

# 2025 COMMUNITY REPORT



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# Dr. Nicola Mercer,

Medical Officer of Health and CEO

As I reflect on the past year, I am reminded how quickly the public health landscape continues to evolve and how important it is for our Agency to evolve with it. In light of this observation, I am pleased to introduce the **2025 Community Report** for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health, which highlights how our teams have responded to both long-standing health priorities and emerging challenges. This year's report captures the breadth of our work, from supporting families and improving access to care, to responding to infectious disease risks, to further strengthening partnerships across our communities.

In 2025, innovation remained central to how we approached our work. We advanced tools that help residents connect with services more easily, including digital supports that streamline communication and improve access to care. We also strengthened protection against nicotine and substance-related harms in schools, supported families through early outreach programs and responded rapidly to emerging risks, from measles activity to mosquito-borne illness. These examples reflect how our Agency constantly adapts, using evidence, partnerships and new approaches to stay on top of health trends that affect our region.

Looking forward, we know that protecting community health requires both vigilance and creativity. Whether we are responding to infectious diseases, addressing inequities in access to care, or using new technologies to improve service delivery, our goal remains the same: to support healthier lives for everyone in Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph. On behalf of the dedicated staff at WDG Public Health, thank you for your continued trust and partnership as we work together toward a healthier future.



*nicola mercer*



# George Bridge,

## Chair of the Board of Health

As Chair it is my yearly privilege to introduce WDG Public Health's Community Report to residents across our region. This year's edition highlights the level of work undertaken in 2025 to protect and promote community health while responding to new and evolving challenges. From strengthening inspection programs and improving access to care, to supporting schools, families and community partners, WDG Public Health continues to proudly serve Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph.

Throughout 2025 the Board saw first-hand how innovation is shaping the future of public health. The Agency implemented new digital tools to improve access to services, explored responsible uses of artificial intelligence to streamline processes, and responded quickly to emerging risks. At the same time, WDG Public Health strengthened prevention efforts in schools, expanded support for vulnerable populations, and worked with partners to address issues like stigma, access to dental care and environmental health risks. These efforts demonstrate how the Agency continues to adapt to changing needs while remaining grounded in evidence and local impact.

On behalf of the Board of Health, I encourage you to read through this report to learn more about the important work being done in our communities. We remain committed to supporting Dr. Mercer, the leadership team and the dedicated staff of WDG Public Health as they continue to innovate, adapt, and protect the health of residents now and into the future.



# Board of Health Members

## Representing Wellington County

David Anderson, Councillor, County of Wellington

George Bridge (Chair), Provincial Appointee

Dr. Duncan Bull, Provincial Appointee

Campbell Cork, Councillor, Wellington County

Chris White (Secretary-Treasurer), Warden, County of Wellington; Mayor, Township of Guelph-Eramosa

## Representing Dufferin County

Steve Cavell, Provincial Appointee

Guy Gardhouse, Councillor, County of Dufferin; Mayor, Township of East Garafraxa

Dr. Ralph Manktelow, Councillor, County of Dufferin

Robin Sedgwick, Provincial Appointee

## Representing City of Guelph

Linda Busuttill (Vice-Chair), Councillor, City of Guelph

Erin Caton, Councillor, City of Guelph

Rodrigo Goller, Councillor, City of Guelph

Anil Kaul, Provincial Appointee

## Representing WDG Public Health

Dr. Nicola Mercer (Ex-Officio Member), WDG Public Health, Medical Officer of Health & CEO



# Financials



The total operating revenue for WDG Public Health in 2025 was \$30.5 million. WDG Public Health receives funding from multiple sources:

- The Province of Ontario provides funding through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). In 2025, the Ministry of Health provided funding for 60 percent of the Agency's revenues and MCCSS provided six percent.
- The municipalities of Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph provide funding based on the population of each municipality relative to the total population of the region. Population numbers are determined by the most recent census. In 2025, Dufferin County contributed seven percent of the Agency's revenues, Wellington County contributed 10 percent and the City of Guelph contributed 15 percent.
- Occasionally, WDG Public Health receives one-time funding for special projects.

As a publicly funded organization, WDG Public Health reports its finances in accordance with the public sector accounting standards. Financial statements are subject to an audit by an external audit firm as outlined in the Municipal Act. The full audited financial statements for 2025 can be found at [wdgpublichealth.ca](http://wdgpublichealth.ca).

# Client and Community Support

In 2025, Client and Community Support (CCS) helped thousands of residents connect to the right public health support faster. CCS is often the first point of contact for families and community members, helping people get accurate information, book appointments and navigate services.

## BY THE NUMBERS:

**29,000+** community interactions

across phone, in-person visits, email, fax and our chatbot.

### WDG Public Health Chatbot reach

- Nearly **2,000** total chatbot conversations
- **220** chatbot conversations opened per month

**2,479**

interactions per month  
(average)

**1,118**

responses received in  
**Parenting Insights Survey**

### Sight for Success returned in 2025

- More than **20** optometrist partners across WDG
- Financial support of up to **\$160** toward prescription eyewear for eligible students in Grades 1–12

# Health Protection

WDG Public Health ensures community health and safety through inspections, investigations and enforcement of public health standards. In 2025, the Agency achieved full compliance with the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). Inspection and complaint reports are publicly available at [CheckBeforeYouChoose.ca](https://www.checkbeforeyouchoose.ca).



**Recreational water safety** – **311** pools, spas and splash pads inspected.



**Drinking water protection** – **90** adverse water quality incidents and **10** boil water advisories investigated.



**Food safety** – **3,021** restaurant and food vendor inspections to prevent foodborne illness.



**Reducing youth access to harmful products** – **366** tobacco and **178** vape retailer inspections.



**Safe environments** – **253** health hazard investigations.



**Infection prevention and control** – **1,390** reportable disease cases investigated. **151** outbreaks investigated in long-term care and retirement homes.



**Vector-borne disease prevention** – **260** ticks tested for Lyme disease. **105,732** catch basins treated for West Nile Virus.



**Rabies prevention** – **1,105** animal exposures investigated. Rabies vaccines given to **202** individuals as preventative measure.

# Assessing the Community's Dental Care Needs

## Understanding Gaps, Barriers and Opportunities for Action

Oral health is a key part of overall health and well-being, yet many residents in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph continue to face barriers accessing dental care. By engaging with people and examining the trends in how they use programs and services, WDG Public Health is able to identify the biggest areas of need and how to help people overcome these barriers.

## What the Data Tells Us

School-based screening is one of the main sources of oral health trends among children. During the 2024/25 school year, more than 11,000 students were screened, identifying hundreds of children with urgent and non-urgent dental needs. Among seniors, the federal Canadian Dental Care Plan program has improved access to community dental services and greatly reduced waitlists for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

## Understanding and Addressing Gaps in Care

WDG Public Health has identified common gaps for both children and adults, particularly seniors, newcomers and those from rural areas and low-income families:

- Low awareness of available programs
- Difficulty navigating insurance eligibility
- No income tax on file
- Limited access to dental providers in rural areas

By reducing barriers related to cost, travel and navigation, more residents can access timely preventative and treatment services. These efforts include:

- Expanding outreach and preventive services, including school- and daycare-based screenings, fluoride varnish programs and on-site clinics in select schools.
- Direct support to help residents understand and apply for eligible dental programs like Healthy Smiles Ontario, the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program and the Canadian Dental Care Plan.

## Informing Future Action

To better understand unmet needs, WDG Public Health conducted a community dental health survey and a broader dental needs assessment. Together, these efforts will inform targeted outreach, program design, and advocacy to improve access to preventive and essential dental care across the region.

### BY THE NUMBERS:

**208** urgent  
and  
**900** non-urgent  
dental needs  
identified in schools

**11,086**  
students screened  
in school-based  
dental screening  
programs

**3,946**  
students received a  
first fluoride varnish  
application

**1,396**  
students received  
a second varnish  
application

# Reducing Stigma in the Community

## Improving Access to Dignified Care and Support

Stigma can prevent people from getting the healthcare and support they need. It can show up as judgment, stereotypes and discrimination, especially for people who use substances or those seeking sexual health services. In 2025, WDG Public Health took action to reduce stigma by improving access to low-barrier services, protecting privacy and working with partners to offer compassionate support.

### DEFINITIONS:

**Stigma** is the negative attitudes and beliefs someone faces because of their circumstances, including discrimination, prejudice, judging, labelling, isolating and stereotyping that can make it difficult for them to ask for help.

**Harm reduction** is the practice of reducing adverse consequences of legal and illegal substance use.

## Supporting People through System Changes

On March 31, 2025, the Consumption and Treatment Site (CTS) at the Guelph Community Health Centre closed and the Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub model began. WDG Public Health worked closely with community partners to help reduce risks during this transition and support individuals who previously relied on CTS services. To maintain access to care, WDG Public Health increased clinic hours at the Royal City Mission from bi-monthly to weekly, offering harm reduction supplies, naloxone, STI/HIV screening and immunization.

WDG Public Health also worked with the City of Guelph to install 10 new needle drop kiosks in high-risk areas, plus an additional kiosk in Arthur, helping reduce stigma and harm by making safer needle disposal easier and more available. In early 2025, the Guelph Public Library became a naloxone distributor — only the second library in Ontario approved to do so — expanding access in a trusted community space.

Together, these efforts helped reduce stigma, strengthen trust and make it easier for people to get the care they need when and where they need it.

# Working with Local Schools to Address Youth Challenges

Schools are a key partner in supporting the health and well-being of children and youth. In 2025, WDG Public Health worked closely with local school boards and community organizations to address emerging challenges students face.

## Reducing Harm from Tobacco and Vaping

To reduce nicotine-related harms, WDG Public Health partnered with Upper Grand District School Board and Wellington Catholic District School Board to launch *Clear Choices: Understanding Tobacco, Vaping and Cannabis*. This online learning program provides an education-focused alternative for students caught smoking or vaping on school property. Instead of relying only on disciplinary action, Clear Choices helps students understand how nicotine affects the developing brain, the risks of vaping and the rules that protect youth. The program will also give schools and Public Health better insight into where additional supports may be needed.

## Supporting Healthy Decision-making

WDG Public Health also supported *Choices Rewired*, a prevention initiative designed to help youth and families navigate screen time and substance use. By curating online resources for parents and guardians, the program encourages open conversations and practical strategies that support healthy habits. It highlights how screen use can affect sleep, mental health, and relationships, while providing clear, supportive information about substances and their risks.

By working alongside schools and families, WDG Public Health helps create environments where young people can build skills, access trusted information and make healthier choices, supporting their well-being today and into the future.

## How Online Learning Supports Families and Schools

- Tailors evidence-informed resources to local youth and families.
- Aligns guidance with school-based learning and prevention efforts in the community.
- Builds resilience and decision-making skills through a strengths-based approach.
- Encourages early, ongoing conversations through plain-language tools.

# Keeping the Community Healthy in 2025

Clinical Services at WDG Public Health helps prevent and manage sexually transmitted infectious diseases, supports sexual health and improves access to testing and treatment across the region. In 2025, the program focused on early detection, equitable access and strong follow-up care to protect community health.

## Preventing and Managing Infections

Rates of several infections remained stable or declined in 2025. Hepatitis C cases stayed well below the provincial average, while gonorrhea and syphilis cases both decreased. HIV cases dropped by 60 percent, and there were no cases of mpox (monkeypox) reported locally. These outcomes reflect strong prevention work, including access to screening, harm reduction supplies and prompt follow-up care.

Tuberculosis (TB) treatment remains a priority. All active TB cases in 2025 completed treatment, which helped reduce the risk of transmission. Public Health also supported people with latent TB infection and focused on treatment for those at highest risk of their infection becoming an active illness.

## Improving Access to Testing and Care

WDG Public Health continued to expand options for residents to access sexual health services. In-person clinics served nearly 600 clients, while the GetaKit program provided online and at-home testing for more than 300 people. Together, these approaches increased access to asymptomatic STI screening, helping identify infections earlier and connect people to treatment sooner.

GetaKit also offered clients online results, rapid follow-up for positive tests, and guidance on prevention strategies such as vaccination and contraception. This model helps remove barriers like travel, privacy concerns and scheduling challenges.



**GetaKit.ca**

## Looking Ahead

By combining prevention, accessible testing, and timely treatment, Clinical Services continues to play a key role in reducing infections and supporting healthier communities throughout Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph.

# Innovation in Public Health

## Using Technology to Help People Get Faster, Easier Service

WDG Public Health uses artificial intelligence (AI) to improve how we serve our community. AI tools help reduce time spent on repetitive tasks, improve accuracy and allow staff to respond more quickly, especially during emergencies.

## Why This Matters:

Public Health receives a high volume of requests every day, including vaccine records, phone messages and lab results. AI helps organize this information faster so residents get the help they need sooner and staff can focus on the work that requires a person and not be bogged down with paperwork.

## Innovation in Action: What it Looks Like

- **Faster record processing** — Our community sends us hundreds of vaccine records every week through voicemails, emails, faxes and photos. We've built an AI system to read these records, pull out key details, and help staff process them faster — especially during school vaccine seasons.
- **Smarter voicemail triage** — We have tools that can turn voicemails into text, identify the main issue (like booking an appointment) and pull out key details like a phone number. This reduces delays and helps staff return calls more efficiently.
- **Improving how lab results are handled** — We use AI tools to help sort and process faxed lab results for reportable diseases, reducing manual work and supporting faster follow-up when urgent results come in.
- **Personalized communication** — Our automated system can create up to 50,000 customized immunization notices per hour and was adapted during the measles response to produce over 5,000 personalized letters to at-risk families.

## Keeping it Safe and Fair

WDG Public Health is careful to use AI responsibly through a comprehensive risk management framework that keeps real people in control of decisions. For example, when AI is used for administrative tasks, outputs get sent to staff for manual review if their accuracy is uncertain. Given WDG Public Health's role as custodians of health information, any personal information is also handled under strong privacy and security safeguards.

# Infection Prevention and Control

## Preventing Outbreaks and Protecting Residents in Congregate Living

Infection prevention and control (IPAC) is essential to keeping people safe in settings where residents live close together, such as long-term care, retirement homes, shelters and group homes. In 2025, WDG Public Health continued to proactively support congregate living settings across Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph.

## Building Skills Before Problems Happen

In 2025, WDG Public Health's IPAC Hub supported facilities with education, coaching and program development through a continued shift from reacting to outbreaks to preventing them. This included helping staff reinforce day-to-day practices like hand hygiene, using personal protective equipment (PPE) and environmental cleaning.

## Flexible Support that Meets Facilities' Needs

WDG Public Health has adapted infection control services so more can be delivered virtually, helping facilities access expert support quickly and consistently, while on-site visits provided more hands-on training and in-depth collaboration when needed. Public health experts also increased proactive outreach, with more than half of services geared toward addressing risks early and improving readiness.

## Practical Tools and Shared Learning

In 2025, WDG Public Health shared practical resources to help facilities respond to emerging issues and improve consistency, including a simplified outbreak management "cheat sheet" for quick reference. Regular webinars were held to address common gaps and new concerns like measles and Candida auris.

## Strengthening Leadership through the IPAC Champion Program

WDG Public Health's IPAC Champion Program supported IPAC leads in long-term care and retirement homes through four months of learning and support. Nine homes participated, Champions delivered 32 education sessions reaching 183 frontline staff and 11 new IPAC policies or protocols were put in place.

Through prevention-focused support, WDG Public Health is helping congregate settings build stronger, safer systems to protect both residents and staff.



# Helping Residents Identify and Reduce Radon Risk



## 100 Radon Test Kit Challenge

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can build up indoors and is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Because radon is colourless, odourless and tasteless, testing is the only way to know if levels in a home are elevated.

To increase awareness and testing across Wellington County and the City of Guelph, WDG Public Health participated in the **100 Radon Test Kit Challenge** in collaboration with Health Canada’s Take Action on Radon program. The partnership sought to reduce barriers to testing, improve local data and support residents to take action to protect their health.

## What We Did

WDG Public Health distributed approximately 180 free radon test kits—nearly double the original target—through in-person outreach and online promotion. Outreach events were held at Pine Meadows Retirement Community and the Centre Wellington Community Sportsplex, two high-traffic community facilities. These events created direct engagement with around 200 residents, providing education on radon risks, testing and next steps.

## Reaching Residents Online

Digital outreach expanded the partnership’s reach across the region. Paid social media promotions resulted in around 18,000 post engagements and 4,000 link clicks, while the radon webpage received approximately 1,000 unique visitors during October and November 2025.

## Community Impact

The 100 Radon Test Kit Challenge raised awareness and testing uptake while creating more local data to better understand radon risk in WDG. This information will help inform future education and outreach efforts while supporting informed decision-making to reduce residents’ long-term lung cancer risk and create healthier indoor environments.

### BY THE NUMBERS:

**180**  
free radon  
test kits  
distributed

**200**  
residents  
engaged through  
in-person  
outreach

**18,000**  
social  
media post  
engagements

**4,000**  
link clicks  
to radon  
information

**1,000**  
unique visitors  
to the Radon  
webpage

# Spotlight: 2025 Measles Response

## Reducing the Impact of the Measles Virus Through Action, Access and Communication

In 2025, Ontario experienced a significant measles outbreak. WDG Public Health responded quickly to protect residents and reduce widespread exposures.



### Quick Action and Guidance for Healthcare Providers

When the first measles case was confirmed in WDG, Public Health alerted local hospitals and primary care providers right away with guidance on recognizing measles symptoms, preventing and controlling infections, lab testing, and reporting suspected cases to the Medical Officer of Health to support timely investigation and contact tracing.

### Supporting Access to Vaccination

As measles spread across Ontario, WDG Public Health supported early measles vaccination for people at higher risk of exposure, including families living, working or travelling in affected areas. On May 6, 2025, Wellington and Dufferin counties, along with the City of Guelph, were named a “measles risk area.” Public Health recommended vaccination for infants, young children and eligible adults who were not fully immunized.

To further assist those most at risk, WDG Public Health sent letters encouraging vaccination to:

- **5,500** families with children four to six with incomplete measles vaccination
- **4,300** families with infants and children missing doses

In local schools, WDG Public Health offered guidance for students with measles symptoms while launching walk-in measles vaccination clinics across all three public health offices in Guelph, Orangeville and Fergus to support fast access to protection.

Ontario declared the measles outbreak over on October 6, 2025.

# Spotlight: Eastern Equine Encephalitis Virus

## Protecting People and Animals from Mosquito-borne Illness

In July 2025, WDG Public Health confirmed the first case of Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV) in a horse in Wellington County. EEEV is a rare but serious virus carried by infected mosquitoes. While it mainly affects horses, it can cause illness in people in very rare cases.



### Early Detection in Animals

The infected horse developed a fever and neurological signs and testing showed it had EEEV. Because the horse had not left the local area, this meant the virus was present locally in the environment.

### Reducing Risk Through Surveillance and Education

WDG Public Health monitors mosquito populations across the region to track West Nile virus and EEEV activity. Ongoing mosquito surveillance helps Public Health understand where mosquitoes that carry disease may be active and supports timely public guidance. Public Health shared information with local healthcare providers to raise awareness about EEEV and encouraged them to consider mosquito-borne illness when diagnosing patients with fevers or neurological symptoms after mosquito exposure.

To date, no human cases of EEEV have been reported in Wellington or Dufferin counties or the City of Guelph.

### Helping Residents Protect Themselves

To reduce the risk of mosquito bites, Public Health reminded the community about simple protective steps:

- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing at dawn and dusk.
- Use Health Canada-approved mosquito repellent.
- Repair screens on doors and windows.
- Remove standing water around homes to reduce mosquito breeding areas.

### Looking forward

While the risk of EEEV to people in the region remains low, local detection highlights the importance of mosquito bite prevention and ongoing monitoring. WDG Public Health continues to support surveillance and provide up-to-date information so residents can stay informed and safe.

# Spotlight: Reinforcing Food Safety

## Supporting Safe Food Practices Across Local Businesses

Food safety culture refers to the shared attitudes, values and behaviours that food industry staff bring to food safety every day. A strong culture helps prevent foodborne illness, ensures health standards are met and builds public trust in local businesses.

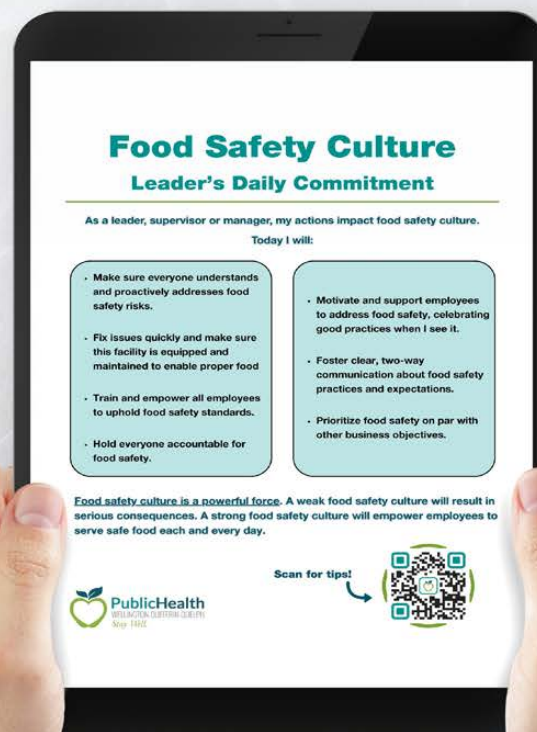
To protect consumer health and support a thriving food sector, WDG Public Health has introduced helpful resources like interactive posters, a free training course, and a comprehensive Food Safety Culture Guide for Operators to help local businesses go beyond compliance with inspections and regulations.

Based on findings from WDG Public Health's latest food operator needs assessment, special attention was paid to operators working in smaller, non-traditional settings like home-based kitchens and mass caterers who face unique risks and challenges due to the large quantities of food they produce.

These tools offer practical, step-by-step suggestions for improvement, including:

- Using inspection results and staff feedback to evaluate current practices.
- Engaging the team to understand and reinforce safe behaviours.
- Increasing food handler and supervisor training, aiming for high certification levels.
- Setting clear expectations during everyday practices and onboarding.
- Leading by example and making food safety habits part of daily operations.

Public health inspectors support operators with guidance and inspections, but lasting safety comes from strong leadership and shared commitment among all staff. A robust food safety culture protects customers, supports compliance and contributes to business success across the region.



# Spotlight: Vaccine Safety and Support

## Protecting Our Community through Evidence-based, Equity-focused Immunization

Vaccination is one of the most effective healthcare interventions, preventing millions of deaths globally each year. In WDG, Public Health works year-round to ensure vaccines are delivered safely to local physician offices and clinics, while providing access to vaccines at WDG Public Health clinics especially for children, high-risk residents and those facing barriers to access.

### Supporting Vaccine Confidence in Schools

WDG Public Health strengthened school-based immunization by implementing the CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract), an evidence-based approach that reduces fear, pain and stress during vaccinations. This student-centred approach helps remove anxiety-related barriers and supports more equitable access to protection.

Since being introduced in the 2023/24 school year, CARD has helped increase local vaccine coverage for HPV, Hepatitis B and Meningococcal disease



### Improving Access and Record Reporting

Under the Immunization of School Pupils Act, WDG Public Health assessed student immunization records, achieving 93 percent compliance. To reduce any barriers around online reporting — Public Health introduced a simpler option to upload a photo of vaccine records, rather than manually entering details. The Agency also offers flexible clinics, rural access points, extended hours and multilingual resources.

### Protecting High-risk Residents and Workers

WDG Public Health supported long-term care and retirement homes with a coordinated fall vaccine campaign targeting influenza, COVID-19 and RSV, using a one-on-one support model to reduce logistical barriers. The Agency also led Ontario in offering the avian flu vaccine to eligible at-risk workers, improving access through online and phone registration.

Together, these efforts strengthen community protection and ensure vaccines remain safe, accessible and responsive to local needs.

# Thank you

**Our mission at WDG Public Health is to protect health and promote overall well-being so everyone in our communities can thrive.**

We are grateful to health care and community partners for their roles in supporting public health measures. With your care and commitment, critical public health programs and services are contributing to improved community wellbeing. Thank you for contributing your strength, passion, energy and vision.

**[wdgpublichealth.ca](http://wdgpublichealth.ca)**

## **Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that the work of WDG Public Health operates on the traditional lands and home of the Hodinöhsö:ni', Anishinaabek, Tionontati and Attawandaron people and is steeped in the tradition of many First Nations, Inuit and Metis people.

As an Agency, we encourage our staff, partners and clients to support the work of reconciliation and promote healing with our Indigenous neighbours.

We are also committed to reducing social inequities and will strive to make our services culturally appropriate and safe for all Indigenous people, their families and their community.

