

Adopting the Quality and Impact Performance Framework

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Measuring the value and impact of public health activities is a daunting task.
- A systematic and organized approach to performance measurement can mitigate some of the challenges and lead to considerable process and outcome benefits for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health.
- WDG Public Health has designed and implemented the Quality and Impact Performance Framework to guide all levels of the organization through the process of answering: what are we doing, how well are we doing it and is anybody better off?
- This approach will allow WDG Public Health to develop a deeper understanding of how the organization conducts its work and how it can be improved to maximize its impact in the community.

Background

A blindfolded person who is told to walk in a straight line will invariably walk in circles. This may sound like a folksy anecdote or old wives' tale, but scientific evidence supports this phenomenon.¹ Scientists speculate that without the visual input that allows people to constantly track their progress through an environment, they swiftly and consistently begin to veer off course. This scenario shares considerable parallels with what happens when organizations fail to collect and incorporate information about their environment and their progress within it.

Local public health units in Ontario have ambitious goals and mandates. While these are certainly worthy aims, measuring progress towards them can be daunting for several reasons:

1. *Much of the work of public health units is focused on prevention and early intervention.* This poses a unique challenge when assessing value and impact of public health work. It is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately estimate the number of injuries prevented, outbreaks averted or children who will avoid adverse childhood experiences as the result of public health efforts.
2. *The work of public health takes place in extremely complex environments.* Local public health units aim to influence the health outcomes for entire populations, but they are only one variable within a vast social ecological system. As a result, it can be challenging to demonstrate a local public health unit's individual contribution to community health goals.
3. *Population-level health improvements tend to occur incrementally over long time periods.* The full impact of many public health programs and services may not be evident for years or even decades after the initial intervention, which can lead decision makers to underestimate the value of public health interventions and services.

Demonstrating the value and impact of the work of local public health units is an inherently challenging task, but that does not mean it is not important, especially in times of budgetary pressures. Thus, a systematic and considered approach must be adopted.

Performance measurement is one such approach. It is the process of collecting, analyzing and applying organizational performance data to improve the quality and impact of services within an organization. Performance measurement involves aligning work with broader agency strategies; clarifying the underlying logic and goals of the work; defining performance measures, targets, and standards; and finally, analyzing results to prioritize and implement improvements.

A performance measurement approach can be especially valuable in a public health context because its flexible nature can accommodate the diverse work of public health units and promote evidence-informed decision making and effective public health practice across activities. Engaging in a performance measurement process can also improve program results before any quality improvement initiatives are implemented. The process of completing the performance measurement steps often clarifies goals and generates insights about the work. Similarly, when performance measures are specific and appropriate, the simple act of tracking them often leads to improved performance; hence the old adage “what gets measured gets done”. Lastly, employing a performance measurement strategy allows the organization to demonstrate not only accountability to funders, but also the value and impact of services to the community at large.

Discussion

Purpose and Goals

In 2023, WDG Public Health began reviewing performance measurement strategies and tools in order to develop an internal Quality and Impact Performance Framework that could be applied to all levels of the organization. The framework borrows heavily from several interrelated disciplines and approaches, including Performance Measurement/Management, Evaluation, Continuous Quality Improvement, Strategic Planning, Evidence-Informed Decision Making and Results-Based Accountability. Three goals were prioritized during the design process:

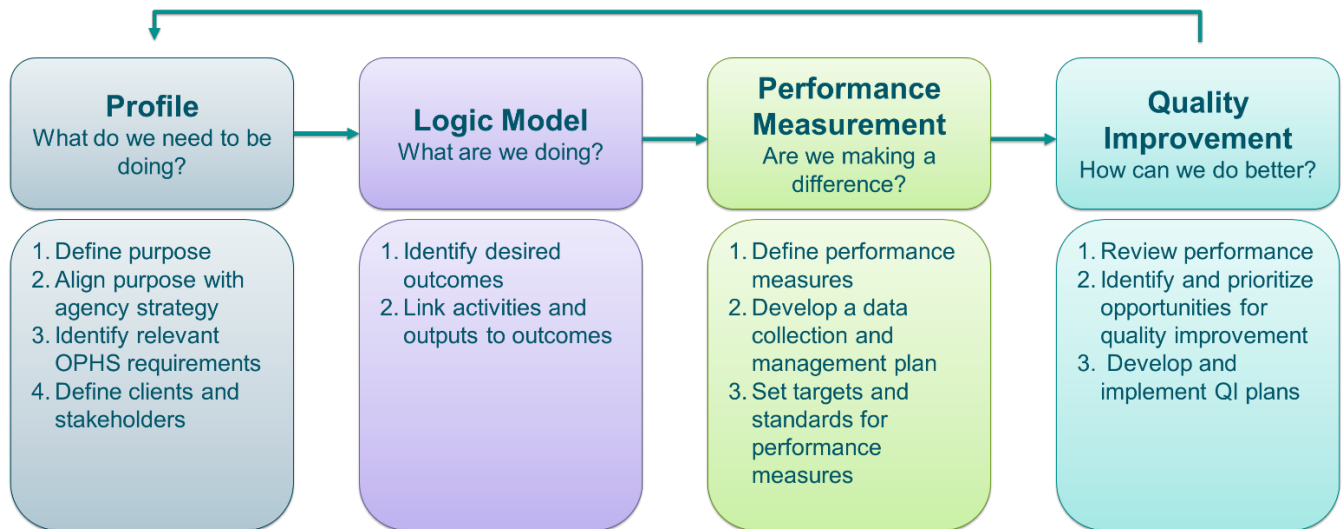
1. Introduce tools that are simple, practical, and flexible,
2. Reduce work for directors, managers, and program leads, and
3. Increase the visibility of WDG Public Health’s accomplishments.

The purpose of the Quality and Impact Performance Framework is to systematically organize and measure the diverse work of WDG Public Health, with a focus on what that work is achieving and how it can be improved to increase the quality of services and community impact. At its core, the framework is quite simple. It guides users through the process of answering three questions: what are we doing, how well are we doing it and is anybody better off?

Quality Improvement Performance Framework Tools

The WDG Public Health Quality and Impact Performance Framework process is comprised of four sequential steps that guide users through the process of performance measurement. The key tasks for each step are included in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Quality and Impact Performance Framework Process



The framework tools are flexible enough to reflect the diverse work of WDG Public Health and can be applied to immunization monitoring and surveillance as easily as food safety inspections and health promotion work. The Framework was also designed to be implemented across all levels of the organization. Engaging in a performance measurement process at every level of the organization helps to ensure that program and team interventions are aligned with the overall goals of divisions and the agency as a whole.

Each step of the framework is accompanied by a detailed users guide and templates to map out ideas and rough work. Upon completing the tasks for each step, users enter information in a centralized REDCap project that serves as a performance measurement database. The database is maintained by the Quality Performance Specialist, who also provides one-on-one support to users throughout the process.

Implementation

The Framework received approval from the Senior Leadership Team in February of 2023 and was rolled out to managers in May-June of the same year. In early July, the Quality Performance Specialist was reassigned to address emerging priorities and implementation was paused until November 2023. As of February 2024, there were 67 entries in the Quality and Impact Performance Measurement Framework. Of these entries, 61 had completed Profiles (91%), 41 completed the Logic Model (62%) and 23 completed a Performance Measurement Plan (34%).

Process Benefits

Like many processes related to performance measurement and quality and improvement, the benefits of completing the Quality and Impact Performance Framework are not entirely derived from the finished product. The process of creating those products also yields important, though less quantifiable, benefits. Completing the Quality and Performance Framework involves developing a deeper understanding of several topics, including the value of clarifying purpose, goals and objectives, aligning work with overall agency strategies, how to critically assess and select performance measures and finally, how to use performance measurement results to improve the quality and impact of services. The Quality and Impact work at WDG Public Health seeks to instill this knowledge at all levels of the organization in order to foster an organizational culture of quality improvement.

The Quality and Impact Framework was also designed to reduce work for managers and directors by streamlining mandatory reporting for teams and programs. The current accountability agreement with the Ministry of Health requires that local public health units submit several reports each year. These include an Annual Service Plan, Quarterly Standards Activity Reports and an Annual Report and Attestation. Managers must also complete annual operational plans for each of their program areas. Taken together, completing these reports requires considerable time and often duplication of effort. The Quality and Impact Performance Framework seeks to streamline measurement and reporting activities by collecting all of the information required for Ministry reporting and operational planning using the framework tools. Information collected in the framework can then be extracted by the Quality Performance Specialist and compiled into the necessary reporting documents.

Outcome Benefits

Although the process benefits of completing the Quality and Impact Framework are substantial, there are also significant rewards to having the organization's performance measurement information assembled in an organized and tailor-made database.

Having a comprehensive inventory of the work undertaken by various divisions and teams will allow WDG Public Health leadership ready access to a bird's eye view of the organization in the form of detailed organizational data. For example, users can easily use the Quality and Impact Framework to generate a list of programs and interventions that address each of the five strategic directions or engage a specific priority population. This information will be used to generate organizational insights and inform decision-making across WDG Public Health.

Information such as this can be especially useful in demonstrating WDG Public Health's accountability to funders. As part of completing the Profile, each entry in the Quality and Impact Performance Framework identifies which of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) it

addresses, as well as which of the specific standard requirements it addresses. This allows WDG Public Health to present a detailed overview of how we are fulfilling the mandate. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health allows public health units to report on locally defined indicators for programs operating under several program standards. Prior to 2022, WDG Public Health tended to select indicators ad hoc which often focused more on the amount of work done as opposed to the quality or impact of that work. By selecting performance measures that address the quantity, quality and impact of the work, WDG Public Health will be able to make a strong case to funders that their investment is being used responsibly and that their mandates are being fulfilled. It is important to note that the framework tools and database were designed in such a way that WDG Public Health will be well positioned to adapt to the revised OPHS and requirements that will likely be presented later this year.

Lastly and most importantly, monitoring the performance of public health work will allow WDG Public Health to assess the quality and impact of public health work in the community. This will produce evidence to support particular interventions or strategies and better understand what is working and what could be working better. With these insights WDG Public Health will be better positioned to share its accomplishments and demonstrate the value of public health services to funders, partners and the larger community.

Next Steps

The first half of 2024 will be focused on supporting the implementation of the Quality and Impact Framework across all levels of the organization. The latter half of the year will focus on addressing gaps in available performance information. Thus far, a recurring theme has arisen while developing measurement plans; although several mechanisms exist to track interactions with clients and community partners, few tools assess the quality of those interactions. As several teams and programs would benefit from this type of information, plans were made to implement brief partner and client surveys to ascertain how these two important groups perceived their interactions with WDG Public Health. Collecting a uniform set of core questions for each team/program will allow WDG Public Health to assess its interactions with these groups overall and by program area.

2025 will focus on the development of a Quality and Impact Dashboard which will visualize the data entered into the Quality and Impact Performance Framework. This will allow users to explore performance measurement information across the organization with ease.

Health Equity Implications

Fully implementing the Quality and Impact Performance Framework will allow WDG Public Health to easily review and compare programs, services and initiatives that seek to reduce

health inequities. Strategies that are shown to be effective will be studied and adapted for other service areas in order to maximize WDG Public Health’s ability to address health inequities.

Conclusion

The development and implementation of the Quality and Impact Performance Framework at WDG Public Health represents a significant step toward enhancing the organization’s ability to measure, evaluate, and improve its work. Recognizing the inherent challenges in demonstrating the value and impact of public health work, the framework offers a systematic approach that aligns with broader agency strategies. The approach will provide leadership with valuable insights, facilitate informed decision-making, and demonstrate accountability to funders. Looking ahead, plans to support framework implementation, address information gaps, and the development of a Quality and Impact Dashboard will further deepen the organization’s commitment to continuous improvement and maximize positive impact on the community. By monitoring and assessing the quality and impact of public health work, WDG Public Health is poised to share its accomplishments, inform effective strategies, and ultimately, demonstrate the invaluable role of public health services in fostering a healthier community.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- Improve health outcomes
- Focus on children's health
- Build strong partnerships
- Innovate our programs and services
- Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. Souman JL, Frissen I, Sreenivasa MN, Ernst MO. Walking straight into circles. *Curr Biol* [Internet]. 2009 [Cited 2024 Feb 12];19(18):1538-42. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19699093/>

Appendices

Appendix A