

Toronto Public Health 2023 Risk Management Report

Date: March 29, 2023

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides the Board of Health with an update on the risk management reporting that is part of the Ontario Public Health Standards Accountability Framework. It outlines risks and challenges facing Toronto Public Health (TPH) in 2023, which include talent availability, uncertainty about the public health landscape, resource capacity to address evolving and emerging public health issues, and challenges securing public support and adherence to public health advice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On March 7, 2022, the Board of Health received its annual report about Risk Management as required by the Ontario Public Health Accountability Framework. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2022/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-222566.pdf>

COMMENTS

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) [Public Health Accountability Framework](#), which came into effect in January 2018, outlines the requirements to which Boards of Health are held accountable. One of the requirements is for public health units to have a formal risk management framework. To satisfy this requirement and keep the Board of Health informed, Toronto Public Health (TPH) submits a risk management report to the Board of Health annually.

Toronto Public Health's risk management framework is based on the Ministry of Health's risk prioritization matrix of impact and likelihood (Table 1). High risks are considered those with a score of 15 or higher, medium risks those with a score of 10 to 14, and low risks those with a score of 9 or lower. Risk score is calculated by multiplying the values of potential impact with likelihood of occurrence.

Table 1: Ministry of Health Risk Matrix

Potential Impact	Threatens the success of the objective (5)	5	10	15	20	25
	Substantial impact on time, cost or quality (4)	4	8	12	16	20
	Notable impact on time, cost or quality (3)	3	6	9	12	15
	Minor impact on time, cost or quality (2)	2	4	6	8	10
	Negligible impact (1)	1	2	3	4	5
		Unlikely to occur (1)	May occur occasionally (2)	Is as likely to occur as not to occur (3)	Is likely to occur (4)	Is almost certain to occur (5)
		Likelihood of Occurrence				

For 2023, four significant organizational risks have been identified based on the likelihood of occurrence and potential impact on TPH's ability to meet its goals of improving the health of the population, reducing health inequities, and preparing for and responding to health emergencies.

1. Talent Availability

Previously identified as a risk in 2022, this is a people/human resources risk with a score of 20: 4 impact and 5 likelihood.

Toronto Public Health's most valuable resource is the talent we attract and retain. Toronto Public Health, like many organizations, is experiencing an increase in retirements and, at the same time, staff are exiting for other employment opportunities. This exodus stems not only from the exit of baby boomers from the workforce but also reflects

- worker fatigue given the extreme demands placed on staff throughout the pandemic;
- remote work opening up new employment opportunities beyond traditional geographic boundaries; and
- the availability of more lucrative opportunities in other organizations and sectors.

At the same time there is a significant talent shortage in some of our most competitive positions to fill. These developments not only impact the attraction and retention of talent, but also contribute to a loss of organizational history and knowledge.

Potential mitigation strategies: succession planning initiatives; employee development and training; employee wellness program; new recruitment strategies; and partnerships with educational institutions for cross-developmental opportunities.

2. Public Health Landscape

Previously identified as a risk in 2022, this is a political and governance risk with a score of 16: 4 impact and 4 likelihood.

In April 2019, the Province of Ontario (the Province) released a [budget](#) that contained a section on "modernizing Ontario's public health units". In August 2019, the Province provided mitigation funding to support public health unit planning for 2020 and to provide additional stability as municipalities begin to adapt to the proposal in the 2019 Budget. Later that year, the Ministry of Health released a [discussion paper](#) to renew a "consultation process to discuss the way forward on ... the public health sector". The consultation process was paused in early 2020 to support public health in light of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health response.

Although the consultation process remains paused, the current cost-sharing mitigation funding provided to local public health units will end on December 31, 2023. In the absence of an extension of the cost-sharing mitigation funding, changes to the funding formula announced in the 2019 Provincial Budget (see Table 2) will come into effect in 2024. When the change in the funding formula occurs, an alternative funding source will

be needed for TPH to maintain its base budget. In the absence of an alternative funding source, TPH will not be in a position to restart the full suite of programs and services that existed pre-COVID-19. Toronto Public Health will need to carefully examine which programs and services should continue in order to meet obligations under the Ontario Public Health Standards in a way that improves the health outcomes of the population and benefits Torontonians.

Table 2: Changes to the Ministry of Health Funding Formula

	Pre-2019 Provincial Budget	2019 Provincial Budget
Mandatory Ontario Public Health Standards Programs *	75% provincial 25% municipal	70% provincial 30% municipal
Other Programs such as Healthy Smiles Ontario, Smoke Free Ontario, and Infectious Diseases Control Initiative *	100% provincial	70% provincial 30% municipal
Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program	N/A	100% provincial since the program was introduced after the 2019 Provincial Budget

* Additional changes to the funding formula were expected to be implemented in subsequent budgets.

Potential mitigation strategies: advocate for funding model that is sustainable and sufficient to meet the public health needs of Torontonians; leverage technology to achieve and improve on program and service outcomes; and apply continuous improvement methods and undertake program reviews to focus resources on priority areas.

3. Resource Capacity to Address Evolving and Emerging Public Health Issues

Previously identified as a risk in 2022, this is an operational/service delivery risk with a score of 16: 4 impact and 4 likelihood.

Toronto Public Health's primary focus from 2020 through to the end of 2022 was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the planning and execution an effective vaccination campaign. In the midst of the pandemic, TPH also dealt with a number of emerging issues, including outbreaks of mpox and invasive meningococcal disease, and a worsening opioid crisis. The resource capacity needed to address the pandemic and other emerging issues challenged TPH's ability to properly address non-pandemic and/or non-outbreak public health issues. Employees continue to exhibit signs of fatigue from the intensive level of activity required over the period of 2020 to 2023. A fatigued workforce increases the likelihood that TPH may not have the capacity to identify and address evolving and emerging issues in as timely and fulsome manner as desired.

Potential mitigation strategies: enhance relationships with provincial, national and international jurisdictions for the surveillance of communicable diseases; partner with educational institutions and/or other organizations within the health care sector; leverage matrixed organizational structure adopted during the pandemic to address complex issues; and collaborate with organizations with experience in high-stress situations to identify recovery strategies.

4. Challenges Securing Public Support and Adherence to Public Health Advice

Previously identified as a risk in 2022, this is a stakeholder/public perception risk with a score of 12: 3 impact and 4 likelihood.

Misinformation, disinformation, COVID-19 fatigue and increasing frustration and disagreement with public health protective measures put in place during the pandemic may result in individuals not adhering to public health advice. Decreased uptake of vaccines and/or boosters and an increase in vaccine hesitancy are both matters of particular concern.

Potential mitigation strategies: collaborate with other local, provincial and federal governments; leverage local community partners and other stakeholders; provide consistent, clear and continuous communication and education; and develop and deploy evidence-based interventions and programs.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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