

Update on the alPHa 2025 Annual General Meeting & Conference

About the Conference

As Toronto's representative on the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) Board of Directors and the Board of Health (BOH) Section Executive Committee, I attended the 2025 alPHa Annual General Meeting and Conference, held here in Toronto from June 18 to 20.

The event brought together public health leaders from across Ontario. It served as a valuable opportunity to share updates from our respective public health units, engage in shared learning, and build connections with peers across the province. According to organizers, the AGM and Conference is an important educational and networking event, featuring high-profile speakers and a range of timely public health topics.

Established in 1986, alPHa is a not-for-profit organization that provides leadership to Ontario's boards of health and their local public health units.

Conference Highlights

1. **St. Lawrence Market Walking Tour** – Explored Toronto's food history and its connections to public health regulation and safety.
2. **Keynote by Marc Forgette** – Founder of Makatew Workshops, Marc led a compelling session rooted in Indigenous teachings, including the hands-on weaving of Dream Catchers.
3. **Topical Sessions on Public Health Priorities:**
 - Partnering with Ontario Health and Public Health Ontario
 - Indigenous engagement and public health
 - Navigating Ontario's evolving policy landscape
 - Provincial update from Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore
4. **Distinguished Service Awards** – Recognizing outstanding leadership and long-standing contributions to public health in Ontario.
5. **Section Meetings** – Included discussions among members of the Boards of Health (BOH) and the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health (COMOH), as well as the annual business meeting and passage of key resolutions.

See attached letter for a more detailed summary.

Recommendation

That the Board of Health receive this item for information.

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Report from: Director Charles Ozzoude

Date: June 25, 2025

As Toronto's representative on the Board of Directors for the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aPHa) and a member of the Executive Committee of its Boards of Health (BOH) Section, I had the privilege of attending this year's aPHa Annual General Meeting and Conference, hosted in Toronto from June 18 to 20, 2025.

This year's event brought together public health leaders from across Ontario and provided a valuable platform to explore emerging issues, reaffirm commitments to Indigenous reconciliation, and strengthen collaboration across our health system.

The Conference continues to be an essential venue for connecting with fellow public health leaders, exchanging knowledge, and renewing our commitment to building a healthier, more equitable Ontario. **I look forward to bringing these insights into ongoing conversations at the Board of Health.**

Key Themes

The conference centered on three broad themes:

- Deepening **partnerships** across the public health and health care systems
- Advancing **reconciliation** and Indigenous engagement in public health
- Navigating **emerging health and political challenges** in Ontario and beyond

Strategic Sessions of Interest

Collaboration Across the Health System

Speakers: Dr. Chris Simpson (Ontario Health), Michael Sherar (Public Health Ontario): This session examined how collaboration between public health and the broader healthcare system strengthens Ontario's collective health response.

- **Key Takeaway for the Board:** Integrated approaches—connecting prevention, care, and health promotion—are essential to improving public health. Hence, our partnerships in public health with system-level organizations must continue to be seamless and sustained.

Public Health's Engagement with Indigenous Communities

Speakers: Leonor Tavares and Dr. Nicole Blackman: This was a thoughtful and reflective conversation about the importance of inclusive, respectful engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) communities.

- **Key Takeaway for the Board:** Building and maintaining Indigenous relationships is deep, ongoing work. Earlier this year, the Board participated in an Indigenous Cultural Safety session—this conference session reinforced **the importance of continuous education and listening**.

Understanding Ontario's Political Landscape

Speaker: Sabine Matheson: This session explored the evolving public policy environment and the complex role of public health within it.

- **Key Takeaway for the Board:** Our role as a Board of Health is not divorced from ongoing global uncertainties and the blurred boundaries of health, politics, and international affairs—especially in a post-COVID era. Hence, our strength lies in **staying vigilant, globally informed, and actively engaged** across levels of government. This includes advocacy on global health security and local preparedness.

Provincial Update from the Chief Medical Officer of Health

Speaker: Dr. Kieran Moore: Dr. Moore provided an update on measles in Ontario and shared plans on collaborative work with Dr. Jane Philpott for a “catch-up” curriculum to equip primary care providers with stronger public health competencies and to improve patient access in primary care.

- **Key Takeaway for the Board:** While collaboration with the healthcare sector is vital, public health remains deeply rooted in the **social determinants of health**—including housing, income, race, and gender. This is central to Toronto Public Health’s Strategic Plan and to guide our ongoing work on health equity and intersectoral collaboration.

Additional Areas of Focus

- **"On the Front Lines"** – Public health leaders from nutrition, inspections, dentistry, and nursing shared current challenges and innovations in their fields.
- **"Legally Speaking"** – aPHa’s legal counsel, James LeNoury, discussed boards’ financial and governance responsibilities.
- **"AI in Public Health"** – Steven Rebellato highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence in local health units, including opportunities and ethical considerations.

Other Highlights

Keynote & Workshop – Marc Forgette (Makatew Workshops)

Marc Forgette delivered a powerful session rooted in Indigenous teachings and hands-on learning, including the cultural practice of Dream Catcher weaving. Key insights included:

- The importance of distinguishing **cultural appreciation from appropriation**
- Embracing **discomfort, humility, and curiosity** in reconciliation efforts

- A reminder that **reconciliation is not solely institutional—individual actions matter**

Marc encouraged participation in cultural gatherings like pow wows. Notably, he introduced **52 Weeks of Truth and Reconciliation**, a book offering weekly, accessible acts of reconciliation. The book challenges the idea that Truth and Reconciliation is strictly policy work, instead promoting its integration into daily life, in all 52 weeks of the year.

alPHa Business Meeting & Resolutions

Among the resolutions passed was a proposal to adopt the *Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework* into public health practice to **support more coordinated, trauma-informed public health strategies across Ontario**. It was sponsored by several health units—the Boards of Health for Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Durham Region Health Department, and Haliburton Kawartha Northumberland Peterborough Health Unit.

Distinguished Service Awards

The event also recognized outstanding public health leadership. Notably, soon-to-retire Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health for Simcoe Muskoka, was among those honoured for his long-standing contributions.

St. Lawrence Market Walking Tour

Participants explored Toronto's historic St. Lawrence Market and the newly redeveloped North Market building, offering a meaningful look at the city's food safety evolution and its connections to public health.