

Corporate Communications Annual Report 2024

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

Meeting Date: May 7, 2025

Report No. **BH.01.MAY0725.R15**, Pages: 9

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Recommendations

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

Key Points

- Corporate Communications leads Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's (WDG Public Health or the Agency) compliance with the communications components of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS).¹ WDG Public Health achieved a 33% increase in impressions and 26% growth in engagements across social media channels. Facebook and LinkedIn saw substantial increases (Facebook: +62% impressions, LinkedIn: +219% engagements), due to targeted content strategies.
- The WDG Public Health website had over 555,000 views in 2024. Immunization content was among the most frequently visited on the website, reflecting WDG Public Health's recognized role in vaccine-related programs and as a trusted source of immunization information.
- Launched new presences on the social media platforms Threads, Snapchat and Bluesky, expanding the Agency's reach to younger audiences and proactively positioning WDG Public Health on emerging social platforms.
- Communications is exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance Agency efforts in reaching and engaging the community.

Background

Corporate Communications (“Communications”) includes both communications and library services, supporting the organization’s internal and external communication needs.

Communications:

- Leads the Agency’s compliance with the communication requirements outlined in the Foundational Standard of Effective Public Health Practice under the Ontario Public Health Standards, specifically in the areas of Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Communication.¹
- Operationalizes the Standard’s Transparency Framework goal to “Promote awareness, understanding, and public confidence in Ontario’s public health system” by informing the public how the Board of Health is protecting and promoting individual and community health and responding to local community needs.
- Works with program areas and subject matter experts to develop clear, accurate and accessible communications to meet the Program Standards for improving public knowledge through developing and implementing local communications strategies or adapting national/provincial communications strategies where local assessment has identified a need.¹

Discussion

In 2024, Communications continued to proactively inform and engage the WDG community through timely, relevant and effective messaging on a wide range of public health topics. The following report highlights key activities, achievements and impacts of WDG Public Health’s communications outreach.

Traditional News Media

In 2024, Communications prioritized timely access to information and key spokespersons for media partners. Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO, and Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health, served as the primary spokespersons representing the Agency in media engagements. Communications staff and other senior leaders also acted as spokespersons on occasion, providing additional support as needed.

Highlights of 2024 news media efforts include:

- The Agency was mentioned in the media 690 times.
- Dr. Mercer and Dr. Tenenbaum continued weekly interviews with CTV Kitchener throughout 2024.
- Communications prepared and distributed 12 media releases (see **Table 1**).

Table 1: WDG Public Health Media Releases, 2024

Date	Media Release/Statements
March 8	Media Release: Manage Your Measles Risk
May 6	Media Release: WDG Public Health to host virtual “Cannabis and other Drugs” parent info session on May 15
May 9	Media Release: WDG Public Health shares how to prevent tick bites and what to do if you are bitten
June 17	Media Release: Public Health is Reminding Residents How to Stay Safe in Extreme Heat
August 1	Media Release: WDG Public Health Invites Community Input in New Alcohol Survey
August 30	Statement from Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum on International Overdose Awareness Day 2024
September 6	WDG Public Health requests public assistance in dog biting incident
September 19	Media Release: West Nile Virus Confirmed in a Dufferin County Bird
September 30	Media Release: WDG Public Health launches Parenting Insight Survey
October 15	Media Release: WDG Public Health Launches Flu and COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics for the 2024 Respiratory Illness Season
October 23	Media Release: Plan to attend virtual “Youth Gambling and Gaming” parent info session on October 29
November 28	Media Release: Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health Launches Free, Accessible STI and HIV Testing Program

Social Media

WDGPH is currently actively engaged on the following social channels:

- [X: @WDGPublicHealth](#)
- [Facebook: @WDGPublicHealth](#)
- [Instagram: @WDGPublicHealth](#)
- [Threads: @WDGPublicHealth](#)
- [LinkedIn: Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health](#)
- [YouTube: @WDGPublicHealth](#)

WDG Public Health has a newer presence on:

- [Snapchat: wdgpublichealth](https://www.snapchat.com/add/wdgpublichealth)
- [Bluesky: @wdgpublichealth.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/wdgpublichealth.bsky.social)

In 2024, Communications strategically expanded WDG Public Health's social media presence by launching on Threads, Snapchat and Bluesky to reach new and evolving audiences. Threads and Bluesky have emerged as alternatives to X; while Threads follows a similar content approach to WDG Public Health's other Meta platforms, the presence on Bluesky remains exploratory in order to build connections and assess how to best engage this audience. In 2024, Snapchat was used specifically for targeted paid messaging, primarily reaching youth aged 16-18, with some additional reach to those aged 19–24, supporting initiatives such as the Community Alcohol Survey and anti-vaping campaigns.

Social media performance highlights in 2024 vs. 2023 include:

- Sent messages increased by 59.5%, and received messages rose by 19.1%, reflecting an increased volume of public health topics and proactive outreach efforts throughout 2024.
- Impressions grew by 33.3% and engagements increased by 26.3%, indicating that Agency content reached more people and resonated with them.
- Communications increased the use of video posts and stories on Instagram in response to platform algorithms that prioritize this type of content. A total of 103 videos were posted to the feed. Story use also grew significantly, with 215 stories shared (resulting in a significant increase in story impressions). This shift reflects a strategic effort to align with trends and improve reach and engagement.
- Facebook saw significant growth, with impressions increasing by 61.6% and engagements up 38.9%, driven by more frequent, timely and relevant content. Using a paid strategy enhanced reach (paid impressions rose 52.2%) and significantly boosted engagement. At the same time, organic content was also highly effective, resulting in an 83.2% increase in organic impressions and a corresponding rise in organic engagements, indicating Agency messaging consistently resonated with the community throughout the year.
- LinkedIn also showed impressive growth compared to 2023. This reflects an intentional strategy of sharing not only job postings but also highlighting staff achievements and professional activities, creating more engaging and relevant content for professional audiences.
- Post link clicks increased by 50.6% over 2023, suggesting the content was interesting and relevant to audiences, motivating them to seek additional information.

The top performing posts across all platforms in 2024 were:

- [Preparing for safe viewing of the solar eclipse \(Facebook, March 27, 2024\)](#): 17,274 impressions, 1,926 engagements
- [Health Alert: Light Blue/Green Fentanyl Circulating in the Guelph Region \(Facebook, October 4, 2024\)](#): 13,553 impressions, 1,057 engagements
- [Take our Community Alcohol Survey \(Facebook, August 2, 2024\)](#): 12,851 impressions, 917 engagements

Overall, 2024 demonstrated significant growth in visibility, engagement and content effectiveness across WDG Public Health's social media channels.

Table 2: Social Media Channel Performance Summary, 2024 vs. 2023

Social Channel	Impressions*	Engagements**	Post Link Clicks***	Audience****
Facebook	1.6M ↑62%	32.5K ↑39%	9.1K ↑64%	11.8K ↑0.6%
Instagram	479K ↑8%	4.6K ↓24%	N/A	7.3K ↑0.4%
X	162K ↓38%	8.4K ↑4.7%	1.2K ↓44%	13.7K ↓3.5%
LinkedIn	35.5K ↑169%	3.2K ↑219%	2.6K ↑227%	2.6K ↑13.5%
Totals	2.3M ↑33%	49K ↑26%	13K ↑51%	36K ↑0.6%

*Impressions refers to the number of times that any content associated with the page was displayed to users during the reporting period. This includes both organic (non-paid) and paid activity.

**Engagements refers to the number of times that users reacted to, commented on, shared, or clicked on posts during the reporting period. This includes both organic (non-paid) and paid activity.

***Post Link Clicks is the number of times that users clicked on links from our posts during the reporting period. For Instagram, the metric measures bio link clicks.

****Audience refers to the number of users who like/follow the page as of the last day of the reporting period.

Public Website

In 2024, the WDG Public Health website continued to serve as the primary and most important tool for public engagement, with over 555 thousand views over the year. Immunization-related pages were consistently among the most visited, aligning with the Agency's established reputation as a trusted immunization resource. Communications collaborated across multiple teams to expand and enhance website content, ensuring comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information. These collaborative efforts have strengthened the website's role as a reliable resource for the community and supported ongoing initiatives, programs and campaigns.

Table 3: Top Pages Visited by Pageviews, 2024

Page	Views
Outbreak Bulletin	40K
School and Childcare Immunizations	13K
2024 Fall COVID, Flu and RSV Clinics	12K
Recommended Immunizations Infant to 6 Years Old	10K
Cannabis and Pregnancy	8K

Blog

The Stay Well WDG Blog continues to serve as a valuable communications channel, providing approachable, conversational content that complements broader public health messaging and campaigns. In 2024, Communications published blogs to support agency initiatives, campaigns and topics adjacent to public health where WDG Public Health plays an educational or supportive role. This approach helps amplify key public health messages, engage community members and maintain relevance across a wide range of health topics.

Previously published blogs continue to engage the community and attract visitors to the WDG Public Health website (see Table 4).

Table 4: Top Blog Posts Visited by Views, 2024

Blog Post	Views
<u>How to say “no” to norovirus in your home</u>	5.4K
<u>What happens when you can’t afford dental care?</u>	2K
Getting back on track with school immunizations (this blog was recently removed; to be updated)	1.6K
<u>The simple facts everyone should know about hookah</u>	1.4K
7 things you didn’t know about alcohol (this blog was recently removed; an updated alcohol blog was added)	1.3K

Library Services

The librarian supports the third Foundational Standard, “Effective Public Health Practice” specifically the first section, “Program Planning, Evaluation, and Evidence-Informed Decision Making” by assisting public health professionals to find, organize and use information to support evidence-based research, programs and services.

The librarian provides literature searches, information services and copyright support to public health staff and management.

In 2024, the librarian was involved in the following projects:

- Contributed to the Ontario Public Health Library Association’s survey submission for the updated *Ontario Public Health Standards*, specifically the following sections:
 - Draft *Program Planning, Evaluation, and Quality Standard*
 - Draft *Partnership, Collaboration, Coordination, and Knowledge Exchange Standard*
- Co-authored [Dependable during disruptions: ensuring remote access to library resources, redeploying staff and offering relevant services during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Presented at the Canadian Health Libraries Association Conference, June 2024.

Looking Ahead: Artificial Intelligence in Communications

Communications is exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance efforts to reach and engage the community. Communications uses AI in a variety of ways from first draft writing to designing social media postings. Some of the tools used regularly include:

- Canva: Magic Studio with 14 AI tools for design
- Meta (Facebook, Instagram, Threads): Advantage+ for advertising
- Adobe: AI Assistant for PDFs, Adobe Firefly (“Text to” for images and design)
- Sprout: AI Assist for optimal send times for different social media platforms
- ADA Chatbot: Bot persona, measurement and reporting, content, wording and training suggestions, predictive suggestions etc.
- ChatGPT Plus: Writing, productivity, image generation, content evaluation (reading level, style and tone)
- PubMed PubReminder and Citation Chaser

This emerging focus on AI will be guided by WDG Public Health’s core values of transparency, equity, and innovation, and will help ensure WDG Public Health continues to lead in delivering timely, accessible, and inclusive public health information.

Health Equity Implications

Communications plays a key role in supporting health equity by helping ensure everyone in the community has access to timely, understandable and relevant information. In 2024, Communications worked with internal teams to consider different audience needs when developing materials and chose communication methods that reached people where they are. This included making content more accessible online, simplifying language when needed, using a variety of platforms to reduce barriers to information and working with community partners to share information. These efforts contribute to a more inclusive public health approach across the region.

Conclusion

In 2024, Communications worked to strengthen how public health information is shared with the community by expanding and improving how media, online platforms and the website can be engaging forums for information sharing and engagement. Communications supports timely updates, worked closely with internal teams and responded to evolving public health needs. As the Agency moves forward with the 2024–2028 Strategic Plan, Communications will continue to support the mission of “Health and well-being for all” by providing clear and inclusive messaging, while continuing to adapt how to connect with and engage even more individuals in the 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. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability. [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 March 26]. Available from: <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf>