



COMMUNITY REPORT **2023**



PublicHealth
WELLINGTON-DUFFERIN-GUELPH
Stay Well.





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Dr. Nicola Mercer,

Medical Officer of Health and CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicola Mercer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nicola" and last name "Mercer" clearly legible.

In 2023 we renewed our focus on community programs while considering how to ensure we are prepared to meet any future health challenges. As the Agency continues to embrace lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continuously imagining, planning and building the future of public health. As Medical Officer of Health and CEO, I am proud to share the 2023 Community Report with you. It demonstrates an innovative approach to the delivery of public health services to our regional residents, which will be a vital component in shaping our shared future.

The Community Report is a key pillar of our commitment to transparency. WDG Public Health continues to look for ways to demonstrate to our community the quality of the services we provide and the value they receive for money invested in public health via municipal and provincial governments. We will continue to share information in the media, online and through province-leading innovations such as the Dashboards and Reports Portal which track our work in keeping communities healthy and safe. These tools are significant advancements in our efforts to ensure health information is more useful and accessible when it is needed. Access to information helps empower community agencies, healthcare partners and the public with the information they need to make informed decisions.

As I look ahead to 2024 and beyond, I am excited for the future of WDG Public Health and our role in Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph. WDG Public Health will continue to take a forward-looking approach to serving our community. With the guidance of our strategic plan, we will continue to take meaningful steps toward a future where everyone in our community can thrive.

George Bridge,

Chair of the Board of Health



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'George Bridge', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

As the Chair of the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health Board of Health, it is my pleasure to present the 2023 WDG Public Health Community Report. This document is a record of the tremendous work carried out by the Agency on behalf of our entire region over the past 12 months. This past year was an important one, as WDG Public Health continued to look for innovative ways to serve our community and plan for the future.

This year, we have seen great steps forward in providing public health services and information, improving the Agency's ability to respond to the needs of our community, while providing greater transparency and value for money. These efforts are not just about responding to immediate needs, but also continuing to build on a strong foundation, ensuring we are well served for years to come.

As we look to the future, we are guided by our new 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. This plan focuses WDG Public Health on providing even greater community impact, while focusing on innovation, inclusivity and sustainability.

On behalf of the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Board of Health, I invite you to review the report and see the important work being done to create a healthier region.

Board of Health **Members**

Representing Wellington County

David Anderson, Councillor, Wellington County

George Bridge (Chair), Citizen Appointee, Wellington County

Duncan Bull, Provincial Appointee, Wellington County

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

Representing Dufferin County

Steve Cavell, Provincial Appointee, Dufferin County

Guy Gardhouse (Chair – HR Committee), Councillor, Dufferin County,
Mayor, Township of East Garafraxa

Ralph Manktelow, Councillor, Dufferin County

Sandra Starr, Provincial Appointee, Dufferin County

Representing City of Guelph

Linda Busuttil, Councillor, City of Guelph

Erin Caton, Councillor, City of Guelph

Rodrigo Goller (Vice-Chair), Councillor, City of Guelph

Representing WDG Public Health

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

Charting the Course: 2024-2028 Strategic Plan

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan is WDG Public Health's first long-term strategy since the COVID-19 pandemic. Developed in 2023 and capturing the insights and input of Board of Health members, the senior leadership team, managers, staff, community partners and consultants, the Plan will guide the work of WDG Public Health in the coming years.

VISION

Health and well-being for all

MISSION

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health protects health and promotes overall well-being so everyone in our communities can thrive

VALUES to guide our work

- Accountable
- Adaptable
- Collaborative
- Compassionate
- Equitable
- Innovative
- Trustworthy



GOALS & PRIORITIES

Improve health outcomes



- Reduce health inequities
- Help make the healthy choice the easy choice
- Help our communities prepare for immediate and emerging health risks
- Tailor our responses to meet health challenges
- Support upstream interventions that promote health

Focus on children’s health



- Support the community’s approach to delivering children’s services
- Promote best and emerging practices to optimize child development
- Provide input on healthy children’s public policy
- Work within the community to address systemic challenges that children and families face

Build strong partnerships



- Equip community partners to make the best decisions
- Share Public Health expertise to help reduce health gaps
- Help our partners adapt their services to our local needs
- Support each other in our roles as community partners
- Engage partners in a shared system

Innovate our programs and services



- Strategically invest in technology
- Utilize our resources more efficiently
- Cultivate a culture of learning and improvement

Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

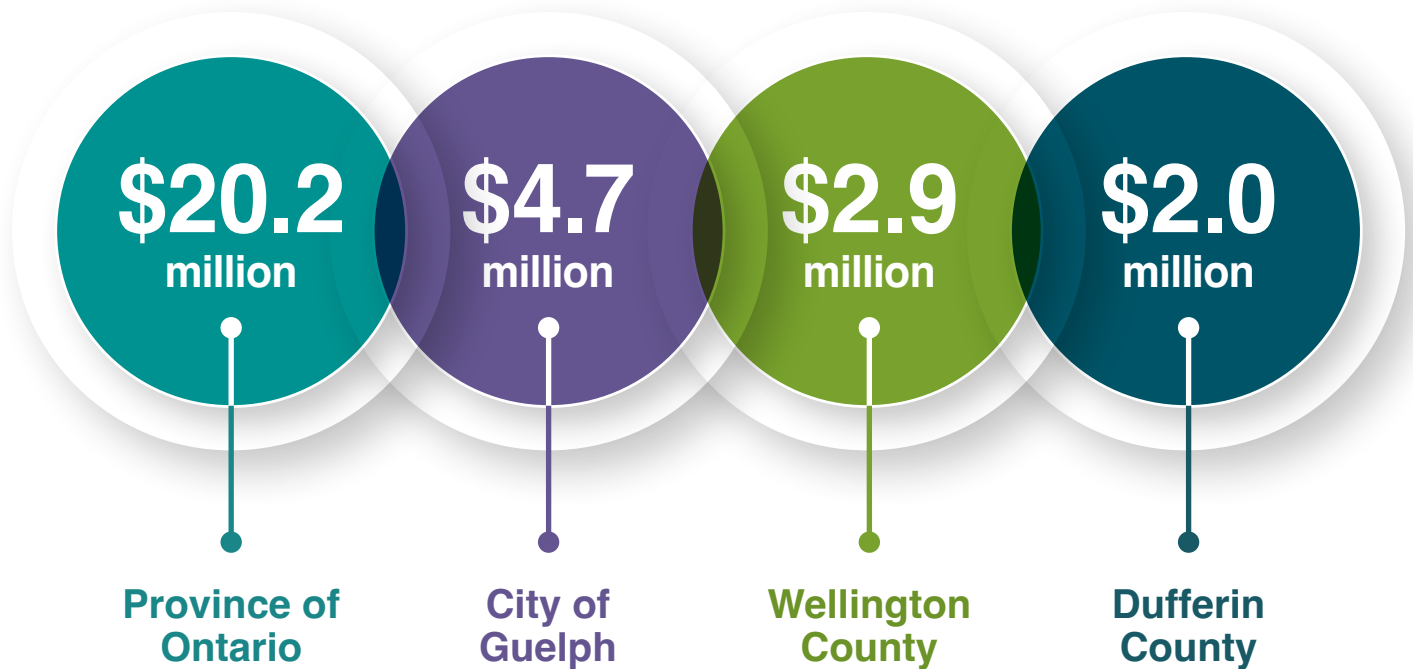


- Actively participate in the Provincial health system changes
- Continue to use our value for money principles in everything we do
- Keep WDGPH as a great place to work
- Be a Public Health trailblazer/leader

Development Timeline



Financials



The 2023 total operating revenue for WDG Public Health was \$30.3M, which included “short-term” COVID-19 pandemic funding. 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 2023, the Ministry of Health provided funding for 62% of the Agency’s revenues and MCCSS provided 5%.
- 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 2023, Wellington County contributed 10% of the Agency’s revenues, Dufferin County contributed 7% and the City of Guelph contributed 15%.
- 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 the year can be found at wdgpublichealth.ca.

Health Analytics

At-a-Glance Dashboards

WDG Public Health's revamped Dashboards and Reports Portal launched in September 2023 at bi.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca. Offering nine interactive dashboards and 34 static reports on topics like substance use, chronic diseases and social determinants of health, the Portal allows groups such as the general public, community agencies and healthcare administrators to access local data relevant to their clients and programs.

The portal presents essential local health and demographic data, insights and patterns/trends in a single, easy-to-find space. Information includes:

- Substance Harm Information & Education
- Respiratory Illness Activity
- Overall Health Indicators
- Older Adult Status Report
- WDG 2021 Census
- Injury Trends



Post-launch, web traffic surged significantly:

>23x
more views*

>37x
more new users*

*When compared with the Portal's previous iteration, created in late 2017

News of Note



What's Next? Adding more content in 2024, including a 2023-2024 Well-being Health and Youth (WHY) Survey Dashboard, and influenza wastewater rate, place of injury, Naloxone data and more.



Artificial Intelligence: A chatbot with AI potential was added to the Agency website to allow for 24/7 access to appointments and information. This demonstrates WDG Public Health's willingness to be engage with technological innovations to enhance our services. Further evaluation is underway, including sharing technological success with other agencies.



Performance Measurement: WDG Public Health implemented a Quality and Impact Performance Framework to evaluate achievements and determine: what are we doing, how well are we doing it and is anybody better off?

Combating Infectious Diseases

Under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, infectious diseases are to be reported to WDG Public Health for investigation on a 24/7 basis. WDG Public Health continues to innovate and implement program changes in order to provide improved care for infectious diseases in the region.



Tuberculosis (TB): The Agency takes a comprehensive approach, investigating infections, ensuring isolation and physician connections and providing treatment and therapy that can last from six months to over two years. WDG Public Health operates a clinic (expanded in 2023) for testing, diagnosis and treatment and actively promotes TB awareness and assessment.



Ticks/Lyme: WDG Public Health received 202 tick submissions in 2023, 90 of which were blacklegged ticks; the primary vector for Lyme disease. An online tick submission process was introduced by the Agency last year.



West Nile Virus: Three mosquito pools tested positive for West Nile virus in 2023; no human cases were reported. WDG Public Health is forming a partnership with Conestoga College to pilot environmental DNA sampling.



Vaccine Distribution: In 2023, WDG Public Health distributed \$8.5 million in vaccines (excluding COVID-19) in Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph. More than 79,000 COVID vaccine doses were given to local residents.

Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness ensures that WDG Public Health is ready to manage threats or disruptions to public health programs and services. Through a range of activities, carried out in coordination with other community partners, the Agency is prepared to respond to and recover from new and emerging public health threats. These include:

- 24/7 on-call response
- Continuity of Operations Plan
- maintain municipal annual emergency planning meetings and exercises
- surveillance of emerging or immediate public health risks
- expanded preparedness planning and training, updated materials and internal administrative processes
- Emergency Response Plan (hold emergency exercise at least once every three years unless a real event is declared)

Survey Says: Cannabis Knowledge and Behaviours

In June 2018, WDG Public Health conducted a survey on recreational cannabis knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. In October 2018, consumption was legalized, providing easier access to cannabis through dispensaries and online stores. A five-year follow-up survey in June 2023, shows the impact of legalization in the community and the COVID-19 pandemic on usage:

42%

of past-year users either increased the amount they consumed or used it more frequently



1 in 3 reported increased cannabis use during COVID-19 (mainly due to anxiety, stress and boredom)

The survey also highlights some concerning gaps in knowledge among those 16 and older:

1/4

were unaware that cannabis use during pregnancy can harm a baby and that there is no known safe amount of cannabis during pregnancy

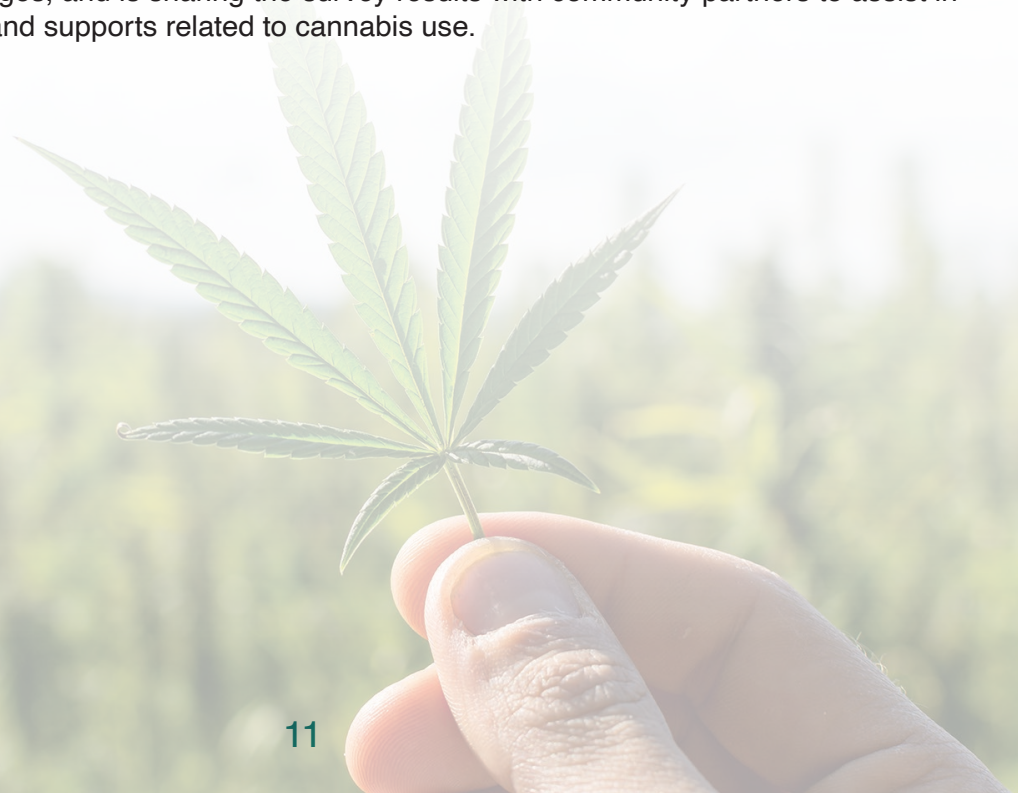
43%

did not know about the delayed effect of consuming edibles meaning it can take anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours to feel their effects

1/3

were unaware that youth cannabis users (under 25 years) face different risks (which include impacts on mental health, learning, memory and decision-making)

WDG Public Health is using survey data to develop informed programs and services, launch new campaigns and update webpages, and is sharing the survey results with community partners to assist in their development of policies and supports related to cannabis use.



Ensuring Transparency and Privacy Compliance

WDG Public Health plays a crucial role in safeguarding the wellbeing of the community, which requires the collection and management of private data. Whether tracking disease outbreaks, monitoring health trends or administering health programs, this data is invaluable and its security paramount. The Agency dedicates significant resources to protecting sensitive information, recognizing the potential consequences of breaches not only for individual privacy, but also for public trust and health outcomes.

Fourteen information requests received by WDG Public Health under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act were consistent with 2022 (16). Under the Act, WDG Public Health is required to provide access to information at the request of clients and members of the public. All requests were met with a response within the legislated 30-day period.

Sixteen Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs) were initiated in 2023. PIAs analyze new or significantly updated projects to ensure ongoing compliance and reflect a commitment to protecting the public from a privacy perspective.

Spotlight On: International Overdose Awareness Day



In the **first 8 months** of 2023, **31 people** in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph lost their lives to suspected drug-related deaths.

“International Overdose Awareness Day calls on each of us to consider the devastating effects of drug poisonings in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph,” says Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health. “Each of those deaths is a tragedy. Despite the progress made by individuals and organizations, these poisonings continue to claim members of our community. On behalf of WDG Public Health, I want to extend my thanks to the many individuals and organizations working to end drug poisonings.”

August 31, 2023

Empathy and dignity should guide actions in combating drug poisonings. Addressing drug poisonings is complex, considering the diverse experiences of those affected. However, actions, or lack thereof, have real consequences on the lives of community members. That is why collaboration is essential in addressing this ongoing emergency.

Supporting Sustainability in Our Food Future

In 2019, the City of Guelph and Wellington County (Guelph-Wellington) were awarded \$10 million from Infrastructure Canada's Smart Cities Challenge to create Canada's first circular food economy: the *Our Food Future* initiative.

Two WDG Public Health staff served as part of the initiative's nutritious foods workstream (NFW), and the Agency itself oversaw the NFW's activities and budget with a goal to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods by 50% by 2025 by creating an environment where all people can access food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life.

Local initiatives include:

Spark Grant Program: Supported small-scale food initiatives in Guelph-Wellington with financial backing. Eleven projects received grants totaling \$51,500, ranging from \$2,000-\$10,000 to enhance access to nutritious foods in various community settings.

Fresh Food Prescription Program Expansion: Allocated \$30,000 to the Guelph Community Health Centre to expand their Fresh Food Prescription program. Participating healthcare professionals "prescribed" fresh food to individuals in need who then redeemed their prescriptions for free fruits and vegetables at The SEED markets or online grocer.

Food Equity and Community Resilience Series: Provided \$20,000 to encourage *Setting the Table* events: a series of gatherings and discussions co-created by community members to learn about community resilience, food equity and how the two relate. Twenty participants received microgrants between \$300-\$1,500.

Wellington County Food Insecurity Community of Practice: Provided \$30,000 for food access interventions in Wellington County and identified the need for a communications campaign to increase public awareness about food insecurity and calls to action. Staff created promotional materials for partners (spring 2023).

Guelph-Wellington Food Security Action Plan: Outlined actions, use of remaining funds and guided partnerships and funding opportunities. It identified six strategic priorities for future food access initiatives over the next three years:

- 1. Food Access and Healthcare:** Increased distribution and use of healthy food prescriptions and vouchers by health and social service agencies.
- 2. Local Food Infrastructure:** Increased food infrastructure for food storage, processing, distribution and community building.
- 3. Building a Circular Food Movement:** Increased awareness about the importance, value and right to healthy food for everyone.
- 4. Integrated Funding Strategy:** Coordinated funding strategy that results in reliable funding sources for local food system work to support service delivery and service innovation.
- 5. Community Food Growing Strategy:** Increased public land used for food growing and retail opportunities for growers.
- 6. Regenerative Agriculture:** Increased regenerative practices used in food production, with greater understanding of the value of these ecosystem services.

Nurturing Resilience:

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The first years of life are crucial to a child's health and wellbeing. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic or stressful events occurring in the first 18 years of life that can have lasting negative effects on health and well-being. They include emotional and physical neglect, household dysfunction and abuse.

ACEs are linked to increased risks of adopting unhealthy behaviors like smoking and substance abuse, as well as poorer health outcomes.

A WDG survey found that a person who experienced four or more ACEs was 5.6 times more likely to have used drugs within the last 12 months than an individual who experienced zero ACEs. Those at higher risk include multiracial, black, Hispanic and Indigenous individuals; those that are part of the LGBTQ2S+ community or living in low socioeconomic status household.

That isn't the end of the story. As a community, we can help those who have experienced ACEs to reduce their negative effects through nurturing relationships with caring adults (particularly during childhood), structure/routine, a powerful identity and sense of belonging/ control, safety and support, and physical and financial wellbeing.

Along with more than 100 community stakeholders, WDG Public Health supports the Community Resilience Coalition of Guelph and Wellington to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors available to children, youth and their families.

ACEs are very common in WDG:

80%

of adults reported having at least one ACE

30%

have experienced four or more ACEs



Food-Borne Illness: Assess, Protect and Improve

WDG Public Health Inspectors prevent food-borne illness through a food safety management system. This includes a risk-based inspection of food premises, consultation and education on food handling practices, and an annual monitoring and evaluation process to reduce risks and protect the public.

As a result, food-borne enteric or gastroenteritis outbreaks (involving two or more cases) are infrequent in the region. When they occur, quick and effective action is taken by Public Health Inspectors:

1. **Assess:** Collect information and samples, assess risk, form and test hypothesis, determine cause.
2. **Protect:** Secure and avoid further consumption of suspect contaminated food. Ensure the specified unsafe food handling practices or conditions are halted.
3. **Improve:** Identify factors that contributed to the outbreak. Provide additional education and other supports to food handlers to prevent a recurrence. Take steps to improve internal and external processes to enhance Public Health's outbreak response and reduce risks of recurrence.

WDG Public Health is available 24/7 to receive and respond to reports of suspected and confirmed food-borne illnesses or outbreaks and conduct investigations and additional inspections as necessary.

Process In Action: In March 2023, during an International Women's Day event, 88 attendees fell ill with symptoms that included vomiting, diarrhea, headaches and nausea. Food that had been prepared and served on-site by an outside caterer was suspected. WDG Public Health's quick and effective response included: identifying and securing suspect food, forming an outbreak team, food and stool samples, attendee questionnaire, epidemiological analysis and on-site assessments.



Thank you

Our mission at WDG Public Health is to help improve the lives and health of those in our communities.

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.

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.

