



Sw SOUTHWESTERN
Public Health
Oxford • Elgin • St. Thomas

WE DO THAT, TOO!

Annual Report 2023



OUR VISION

Healthy people in vibrant communities.

OUR MISSION

Leading the way in protecting and promoting the health of all people in our communities, resulting in better health.

OUR VALUES

- Evidence
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Quality
- Equity
- Forward-thinking

Community Leadership

The Southwestern Public Health Board of Health is comprised of municipal appointees and provincially appointed Order in Council positions.

The Board is accountable to the Ontario Ministry of Health and the communities of Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas to ensure we deliver quality, responsive programs and services under the Ontario Public Health Standards as regulated by the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act.



Mayor Joe Preston
Board Chair, City of St. Thomas



Councillor Bernia Martin
Board Vice-Chair, Oxford County



Cynthia St. John
Chief Executive Officer



Dr. Ninh Tran
Medical Officer of Health



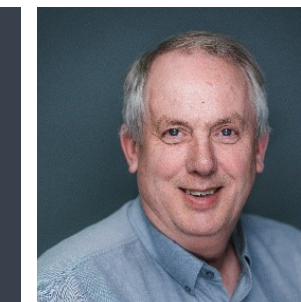
Councillor Jack Couckuyt
Elgin County



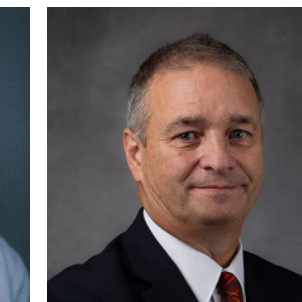
Councillor Jim Herbert
City of St. Thomas



Deputy Warden Grant Jones
Elgin County



Councillor David Mayberry
Oxford County



Councillor Mark Peterson
Oxford County



Lee Rowden
Provincial Appointee



Warden Marcus Ryan
Oxford County



Davin Shinedling
Provincial Appointee



David Warden
Provincial Appointee



Councillor Duncan MacPhail
Elgin County - *In Memoriam*

In memory of Councillor Duncan MacPhail (West Elgin), whose dedication to public health and unwavering commitment to the well-being of our community will forever inspire and guide us.

Message from the Board of Health



As I reflect on the 2023 year and my term as Chair of the Southwestern Public Health Board of Health, what stands out most prominently is the commitment of my colleagues to the well-being of every Oxford, Elgin, and St. Thomas resident.

Public health's legislated mandate is broad and ranges from food safety to routine immunization to emergency management to safe water. Each health unit strives to shape its service delivery based on the unique needs of the communities it serves and in a way that is accessible, equitable and fair.

Through a series of staff presentations, we were informed about a new Nurse Partnership Program that connects young families with area primary care providers for pre and post-natal care, and a new comprehensive school health model that is focused on delivering a greater volume of service to the schools we know need it the most.

We had lengthy and often animated conversations about the local opioid crisis, the need to prevent dozens of overdose deaths and public health's role in this escalating and devastating tragedy. This conversation led to the commissioning of a [Feasibility Study on Consumption and Treatment Services](#) and conversations with local municipalities about their willingness to support this type of service.

Our Board governance work spans from monitoring our organization's financial health to understanding organizational risks, to exploring the opportunities to work with community partners to improve health outcomes in our communities. We also worked together to determine where additional investment was required to make changes in the shorter-term (3-5 years). All this work is done in partnership with the skillful and dedicated leadership of our Chief Executive Officer, Cynthia St. John, and our Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Ninh Tran.

As a Board, we look forward to reviewing the data that illustrates a marked improvement in the health of our community – and reporting the progress we are making in priority areas back to each of you. Lastly, to the staff, thank you for your commitment to community health and vitality – none of this would be possible without you.

Best Regards,

Joe Preston
Chair, Board of Health

Message from the CEO

2023 was the year that the dust settled on the Covid-19 pandemic response.

The pandemic was not “over,” and cases continued, but our response work lessened, and the staff team could more easily turn their attention to the other core work of public health. This included the backlog of immunizations, inspections, and other follow-up work that resulted from our intense focus on the pandemic since 2020.

As the last of our mass immunization clinics were closing, our Foundational Standards team was preparing a Board of Health presentation that would change the course of the year for Southwestern Public Health.

Upon learning that the health status of the residents of Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas lagged that of the rest of Ontario in some domains, the Board of Health requested recommendations on where further investment into public health interventions could impact population health objectives over the next three to five years.

What followed was a prioritization process that looked at available data, research evidence, ethical considerations, and public health expertise to select seven priorities: climate change, substance use prevention, nurse family partnership, mental health promotion, childhood immunizations, infection prevention and control, and emergency management. Details about each of these priorities and what we hope to achieve can be found throughout this Annual Report.

None of this work, of course, would be possible without the nearly 200 nurses, inspectors, dietitians, dental hygienists and assistants, program assistants, epidemiologists, planners, health promoters and so many others who show up with passion, professionalism, and commitment every day. This staff team is the best of the best – laser-focused on improving the health of our clients and the communities we serve.

I am so proud to work for an organization that is data-driven and willing to do the hard work of prioritization. I am so grateful to work with a Board of Health willing to make such a bold, courageous investment into the health of their community.

Recently, the Ministry of Health announced a three-pronged strategy for strengthening public health that includes voluntary mergers, a thorough review of the Ontario Public Health Standards, and multi-year funding commitment. Adequate and consistent funding from our provincial funders is needed to improve the health and well-being of our communities. While I cannot predict what will unfold in 2024, I am confident that the public health leadership of our Board and staff will serve this community well throughout any transition that comes our way.

With gratitude,

Cynthia St. John
Chief Executive Officer



Message from the MOH

2023 was a memorable year for me both professionally and personally as it was my second year, and my first full year as Medical Officer of Health for Southwestern Public Health. It was also a year with a “new” Board of Health and new faces at the leadership table following the 2022 municipal election.

In the 2022 Annual Report I commented that as we transitioned our work away from a complete focus on Covid-19, I was looking forward to focusing on other critical public health issues, including the opioid crisis, climate change, and other health system initiatives.

This transition from Covid-19 to other crucial public health issues was punctuated with the closure of our mass immunization clinics in February. My work took a sharp turn with my involvement in a feasibility study entitled, “An Exploration of the Need for and Feasibility of Consumption and Treatment Services in the Southwestern Public Health Region.” The recommendations in the Report were endorsed by the Board of Health in June and we have since engaged in some challenging yet thoughtful conversations with municipalities and other community groups about this strategy and others required to combat the opioid crisis hitting our region.

Climate change is a public health issue. Global warming and extreme temperatures impact human health directly (especially our most vulnerable populations) and indirectly. For example, in a largely rural community, changes to average temperature and precipitation patterns may disrupt agricultural businesses and the production of food. As part of SWPH’s Climate Change Working Group, I provided input into the development of [SWPH’s Climate Science Report](#), a Report describing the anticipated impacts of climate change on future temperature, precipitation, air quality and ultraviolet index in Oxford and Elgin Counties. I look forward to sharing the results of the follow-up Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment we are doing in partnership with the Waterloo Climate Institute at the University of Waterloo.

These two priorities were of course accompanied by work that ranged from local measles preparedness to the roll out of the new RSV vaccine to the vulnerable residents of congregate living settings, to issuing our first air quality warnings related to forest fires, to launching successful campaigns to encourage pap smears and STI testing.

I am grateful for the amazing staff, the leadership team and Chief Executive Officer, a supportive Board of Health, and great partners and residents that have supported me and SWPH in resuming our core services and tackling new challenges. I look forward to 2024 and continuing this important work.

Sincerely,

Ninh Tran
Medical Officer of Health

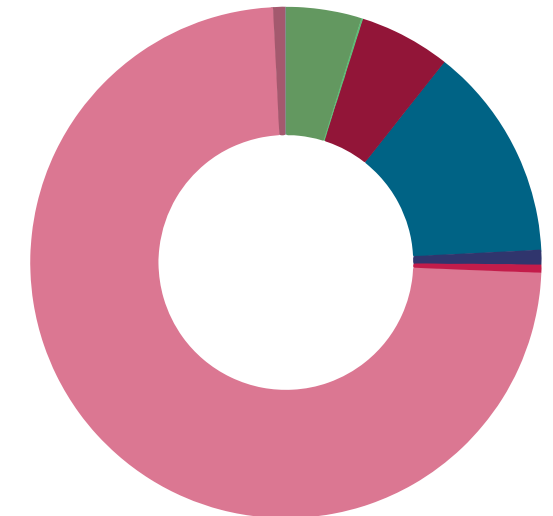


Southwestern Public Health Financial Picture, Year Ending December 31, 2023

Revenue

City of St. Thomas	\$1,115,063	
Clinics	\$23,880	
County of Elgin	\$1,351,194	
County of Oxford	\$3,169,783	
Interest	\$221,209	
Other fees & recoveries	\$121,776	
Province of Ontario	\$17,209,082	
PHAC	\$182,940	
Public Health Ontario	\$4,894	

Total Revenue **\$23,399,821**



Expense

Cost shared general programs and services	\$17,183,011	
Covid -19	\$1,376,534	
100% Ministry funded programs	\$1,125,477	
Other programs & one time expenditures	\$3,136,403	

Total Expenses **\$22,821,425**



For our full 2023 Audited Financial Statements, visit our [website](#).

VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASE

142 school immunization clinics for Grade 7 students



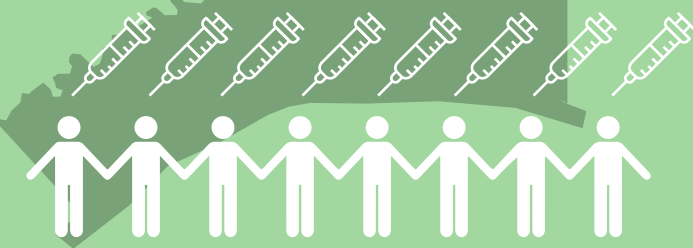
35,261 Number of students whose vaccine records were assessed for completeness

Suspension notices: Students whose parents received at least one Request for Information



COVID-19

9633 people were immunized at SWPH clinics in 2023



SEXUAL HEALTH

2786 visits to an SWPH sexual health clinic



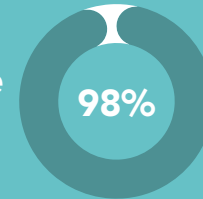
Visits to all regional sites for Needle Syringe Program:

6076

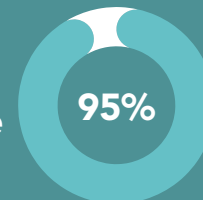


CHRONIC DISEASE & INJURY PREVENTION

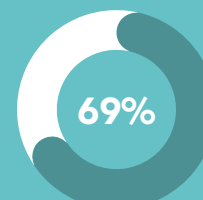
Tobacco retailers inspected for compliance with rules for tobacco products/accessories



Vapour product retailers that were inspected and received education on the Smoke-free Ontario Act



Staff that received trauma-informed care and de-escalation strategies training



ORAL HEALTH

8049 students were screened by the Oral Health Team

63% of students screened were found to have clinical need for preventive services

11% were found to need emergency/essential treatment

78% of those enrolled in Healthy Smiles Ontario began treatment within 16 weeks

IT

3259 IT tickets resolved



97% of staff completed Cyber Security Training

COMMUNICATIONS

1.4 Mil people reached through Facebook, Instagram & X (Twitter)

196,724 people accessed our website



HEALTHY GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

179 online breastfeeding support referrals

525 in-depth Healthy Baby Healthy Children screens

187 prenatal screens completed, 30% increase from 2022

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

2488 interactions with local schools

54% of priority schools received at least one Healthy Relationships Plus program

1264 visits to priority schools

INFECTIOUS DISEASE

All food safety and infection prevention & control inspections were conducted at licensed childcare centres



100% of staff are up-to-date with legislated training requirements

HUMAN RESOURCES

29 new hires in 2023



100% of staff are up-to-date with legislated training requirements

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Investigated or responded to:

629 potential rabies exposures

282 farms that employ international workers

11 food safety complaints

Seven Priorities for Investment



Early this year, the members of the Board of Health presented an exciting challenge to us by posing the following question: If you could receive additional investment in services that would move the needle on public health outcomes over the next three to five years, where would you invest that funding and why?

The 2023 program plans were reviewed to determine if further investment could impact the population health objectives within the next three-to-five years. The following were taken into consideration as we prioritized the plans for investment: population health objective, whether it was a public health priority, and the quality and availability of data to measure the impact over time.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Intervention for: Residents of Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas

Data: The rate of heat-related Emergency Department visits in SWPH has been double to triple the Ontario rate since 2018.

The work of climate change in public health is currently focused on completing a Health Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment which aims to understand the current and projected future risks of climate change on the people living in our region and ultimately to identify policies and programs to increase readiness for and resilience to these risks. The vulnerability assessment will improve our understanding of the current associations between weather, climate, and health outcomes. Our goal is to reduce the negative health impacts of climate change on the population.

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

Intervention for: School-aged Children and Youth

Data: Youth in the Southwestern Public Health region are trying vaping, and vaping more often, than other youth in Ontario.

Youth vaping has become a significant local issue as evidenced by reports from our local schools and school boards. At the same time, the body of evidence on the health harms related to vaping has been growing, especially for the youth population. A comprehensive health promotion approach, including policy development, school-level programming, and enforcement, will be required to reduce first-time and subsequent vaping.

Intervention for: Vulnerable Populations

Data: As of 2021, the rate of opioid-related deaths in the Southwestern Public Health region was higher than the Ontario rate.

SWPH's harm reduction work strives to minimize potential harms or negative consequences associated with using opioids, like Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, opioid overdoses, and deaths. With further investment in sharps management, needle supply services, naloxone support, along with training, we hope to see reduced rates of new cases of Hepatitis C and HIV as well as reduced rates of opioid-related emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and deaths.

NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

Intervention for: Expectant First-time Mothers and Babies 0-2 years old

The Nurse Family Partnership is a Public Health Nurse-only home visiting program that empowers first-time moms with key tools and supports to create better outcomes for themselves and their babies. With over 20 years of high-level evidence to support this program, the NFP program is considered the gold standard of home visiting programs. First-time expectant mothers that have been negatively affected by social determinants of health, experience barriers to accessing health care services, and show the greatest needs requiring the highest level of expertise will be offered this service.

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Intervention for: Residents of Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas

Data: The percentage of people who reported their mental health as "fair" or "poor" nearly doubled among Southwestern Public Health residents from 2015/2016 to 2019/2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted the mental health of Ontarians and, in particular, the workforce involved with the pandemic response and those working in a support capacity. There is great value in mental health promotion activities that address the repercussions associated with a prolonged emergency state as well as preparing organizations and the community at large for future emergencies such as providing support for staff well-being, resiliency training, and managing the backlog of paused services while avoiding staff burnout. SWPH is well-positioned to focus on dedicated Covid recovery initiatives with the intention that we will pilot the mental health promotion interventions internally and then share them with partner agencies for implementation.

CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS

Intervention for: School-aged Children and Youth

Data: Immunization coverage for Hepatitis B and Meningococcal among 12-year-olds in the Southwestern Public Health region decreased significantly between 2018 and 2021 (6.7% for HepB and 7.9% for MenC).

In addition to catch-up vaccine work that could not be accomplished during the pandemic, we have an increasing number of families in the community who do not have a regular health care provider and must turn to public health for immunizations or who are new to Canada and have not had the same vaccine access as those born in Canada. Further investment in this field will ensure we can continue to immunize children in a timely way and expand our outreach to vaccine-hesitant populations and communities who are newer to our communities and also require translation and interpretation services (i.e. Punjabi, Hindi, Mandarin, Ukrainian).

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Intervention for: Employees of Congregate Living Settings

Data: There was only one reported outbreak in a congregate living setting in 2019. In 2022, there were 67.

Between 2019 and 2022, for example, the number of respiratory outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes in our region each year more than doubled. Because of these increases, it is anticipated that the need for education and management of outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes (LTC/RHs) will continue to require resources in the future beyond our normal complement. Further investment in this public health priority would enhance the promotion of infection prevention and control measures in our LTC/RHs, childcare facilities, group homes, and other congregate living settings such as migrant farm housing across the region.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Intervention for: Municipal Partners and Emergency Services in Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been significant attention on emergency preparedness among local public health units, as evidenced by the [2022 Chief Medical Officer of Health report](#) that advocated for increased funding and human resources for emergency preparedness activities.

Emergency Response planning has focused on building internal organizational capacity to respond to and recover from the next emergency. This work will include building stronger networks and partnerships with local municipalities and health system partners for a more coordinated and effective response to all emergencies in the SWPH catchment area.



WE DO THAT, TOO!

St. Thomas Site
1230 Talbot St.
St. Thomas, ON
N5P 1G9

Woodstock Site
410 Buller St.
Woodstock, ON
N4S 4N2

1-800-922-0096
swpublichealth.ca

