



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Together  
with our communities,  
we help people  
become as healthy  
as they can be.



## VOLUNTARY MERGER

In August 2023, the Ministry of Health announced plans to strengthen the public health sector by offering one-time funding, resources and supports to local public health agencies that voluntarily merged by Jan. 1, 2025.

In response to the announcement, in March 2024 the Board of Health for Hastings Prince Edward Public Health voted in favour of an intent to merge with Kingston Frontenac, Lennox & Addington Public Health and Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. Together, the three Boards of Health submitted a business case to the province for a new merged health unit covering a nearly 20,000 square kilometre area and serving more than 550,000 residents across the southeast region.

In December 2024, the government of Ontario approved the funding for the voluntary merger, and all three Boards of Health voted unanimously to proceed with the merger. On Jan. 1, 2025, the South East Health Unit Board of Health met for the first time, officially launching the new merged public health agency. The agency's responsibilities remain the same as those of the legacy agencies: to provide public health-based programs that help prevent illness and injury, promote health and wellness, and protect residents from environmental health hazards.

This voluntary merger strengthens our capacity and ensures that we can continue to have the skilled personnel necessary to effectively offer high-quality public health services to our residents, with a goal of overall healthier communities across the southeast region.



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health is situated and provides services on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee people.

## ABOUT US

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health serves the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward from four local offices in Bancroft, Belleville, Picton and Trenton. We monitor the health of our local population, deliver programs and services within our communities, and help develop healthy public policies.

We provide information and support in many areas to help improve the health and well-being of our 177,000 residents. Some examples of the services we provide include: supporting new parents and babies through breastfeeding consultations; inspecting recreational water facilities, personal service settings, and food service settings to keep residents safe; offering community clinics for vaccinations and healthy sexuality; monitoring and responding to cases of infectious and communicable disease; collaborating with community partners to promote safety and reduce injuries; providing oral health screening and clinics; providing education and information to help residents make informed decisions about drug and alcohol use; and monitoring and reporting on community health issues to help inform the planning and delivery of local health services.

## 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Financial statements are reviewed annually by the Board of Health, and are available at [hpePublicHealth.ca](http://hpePublicHealth.ca).



# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF HEALTH CHAIR AND THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

The year 2024 was memorable; filled with achievements, service to our community, and change, as we undertook planning for our future. Despite being faced with uncertainty and some unexpected challenges, staff at Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) didn't waver in their commitment to deliver high-quality public health services to improve the health and well-being of our diverse population. We identified and responded to emerging public health issues in 2024, while continuing to deliver our regular programs and services.

- We unveiled an expanded Respiratory Illness Dashboard which provided a consolidated weekly summary of respiratory illnesses activity, including influenza, COVID-19, RSV, and other respiratory viruses in our region.
- We implemented the Steps to Wellness program, a free and effective nine-week, group-based cognitive behavioural therapy program where pregnant individuals or new mothers with babies up to 12 months of age meet weekly in a virtual group setting with public health nurses to learn skills, strategies and tools to help them manage their postpartum depression or anxiety.
- We launched two new mobile dental vans, in partnership with Kingston, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington Public Health, to enhance accessibility to provincial dental programs and help bridge the gaps in oral health care within our communities, particularly in underserved and rural areas.
- We implemented several initiatives to address the local increase in cases of syphilis, including participation in the Syphilis Point-of-Care Rapid Testing and Immediate Treatment Evaluation (SPRITE) study.
- We completed the Community Health Profile 2024, which summarizes the population health status of residents in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties, using key indicators drawn from the most recent five years of publicly available data.
- We presented the Real Cost of Eating Well in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Report, which shows the prevalence of household food insecurity for HPEC is 23 per cent, significantly higher than the provincial estimate of 17.4 per cent.
- We worked closely with community partners to develop a Community Drug Strategy, which aims to identify and implement collaborative long-term solutions related to unregulated substances within our community.
- We collaborated with GetaKit to offer free at-home HIV and sexually transmitted infection self-test kits for residents aged 16 and older as a strategy to increase access to sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing.
- Our multi-disciplinary Healthy Schools team continued to support comprehensive school health in secondary and elementary schools, providing information to families at school events, working with educators to deliver health-related educational programming focused on substance use prevention and other priority school health topics.

While this will be the last Annual Report from HPEPH, we look forward to the positive impact we will have on the health and well-being of our residents as we move forward as Southeast Public Health.

**Janet O'Neill**  
Chair, Hastings Prince Edward Board of Health  
Mayor, Municipality of Marmora and Lake  
County of Hastings

**Dr. Ethan Toumishey**  
MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health & CEO  
Hastings Prince Edward Public Health

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