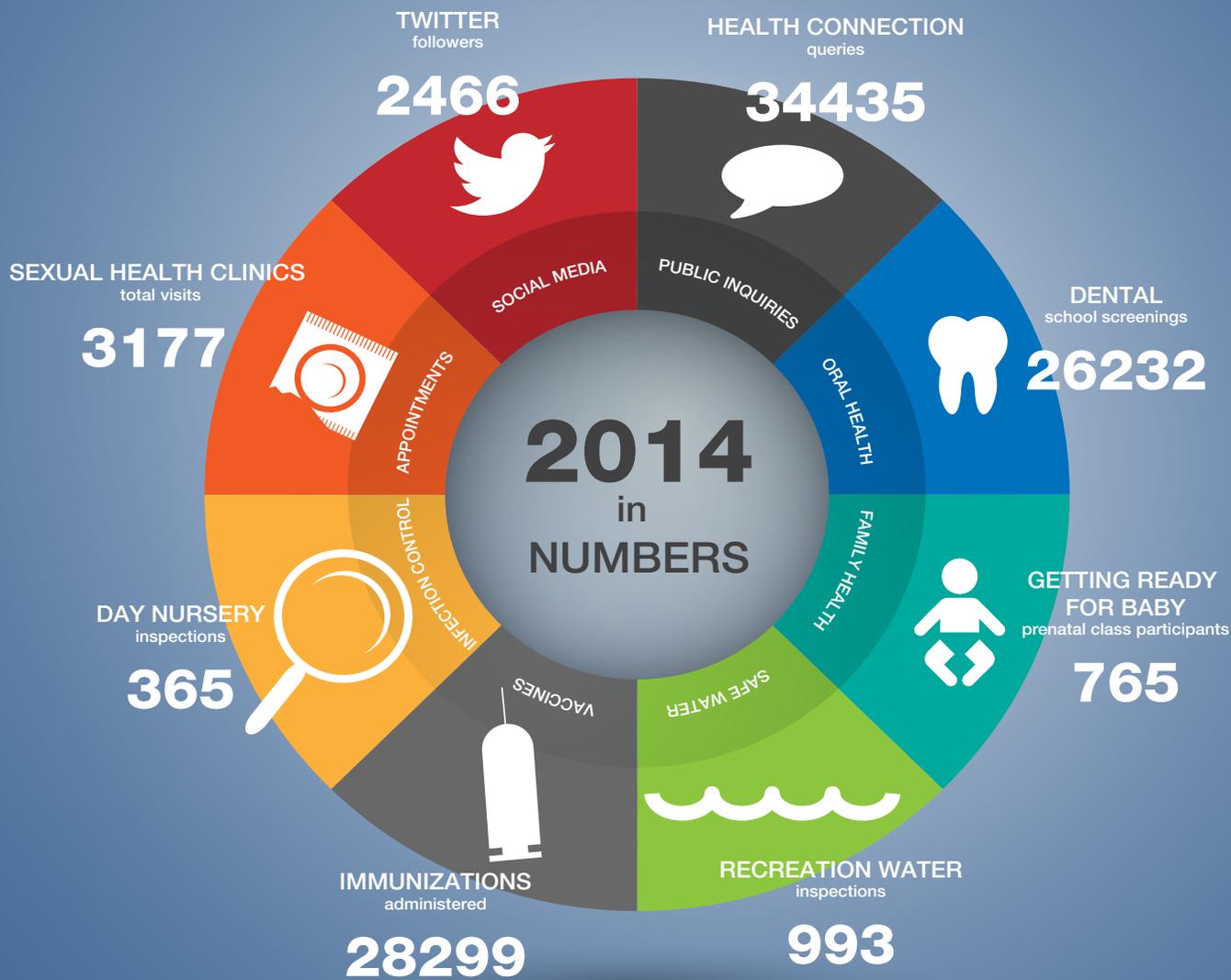


Health@ Simcoe Muskoka



From the Medical Officer of Health

As the population of Simcoe and Muskoka grows, protecting and promoting the health of residents and visitors requires effective and efficient public health programs and services. In recent years, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's activities have included a focus on the following broad areas:

Promoting Policy

Healthy public policy is the most powerful means of improving the health of our communities. Advocating for health supporting policy remains a major aspect of our work. To this end, during and following last fall's election, we provided new municipal councils with a primer on a range of public health issues: food access and security, poverty, alcohol, community water fluoridation, housing, air quality, and active transportation.

We continue to support our communities to become more compact, complete and supportive of walking and cycling, with increased access to public transportation. Our work included the release of our updated *Healthy Community Design Policy Statements for Official Plans* in 2014.

Identifying Priorities

Our focus on the social determinants of health is ongoing. Part of this work involves assessing and modifying our programs to ensure they address the needs of vulnerable people, including individuals and families living in low income.

Preparing for and responding to potential and emerging health hazards is a key public health mandate. This is particularly important during large event gatherings, such as the 2014 International Plowing Match and the 2015 Pan Am Games, where we collaborate with municipal and provincial agencies to protect the public's health.

In the summer of 2014 we introduced a heat alert and response system – one example of a public health response to the impact of climate change. As well, we supported local municipalities' funding applications for the provincial Healthy Kids Community Challenge, and we will work with the two successful communities in fulfilling their plans.

Sharing Knowledge

Knowledge is needed to protect and promote health. We launched a website portal for primary care providers, including physicians, with current information and guidance on public health matters. We also successfully launched *Panorama*, a database that enhances our vaccination information system. Early in 2015, the public health inspection results for food premises in Simcoe Muskoka became available on our Inspection Connection website.

Maintaining and enhancing the public's health requires both tried and true programs, as well as responses to new and emerging challenges. The past year has been no exception.

Medical Officer of Health — Dr. Charles Gardner



Peace of mind when dining

The new Inspection Connection

One of the health unit's best known services in our communities is inspecting places where food is prepared and served. To give the public easier access to the results of these inspections, the health unit now offers its inspection reports online through the Inspection Connection website.

The website www.inspectionconnection.ca offers map-based information about inspections at food premises. For each premise it provides a brief overview of critical or non-critical issues that have arisen at the facilities, and whether they were corrected. It also helps educate people on the health unit's role in protecting the public from foodborne illness.

Inspectors present the establishments with green certificates of inspection indicating that, on the date of inspection, the minimum standards of the regulation were met. Red closure signs may accompany an order to close the establishment—something that only happens when an inspection uncovers an immediate health hazard.

Food establishments are inspected in accordance with Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Act and inspection results must be made available to the public. Posting-based systems similar to the health unit's are being used by a growing number of health units in Ontario and across North America.

Inspection Connection Signage



An extra blue sticker is attached to the sign when at least one certified food handler was working on the date of inspection.

Each poster contains a QR code that can be scanned by smart phones taking them to www.inspectionconnection.ca

Addressing health inequities

Strong evidence shows that low income is linked to a wide range of poor health and social outcomes.

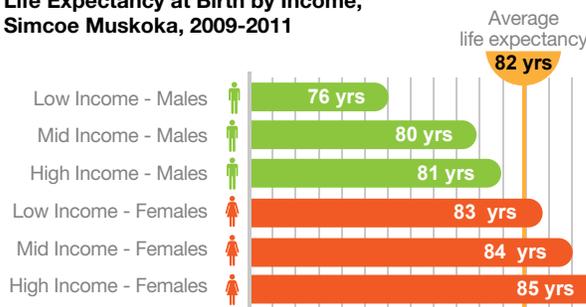
About 56,000 people in Simcoe and Muskoka (or 11% of the population) live in low income, based on Statistics Canada's after-tax low-income measure.

The health unit is developing a multi-year plan to address the factors that create health inequities for this population. These factors, also referred to as social determinants of health, include income, housing, transportation, employment and food insecurity.

Reducing health inequities is not something the health unit can do alone. We are working with other agencies and groups to develop strategies and to advocate for policies, programs and services that will help to increase the overall health and well-being of people living in low income.

At the same time we are examining our own programs and services with a health equity lens. In one such case we have worked with our partners to modify the way we provide car seat safety checks to make them more available to parents who have difficulty accessing car seat safety information.

Life Expectancy at Birth by Income, Simcoe Muskoka, 2009-2011



Sources: Ontario Mortality Data 2009-2011, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care; IntelliHEALTH ONTARIO, data extracted May 2015. National Household Survey 2011, Statistics Canada.

Measuring performance

The health unit's balanced scorecard measures progress of the agency's strategic plan.

The scorecard clusters indicators from its strategic initiatives into four quadrants, giving a simple, colour-coded picture of movement forward on agency priorities, and where energies are needed to address challenges.

The 2014 scorecard demonstrates positive results in our efforts to engage the community and work in partnership on priority public health issues and initiatives, including the social determinants of health, infection prevention and control and business continuity planning. While our long term goal is to improve health status, changes to these measures are more gradual and cannot be attributed to the actions of a single agency.



Being accountable to our funders

The provincial government annually sets target levels of performance and Boards of Health are required to use best efforts to achieve those targets.

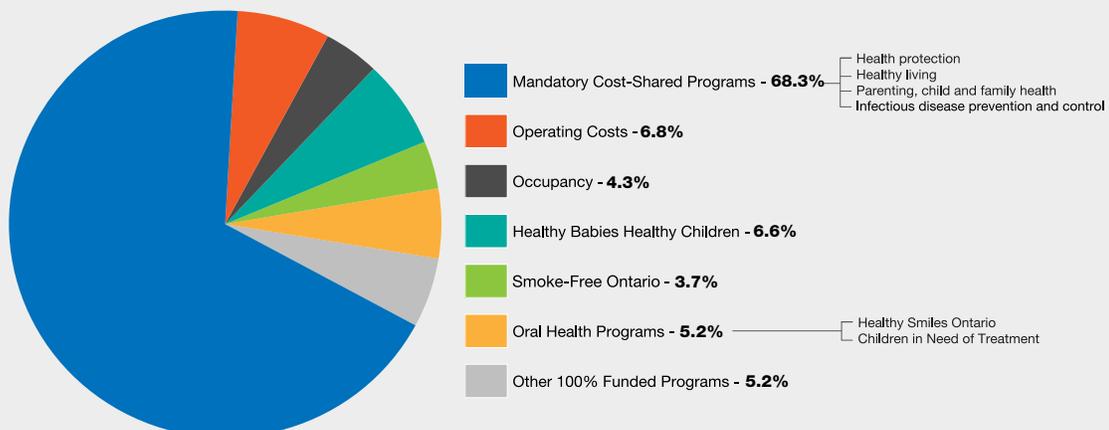
In 2014, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit reached full compliance with the provincial standard in four areas, while making strong progress in five others.

Examples of reaching or exceeding our targets include: 100% of refrigerators storing publicly funded vaccine that are located in health care providers' offices received a cold chain inspection; nearly 100 per cent of local tobacco vendors in compliance with youth access legislation, exceeding the province's minimum of 90 per cent; and exceeding the target in the percentage of moderate-risk food premises inspected at the required half-year intervals.

In three areas there was a drop in performance from the previous year due to resourcing and capacity issues. A plan of action has been developed to address performance shortfalls in an effort to ensure continuous quality improvement.

More information about our accountability and performance measures can be found at www.smdhu.org/Accountability.

2014 Health Unit Budget - \$36.9 Million



Reaching the medical community



Primary Care portal

The health unit works with its primary care partners in hospitals, medical and dental offices, long-term care facilities and pharmacies to promote health and prevent disease and injury.

But connecting with those busy professionals when their time is limited can be challenging. In 2014 the health unit unveiled a new website section designed specifically with the needs of primary care professionals in mind. The Primary Care portal is the culmination of more than a year's research and development into the electronic tools that would

best serve this group. The work involved consulting with the local medical community, studying how other health units provide online information to their medical communities, and considering the most relevant content for the site.

The portal provides timely information on communicable and chronic diseases, maternal and child health,

and other areas of interest to primary care providers. A rotating banner at the top of the main page provides links to information on the most current and pressing public health issues.

Since its launch the site has received positive response from Simcoe Muskoka's primary care community, with good uptake to date.

Campaign earns kudos

The health unit used social media for the "Talk Sex With a Nurse" campaign to get messages about sexually transmitted infections, risk reduction and testing to men having sex with other men. This population is a small, hard-to-reach, closed community where high-risk exposures take place.

Among men having sex with men, a growing number are being diagnosed with sexually transmitted infections and HIV, raising the need to reach out. Created in partnership with the AIDS Committee of Simcoe County, the "Talk Sex With a Nurse" campaign uses a cruising website to provide health teaching and confidential information. On-line chat methods and e-blasts on the website have been used. This has resulted in an increase in attendance by men at the health unit's sexual health clinics. The campaign won a \$10,000 award for innovation from Canada Health Infoway.

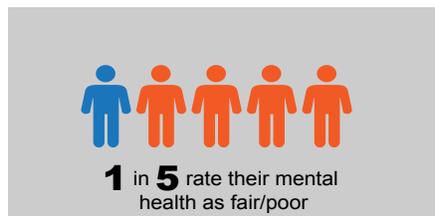


(l to r) MOH Dr. Charles Gardner, Board of Health Chair Barry Ward and Sexual Health Manager Jillian Fenik display the Public Health Social Media Innovation Award from Canada Health Infoway.

Helping to create healthier schools

Mental Health Indicators

Students Grades 7-12, 2013
North Simcoe Muskoka + Central East
Local Health Intergration Networks



Source: Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., Beitchman, J. H., Wolfe, D., & Mann, R. E. (2014). *The mental health and well-being of Ontario students, 1991–2013: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 38). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Tackling mental health and stress

The health unit works with Simcoe Muskoka schools, school boards, Healthy School committees, teachers and counsellors to plan and implement a range of programs and activities to enhance student health.

With students reporting higher levels of stress and poorer mental health than a decade ago, the healthy schools program has focused attention on this issue.

Public health nurses support the delivery of the Can You Feel It stress program to students from Grades 7 to 12. Through this program students learn that change is constant, and in managing change, learn to recognize their own stressors, control their reactions, adopt healthy coping strategies and build resilience.

Nurses from the health unit also support the Roots of Empathy program and Playground Activity Leaders In Schools (P.A.L.S./Healthy P.A.L.S.) across Simcoe Muskoka. These evidence-based programs complement the positive mental health promotion strategy, with a focus on reducing bullying and aggression, increasing physical activity, building empathy, and promoting student leadership.

A report of health unit activities in schools for 2013–2014 is available at: www.smdhu.org/SchoolPartnerships.

Tanning beds—no longer allowed for youth

It's proven that use of tanning beds will do as much damage to skin as the sun. When used by youth, the damage has been associated with skin cancers later in life.

In May 2014, regulations in the *Skin Cancer Prevention Act* prohibited the use of tanning beds by people under 18 years of age. The job of enforcing that law falls to public health units.

Initial health unit efforts have focused on education and awareness. Inspectors visited 73 tanning salon operators in 2014 to explain the range of procedures that must be followed, such

as registering with the health unit, and posting signs outlining the ban on minors and advising of the dangers of tanning. For the time being, enforcement will be driven only by complaints.

This new duty falls to public health inspectors who are already working with child care and personal service settings such as beauty salons and tattoo parlours.

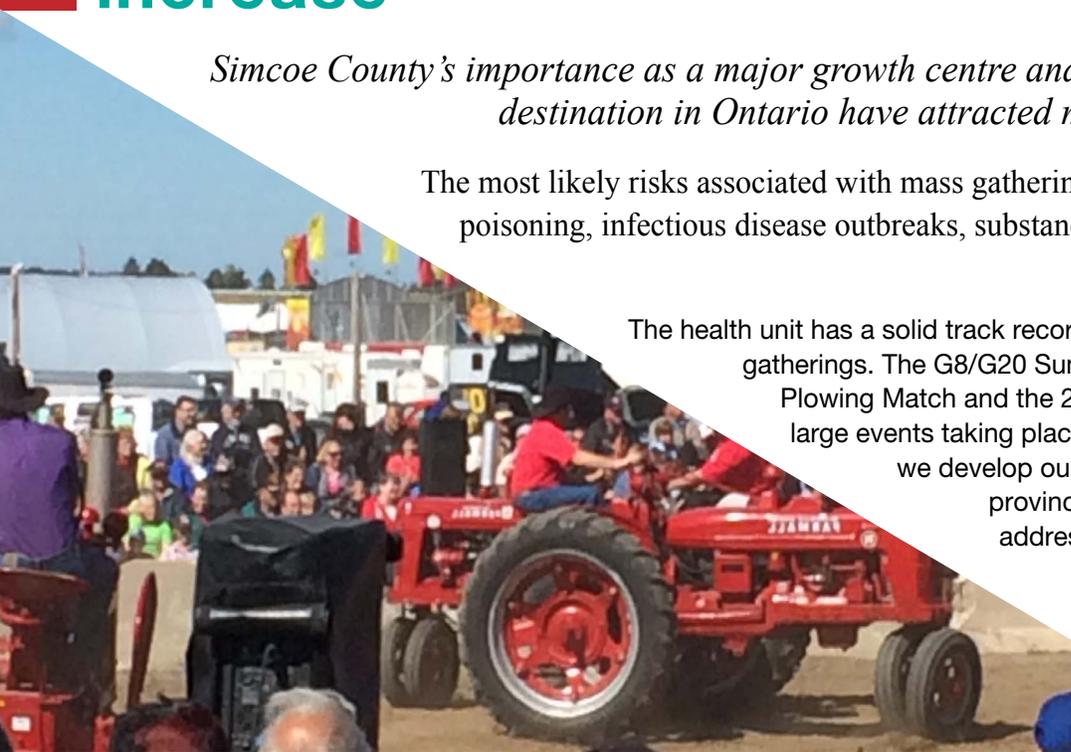


Where crowds gather, health risks increase

Simcoe County's importance as a major growth centre and Muskoka's draw as a tourist destination in Ontario have attracted more large-attendance events.

The most likely risks associated with mass gatherings are health hazards such as food poisoning, infectious disease outbreaks, substance abuse, dehydration and weather emergencies.

The health unit has a solid track record in planning and preparing for mass gatherings. The G8/G20 Summit in 2010, last year's International Plowing Match and the 2015 Pan Am Games are examples of large events taking place in our area. For all mass gatherings we develop our plans in conjunction with municipal, provincial and other partners to prevent and address potential illness and injury with the crowds attending such events.



Health unit activities for large-attendance events include inspecting for food safety and safe drinking water; enforcing tobacco legislation; monitoring for health impacts of extreme heat or poor air quality; communicating risks and educating the public and event organizers about injury prevention, substance abuse and infection control; and responding in the event of emergencies such as disease outbreaks or heat alerts.

Panorama improves vaccine tracking

Our new database system tracks vaccines and enhances our province-wide immunization information system.

The health unit moved more than 1.7 million documented immunizations to the new Panorama database in the fall of 2014. The records are from school immunization programs and public immunization clinics. The provincial Panorama system permits secure sharing of information with health authorities across the province. It also improves how immunization



information is tracked and recorded. With the ability to forecast required immunizations and run reports, it will ultimately help reduce the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases.

A new internal vaccine inventory management program is already beginning to show results in new efficiencies this year and has prepared us to include vaccine inventory in the Panorama module; vital outcomes when the agency handles and distributes as much as \$10 million worth of vaccine in a year.

Board Chair message



Health can be improved—or impeded—by community design, government policy, and economic and environmental factors. Over the last year, I have been delighted at the Simcoe Muskoka Board of Health’s level of activity on all fronts. The board has played a significant role in advocating for change to bring innovative thinking into reality.

Elections at the provincial and municipal levels created an opportunity to press for future decision-making with the well-being of the public in mind. The board of health endorsed a widely distributed election primer that brought broad concepts of affordable housing, pedestrian friendly streets, food security and other issues to the attention of election candidates.

A report in January 2014, revealed that local low-income families struggle to afford healthy foods. The board joined a province-wide call for the Ontario government to increase social assistance benefits and raise the minimum wage to bring nutritious food choices within reach.

Throughout 2014, the health unit challenged new rules that relax the sale of alcohol. The board of health communicated to all municipalities in Simcoe and Muskoka about the risks of selling wine at farmers’ markets. The debate continued into this year when the province allowed sales of beer in grocery stores. We continue to contend that making alcohol more accessible will increase consumption, resulting in more chronic illness, injuries, and disruption of home life.

At times our role has been to advocate for improved funding. The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program has been stretched for many years with dwindling resources. The board of health renewed a call to the province for strengthened financial support for this widely praised service. The board also led a call to maintain financial support for families in need of dental service, in keeping with Ontario’s Public Health Standards. This was in response to policy changes that will exclude some families from funding for preventive dental care for their children.

The board of health’s vigorous work last year has carried into the new board in 2015. Roughly half the board’s membership consists of new faces. We have lost some valuable members, but the new governing body comprises an ideal mix of experience, complementary skills and fresh thinking. Even in its infancy, this board has shown it is eager to take up the cause of public health.

Chair, Simcoe Muskoka District Board of Health — Barry Ward



MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH

Dr. Charles Gardner
(Medical Officer of Health)

Dr. Colin Lee (Associate MOH)
Dr. Lisa Simon (Associate MOH)

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