

# Table of Contents

Strategic Framework	2
Letter from Dr. Nicola Mercer	3
Letter from George Bridge	4
Board of Health Members	5
Financials	6
COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Rollout	7
Spotlight: Delta	10
What's Next?	12
Enter Omicron	13
COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Clinics	14
COVID-19 in 2021: Community Focus	16
COVID-19 in 2021: Communications	18
(Non-COVID) Highlights in 2021	20

# Strategic Framework

### **Mission**

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) uses an innovative approach to deliver evidence-informed programs and services to meet the distinctive needs of our communities.

# Guidina **Values**

Flexibility • Collaboration • Value • Integrity • Equity

### **Priorities**

**Activities** 

Key

# **Service Delivery**

- Improve client experience
- Integrated service delivery that considers WDGPH's role in the broader sector
- Expand service digitalization

## **System Transformation**

- Group conversations with each program about WDGPH's role in system transformation
- · Plans and updated processes for administrative areas and IT systems
- Have everyone ask: "how am I getting ready for change?"



### **Knowledge Broker**

- Analyze, interpret and disseminate health data
- Integrate evidence into policy and decision-making
- Measure impact and effectiveness of interventions

# **Outcomes**

- · Client access and greater satisfaction
- Focus on "how can the system best address it?" (not "how can we fix it ourselves?")
- Increase accessibility and efficiency
- Greater engagement and understanding of change and what WDGPH can do
- · Update documentation, new emergency response system and administrative readiness
- · Enhance agency-wide capacity for change

- · WDGPH is a community public health expert
- Programs and services meet community needs
- · WDGPH understands what is working

# From Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

A year ago, we were in the early months of the largest vaccination program our region – and the world – had ever seen. Today, while the COVID-19 pandemic is without a doubt still with us for the foreseeable future, record vaccination rates and access to treatment have pushed us into a different phase of our response. As Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, I am pleased to share the 2021 Community Report which details our region's response to this generational public health challenge.

The report details the significant progress we have made as a region. Truly, it is impossible to overstate the size and scope of our shared efforts to protect one another. As the sixth wave of COVID-19 ebbs and we look forward with hope for a better summer, it is right that we use this moment to reflect on all that we have accomplished together. But, as I look forward to the next several years, I believe we must do so humbly, acknowledging how much is left to do.

We cannot forget the lessons of this pandemic, or we risk being unprepared for future ones. We must undergird our society in a way that firmly protects our collective health – especially the most vulnerable among us. We must think about our lived environments and how we can make them safer and more resilient against these threats. We must address the climate change challenges that will put added pressure on our health and our health systems. We must elevate trusted voices and incorporate the best information available to us and act on it swiftly.

As we look back to the key accomplishments of 2021, I am proud of the work detailed in this report. As we look forward, I am confident in and committed to the public health work yet to come.



Photo credit: Orangeville Banner



# From George Bridge, Chair of the Board of Health

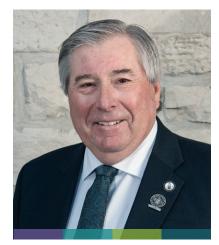
Last year, I called 2020 a "busy year" for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. If it's possible, 2021 was an even busier one. As Chair of the Board, I had a front-row seat where I watched our entire region respond to the continuing global COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, the Board of Health – the municipal councillors and mayors who provide oversight of the health unit – have seen the organization's commitment to protecting all of us from this virus.

Time and time again, WDG Public Health was ready to respond to the pandemic as it evolved, making sure our region was ahead of the curve in our response to COVID.

Because of the work of Public Health and many others throughout our region, we are in a much better place than we were a year ago. The pandemic isn't over, and we will continue to deal with COVID well into the future, but access to treatments and a vaccination rate that is among the best in North America, means we are better able to deal with COVID in the coming years.

While we cautiously move forward, the work of Public Health will remain essential, both in managing the ebbs and flows of COVID-19 as well as the many other important services and projects that are slowly springing back into action. It is my hope – a hope I know many of you share – that we will build on this work as a region to ensure everyone is as healthy as possible as we head into the future.

In this report, you will see an accounting of the programs and services delivered in 2021 by WDG Public Health. Even though the agency has begun to resume pre-pandemic work, the COVID story is an important one that will impact and inform much of our work in the coming years.





# Board of Health Members



# **Representing Wellington County**

George Bridge (Chair), Councillor, County of Wellington; Mayor, Town of Minto Allan Alls, Councillor, County of Wellington Chris White (Secretary-Treasurer), Councillor, County of Wellington; Mayor, Township of Guelph-Eramosa

# **Representing Dufferin County**

Guy Gardhouse, Councillor, County of Dufferin; Mayor, Township of East Garafraxa Ralph Manktelow, County of Dufferin Citizen Appointee

# **Representing City of Guelph**

Christine Billings (Vice-Chair), Councillor, City of Guelph June Hofland, Councillor, City of Guelph Rodrigo Goller, Councillor, City of Guelph

# **Representing WDG Public Health**

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

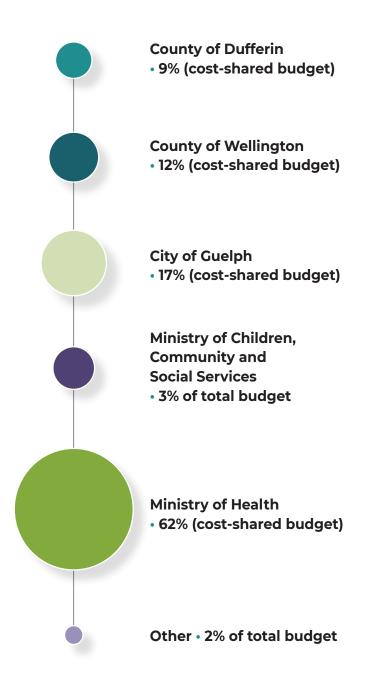
# Financials

The 2021 total operating budget for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health was \$40,075,746.

Public Health receives funding from multiple sources:

- The Province of Ontario provides funding primarily through the Ministry of Health for the Agency's cost-shared budget that funds the majority of WDG's public health services. In 2021, the Ministry of Health provided funding for 62 percent of the total cost-shared budget.
- 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 2021, the County of
   Wellington contributed 12 percent of the
   cost-shared budget, the County of
   Dufferin contributed 9 percent and the
   City of Guelph contributed 17 percent.
- The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services also provides program-specific funding that accounted for 3 percent of the Agency's 2021 operating budget.

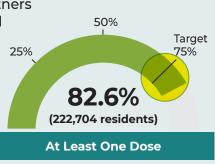
As a publicly funded organization, WDG Public Health reports its finances in accordance with the public sector accounting standards. Financial statements are subject to an audit by an external audit firm as outlined in The Municipal Act. The full audited financial statements for the year can be found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

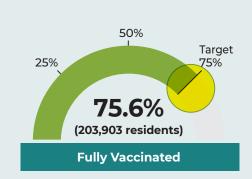


# COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Rollout

WDG Public Health marshalled all its resources and leveraged partnerships across the region to make 2021, the "Year of the Vaccine." Vaccinations by public health nurses, community partners and local health care workers saved many in our community from infection and the worst of the pandemic.

WDG Public Health and partners met and exceeded the initial vaccination target of 75 percent of ages 16+ by early August 2021:





# **How We Did It**

- Developed a new pre-registration and appointment booking system in house that met the shifting needs of the provincial vaccination program
- Relied on strong partnerships with community leaders including health organizations, emergency services, businesses and municipalities
- Dedicated WDG Public Health teams to address clinic operations, call centre, appointment bookings, and logistics and supplies
- Updated interactive online dashboard to include vaccination rates in the region by location and age demographic

Ensuring vaccines were quickly and effectively distributed required support from every aspect of WDG Public Health's operations including facility upgrades, equipment acquisition and logistical planning. After vaccines arrived, WDG Public Health was ready to administer them to the public within 24 hours. In addition to infrastructure planning, public health nurses were trained to deliver the vaccine.

Another significant need was ensuring that the infrastructure to receive and store

vaccines was in place before the first doses arrived. WDG Public Health installed refrigerators and ultra-low freezers in late 2020. When the vaccines were delivered in early 2021, Public Health could store 100,000 units of the Pfizer vaccine in freezers reaching -70°C and nearly 1 million refrigerated doses.

These efforts helped to ensure that every person who wanted a COVID-19 vaccine in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region received one.

**COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Rollout (cont)** 

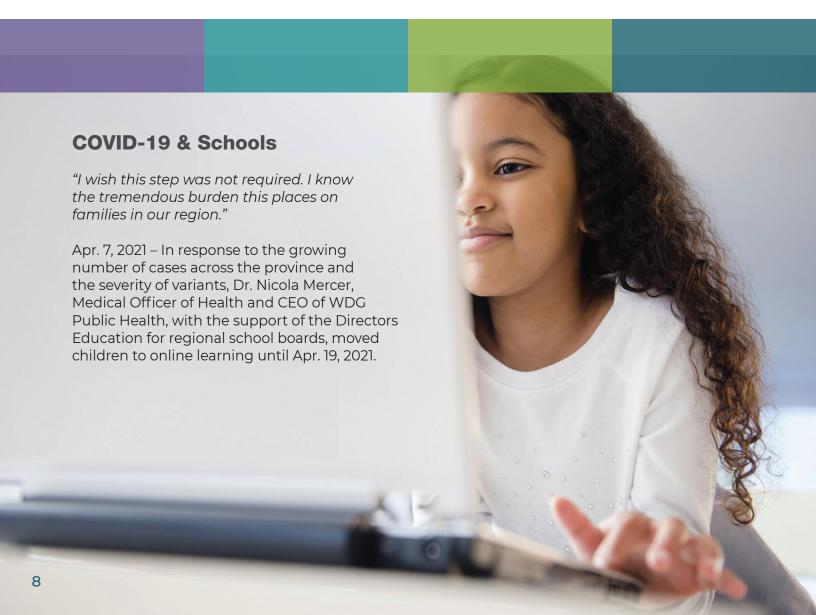
# **Phases Overview**

# **Phase 1: Vaccinations for High-Risk Individuals**

Given limited global supplies, initial vaccine doses were not enough to meet demand in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. Between January and March 2021, WDG Public Health focused on immunizing only the most vulnerable including residents, staff and essential caregivers in long-term care and retirement homes, health care workers and the Indigenous population.

A team of Public Health staff, including the Medical Officer of Health, met daily to ensure prioritization criteria was consistent with Ontario Ministry of Health guidance, and that vaccine appointments were being made available.

Locally, the first vaccines were directed to staff at a long-term care home that experienced the area's worst outbreak. Of its 59 residents, there were 56 COVID-19 cases, a heartbreaking and difficult experience for the residents, families and staff. A group of five staff from this home, who had faced the tragic outbreak nine months earlier, rolled up their sleeves on Jan. 6, 2021, and made local history as the first COVID-19 vaccine recipients in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph.



COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Rollout (cont)

# **Vaccine Appointments**

WDG Public Health's online pre-registration and appointment booking system made it fast and easy for residents to schedule their vaccines. The digital tool managed hundreds of thousands of appointments, email and text notices and appointment alerts. In addition, the tool's real-time digital format meant that changes to vaccine criteria and eligibility could be quickly and efficiently communicated to the public.





WDG Public Health administered a **record number of vaccinations** in **June 2021: 137,022 total doses** 

## **Phase 2: Mass Vaccinations**

As vaccine supply increased, WDG Public Health delivered broader immunizations from April to July 2021. Mass clinics were running at maximum capacity and mobile clinics across Wellington and Dufferin counties were increased to meet the expanded eligibility of those who could receive the vaccine. This initially included adults 64 years of age and expanded to those 54 and then 44 years of age as vaccine supply and eligibility increased.



# **Highlight: Online Interactive Reports**

WDG Public Health was among the first public health agencies to launch public dashboards for both local COVID-19 data and for local vaccination progress. As the dashboards grew and evolved, they provided detailed information to the residents of the region, helping them to protect themselves and their families.

# **Spotlight: Delta**

By June 2021, case rates had dropped: only 33 people out of 100,000 had COVID-19. Hospitalizations were decreasing.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health met the vaccination target identified in the Provincial Reopening Plan.

There was a sense of cautious optimism that the region, province, county and world were turning a corner.



Then came Delta. This variant initiated a fourth wave and a rise in local cases – the rate of cases in unvaccinated individuals was higher compared to fully vaccinated individuals. Delta was more than twice as contagious as previous variants and more likely to put infected people in the hospital. It surged and became the predominant variant in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph area (Omicron was poised to overtake Delta in December 2021 and by January 2022 became the dominant strain).

In response to new provincial orders, on Sept. 23, 2021, Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, issued an order requiring proof of vaccination for those entering sport and recreational facilities (rescinded on Feb. 25, 2022).

**Did You Know?** Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph was a "Delta hot spot" which meant that we received accelerated second dose eligibility for anyone aged 12+ years.

### **COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Rollout (cont)**

# **Phase 3: Steady Vaccinations**

WDG Public Health steadily delivered vaccinations to anyone 12+ years old between August and early November 2021. In addition, select groups became eligible to receive a first booster dose including:

- Residents of high-risk group settings (e.g., long-term care or retirement homes, chronic care hospitals)
- Immunocompromised individuals (e.g., receiving active chemotherapy)
- · Ages 70+ years
- · First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults and their households
- · Select health care workers



## **About the Vaccines**

Four different vaccines have been approved for use by Health Canada:

### mRNA Vaccines - Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna:

mRNA vaccines teach your cells to make a protein that triggers an immune response against COVID-19. Once triggered, your body makes antibodies that help you fight the virus if you contract it. mRNA vaccines must be stored in specialized freezers, require two doses as well as booster doses when their protection decreases.

### Viral Vector Vaccines – AstraZeneca/Oxford and Janssen:

Viral vector vaccines use a harmless virus (in this case, an adenovirus) as a delivery system to help your cells to make a coronavirus protein. This protein triggers an immune response that helps protect you against COVID-19. These vaccines can be refrigerated and Janssen requires only one dose.

# **Phase 4: Child Vaccinations (underway)**

Health Canada has approved vaccination of children ages 5-11 years and rollout is underway with support from primary care physicians, pharmacies, municipal partners, community health centres, school boards and children and youth treatment centres.

GOAL: Vaccinate 90 percent of the children 5-11 who reside in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region

# What's Next?

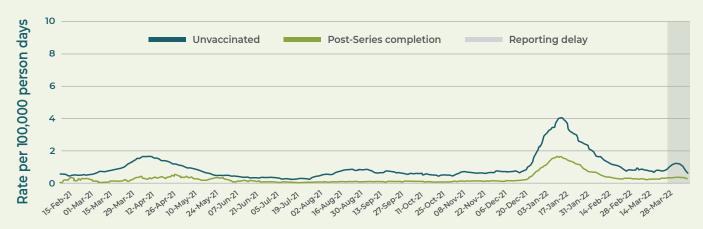
# **Predicting the future of COVID-19 is challenging:**

- 1. New variants may occur
- 2. The duration of vaccine protection against current or emerging variants is unknown

As pandemic levels are brought under control, COVID-19 may continue as sporadic or seasonal outbreaks. New or reformulated vaccines/boosters will be important to keep the virus under control.

**WHAT WE DO KNOW:** The reduction of transmission leads to lower COVID-19 cases. Provided most residents are fully vaccinated, transmission should decrease and result in fewer hospitalizations and deaths:

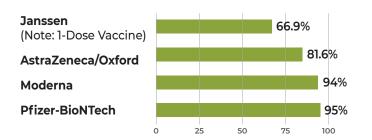
Public Health Ontario: Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 Following Vaccination in Ontario (Dec. 14, 2020-Apr. 10, 2022)



# **Vaccine Effectiveness**

Vaccines allow us to develop immunity without becoming infected and without the subsequent risk of illness and death. All the approved COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of becoming ill with COVID-19.

Common COVID-19 vaccine side-effects are similar to those for other routine vaccines and include pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache and muscle/joint pain. In rare incidences, the AstraZeneca vaccine was linked to a blood clotting, primarily in women under the age of 55.



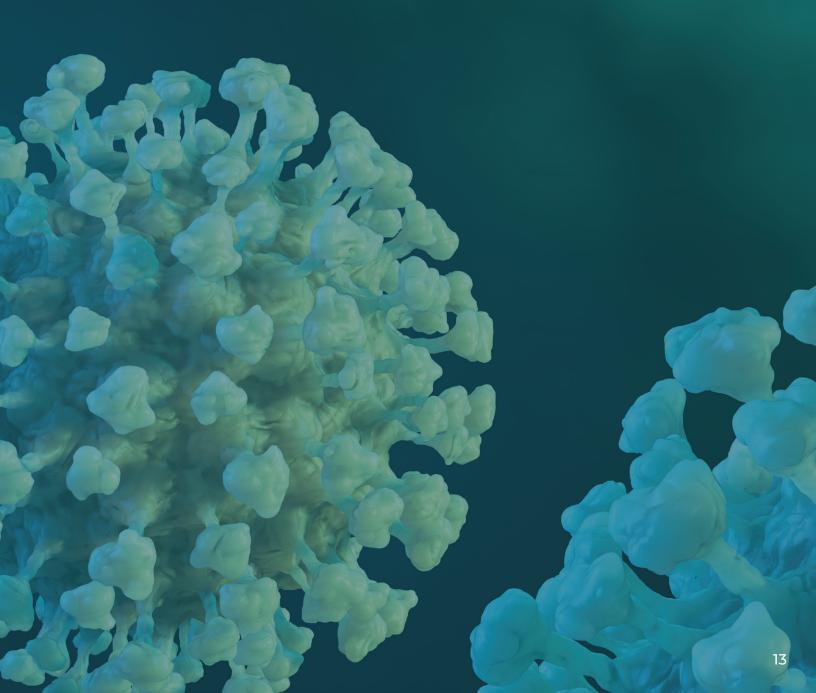
<sup>\*</sup> Note: Effectiveness means how much protection a vaccine provided within clinical trials in the population. The above rates demonstrate protection against the B.1.1.7 ('UK') variant. For Delta, two doses plus the increased protection of boosters prevent 95+ percent of hospitalizations and infection. Against Omicron, two doses with boosters prevent 90+ percent of hospitalizations and increase protection against infection by 50-60 percent.

# **Enter Omicron**

WDG Public Health confirmed its first case of the Omicron variant on Dec. 9, 2021. Omicron spreads more easily than earlier variants of the virus, including Delta. It is now the dominant variant in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. Although it may cause more mild symptoms, some individuals infected with Omicron will still need hospitalization or experience severe symptoms (including death).

Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, addressed the region on Dec. 10:

"Act with caution. The combined protection of masking, physical distancing, limiting gathering sizes and getting first, second and booster doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will continue to protect against the virus."



COVID-19 in 2021: Vaccine Clinics

Facilities such as hockey rinks and community centres were identified as locations that could accommodate large groups indoors while maintaining physical distancing. When asked, area municipalities offered, without hesitation, the Alder Recreation Centre (Dufferin County), Centre Wellington Community Sportsplex (Wellington County) and West End Community Centre (City of Guelph) to serve as mass immunization sites. The University of Guelph, Guelph Family Health Team and Linamar Corporation also hosted partner clinics and were instrumental in helping **Guelph become one of the most vaccinated cities** in North America.



96%

of feedback stated overall satisfaction with clinics



of feedback reported that clinic staff were friendly, helpful, professional and informative

# How We Did It

- Different types of clinics were created to support our community needs
- Clinics were set up in centralized, easy-to-access target areas in Guelph, Fergus and Orangeville
- Clinics were staffed by various health care providers including data staff, public health and community nurses, community physicians, local emergency medical services and volunteers working long days over many months

# **Clinic Checklist**

- ✓ Large enough to provide a minimum of 800-1,200 vaccines in an eight-hour day
- Seamless flow while addressing security, screening, check-in, vaccination, recovery and check-out
- Stable vaccine storage temperature including transport to, during and between clinics
- ✓ Heating and cooling for visitor comfort





# Special thanks to our clinic site partners:

We couldn't have done it without you!













+ local physicians and pharmacies

# **Clinics Snapshot**

When vaccines became available in January 2021, WDG Public Health received limited doses that were administered in small or mobile clinics at long-term care and retirement homes, and other congregate settings. As the number of available doses increased and more of the general population became eligible to receive a vaccine, larger clinic spaces, with associated staff and volunteer teams, were needed to accommodate more people.

## **Mass Clinics**

Highly successful in administering a large number of doses: the University of Guelph clinic had the largest number, reaching 1,700+ people in a single day. Over the region, at the peak of the vaccination campaign, 7,000+ people were vaccinated in a single day.

## **Mobile Clinics**

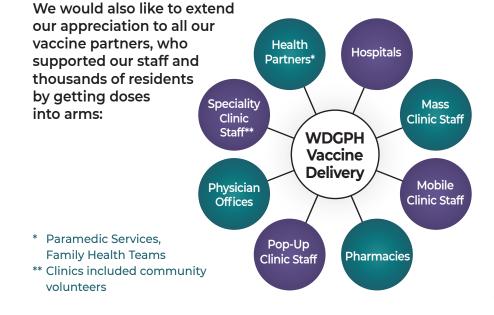
Supported populations surrounding Drayton, Palmerston, Harriston, Mount Forest, Grand Valley, Erin and Shelburne. Mobile clinics in these areas assisted with eliminating transportation issues.

# **Speciality Clinics**

Assist individuals and families who struggled to access the vaccine at mass clinics due to a variety of reasons including physical and environmental challenges, anxiety and medical issues.

# **Pop-up Clinics**

Smaller in size with a focus on locations and populations that had lower vaccination rates. These clinics connected with individuals who were otherwise hard to reach and helped ensure that locally, more than 90 percent of residents received the vaccine.



# COVID-19 in 2021: Community Focus

# **Safe Workplaces**

A healthy economy promotes a healthy community: getting vaccinated is important to help reduce COVID-19 outbreaks in workplaces. This includes all WDG Public Health staff who are now required to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Local employers also introduced additional measures to protect their staff, clients/customers and the wider community:

- 1. Actively screening employees each day (as per Ontario regulations)
- 2. Allowing employees with symptoms to stay home
- 3. Providing opportunities for staff to work from home
- 4. Adhering to provincial mask and face covering requirements
- 5. Establishing workplace safety plans

As COVID waves progressed, more people required vaccination to fulfill employer policies and incentive programs as well.

Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health, shares his thanks with the business community's adoption of this additional workplace protection: "This step will help protect the health and wellbeing of your workplace and the greater WDG community... Like many residents of the region, I am so grateful to spend my time in a place where businesses put the health of our community first."

# **Care & Group Settings**

It proved difficult to control transmission in settings where individuals share a dining room, kitchen, washroom or sleeping space (these are called "congregate settings"). Locations where unrelated people live in close proximity saw a disproportionate impact of COVID-19. These included long-term care and retirement homes, shelters, supportive housing, group homes, residential treatment centres and hospices.

Long-term care residents represent only 0.5 percent of Ontario's population but reported more than 50 percent of the province's COVID-19 deaths.

In response, Ontario Health identified organizations to lead local Infection, Prevention and Control (IPAC) Hubs. These leaders work with local health system partners to provide specialized group living guidance and support. WDG Public Health's successful collaboration with community partners led to it being chosen as the Guelph-Wellington IPAC Hub and the recipient of provincial funding with a focus on infection prevention and control capacity through ongoing training, support and partnership.

### **COVID-19 in 2021: Community Focus (cont)**

The Central West IPAC Hub, overseen by William Osler Health System, provides support to Dufferin-area congregate settings. WDG Public Health's Congregate Settings Team works closely with the Central West IPAC Hub to provide supports and services to Dufferin congregate settings. WDG Public Health's short-term IPAC goal is to support training, capacity building and partnerships to prevent, mitigate and control COVID-19 cases and deaths among congregate residents and staff. Long-term, these efforts will support a culture for ongoing efforts to prevent, mitigate and control illness and outbreaks in these settings.



In April 2021, an Advisory Committee was established to share information, promote collaboration and provide input and guidance to support infection protection in congregate settings. This Committee includes the representatives of many local partners:

- County of Wellington
- · Guelph General Hospital
- · Guelph Wellington Ontario Health Team
- Home and Community Care Support Services
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Long-Term Care
- · North Wellington Health Care

- Nurse Led Outreach Team
- Ontario Health West
- · Public Health Ontario
- · Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
- · Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority
- St. Mary's General Hospital

... and congregate setting and service provider organizations

The ongoing focus for the Committee is building infection control capacity and advancing IPAC culture within each organization through trainings, supports and partnership.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on residents of all congregate settings has been profound. WDG Public Health extends sincere and heartfelt condolences to family, friends and staff that have lost their loved ones during this tragic time. Public Health will continue to support staff, residents and their families with a focus on decreasing illness and outbreaks in these high-risk settings.

# COVID-19 in 2021: Communications

Effective public health communications are critical to share and amplify accurate information, correct misinformation and encourage action. In 2021, WDG Public Health's goal was to communicate frequently, clearly and consistently about COVID-19, public health measures and vaccination. As a result, the agency saw huge growth in its social media, website and media relations activities:



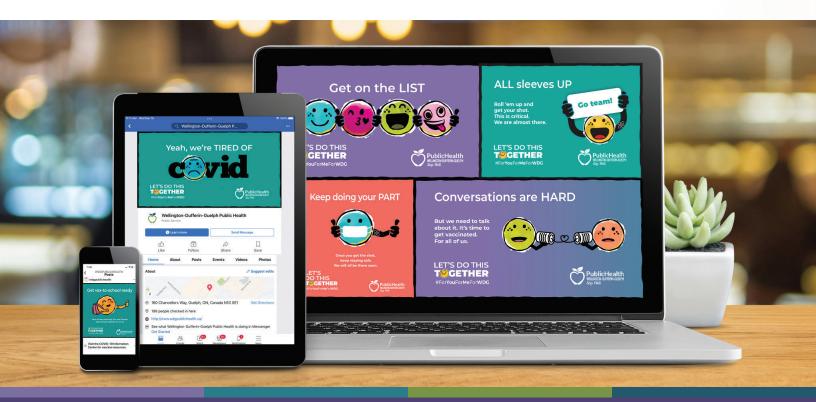
impressions across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn (increase of 302 percent over 2020)



website page views (increase of 143 percent over 2020)



media mentions (increase of 307 percent over 2020)



The "Let's do this together" campaign, with municipal and community partners used the hashtag #ForYouForMeForWDG. Community partners and organizations were invited to participate and integrate the campaign's messaging throughout their communications channels. A toolkit with access to campaign assets along with a link to download various graphics to utilize on social platforms and channels was provided.



# **Combating Vaccine Hesitancy**

WDG Public Health has been successful in informing and educating the community in support of vaccination. More than 91.9 percent of residents have been fully vaccinated in WDG. This includes "innovators" (those who want to be the first), "early adopters" (those who quickly adopt new ideas) and the "early majority" (those who adopt after seeing evidence of success).

Efforts will now centre around overcoming vaccine hesitancy in the remaining population through fact-based vaccine data:

- vaccines were created based on decades of previous research and were carefully tested for effectiveness and safety
- · have only temporary minor side effects
- do not give you COVID
- · can protect you from getting sick
- add extra protection if you've already had COVID-19
- help protect others in your community
- · help things get back to normal

# (Non-COVID) Highlights in 2021

# **Healthy Babies Healthy Children**

Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) is a free and voluntary provincially-funded program that screens newborn children to support those who have risk factors that could impact their growth and development.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HBHC services delivered through the WDG Public Health were largely halted as staff were redeployed to address the community COVID response.

During that time, public health nurses only delivered triage support to those children that had "with-risk" scores or incomplete screenings.

The program restarted in August 2021 and staff have made great strides, providing more than 421 visits/assessments since then.

### **School Immunizations**

High levels of immunizations prevent outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases. While most childhood vaccines are given by primary care practitioners, a select few are administered by WDG Public Health including hepatitis B, HPV and Meningococcal vaccines.

Overall school-based immunization rates for 2020-2021 remain lower than normal due to pandemic-related school closures. WDG Public Health resumed in-school "catch-up" clinics for grades 7 and 8 in October 2021 and high school clinics resumed in February 2022. Public Health will work with school boards, community partners and parents to increase vaccine rates.

Between Sept. 1, 2021, and Jan. 24, 2022, WDG Public Health in-school clinics provided more than 11.000 immunizations to grades 7 and 8 students.

# **Performance Indicators**

While Health Protection staff were redeployed in 2021 to support the COVID-19 response. essential inspections and investigations continued and all reports of foodborne illness and food safety complaints were investigated:

**Food Safety Inspections** (includes high, moderate and low risk inspections)

**Healthy Environment Inspections** (i.e., seasonal housing, camps)

Tobacco/E-cigarette Promotion Inspections

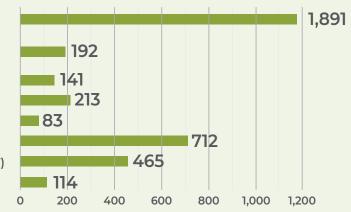
Safe Recreational Water Inspections

Adverse Drinking Water Results Reported & Resolved

**Animal Rabies Exposure Investigations** 

Reportable Disease Investigations (i.e., Hep B, Hep C, HIV)

**Child Care Inspections** 



# Thank You

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

But we can't do it alone.

We are grateful to health care and community partners for their roles in supporting public health measures including the vaccine rollout. Without your support and commitment, a public vaccination campaign of this scale and scope would not have been possible.

Outside of the COVID-19 response, there are many other Public Health programs and services that are critical to support whole-community wellbeing. It is thanks to the strength of organizations, businesses and individuals like you that we can continue to deliver on our key priorities: providing access to health programs and services, supporting broader health system analysis and transformation, and serving as a knowledge broker in our communities.

Thanks to you, we are moving forward in a more hopeful position.



wdgpublichealth.ca