

Summary:

Putting Health on the Agenda: The 2026 Municipal Election



Northeastern
PUBLIC HEALTH
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du Nord-Est

How Municipal Decisions Shape Community Health

Municipal decisions can influence the health of communities; here are a few examples.

Substance Use and Retail Environments: The NEPH region has the highest smoking rates and alcohol use in Ontario. The density and location of tobacco, vaping, cannabis, and alcohol retailers can influence substance use behaviours by increasing visibility, accessibility, and normalization, particularly among youth.



Municipalities can:

- Consider retailer caps and zoning restrictions for tobacco, vaping, cannabis, and alcohol retailers, where permitted.
- Support substance-free recreational, cultural, and community events.
- Implement smoke-free and vapour-free bylaws on municipal properties not covered by the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, such as parks, trails, beaches, and municipal events.

Housing and Homelessness: When people have access to adequate housing, they are more likely to have better health outcomes. Affordable housing provides adequate shelter, reduces overcrowding, and supports access to basic needs like food.



Municipalities can:

- Support transitional and affordable housing in land use policies.
- Prevent the demolition of affordable housing and speed up affordable housing developments.
- Advocate for provincial and federal investment.

Social Connection: Community design plays an important role in shaping social connectedness. Access to parks, public spaces, reliable transportation, and inclusive community gathering places can help foster meaningful social interaction and strengthen a sense of belonging.



Municipalities can:

- Invest in parks, libraries, trails, community centres, and public gathering spaces.
- Support walkable, age-friendly, and accessible neighbourhoods.
- Fund recreation, arts, cultural, and intergenerational programming.

Healthy Built Environment: Community design can influence many outcomes related to chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes, as well our mental health and social well-being.



Municipalities can:

- Improve walkability through safe sidewalks, crossings, and traffic calming.
- Expand access to parks, trails, and green spaces.
- Invest in reliable and accessible public transportation.

Climate change: Climate change is leading to more frequent and intense extreme weather, shifting patterns of infectious disease, and impacting food and water safety. These changes affect physical and mental health, and place additional pressure on healthcare and emergency services.



Municipalities can:

- Integrate climate adaptation and resilience into municipal planning and decision-making.
- Support emergency preparedness measures for extreme heat, severe weather, wildfire smoke, and other climate-related events.
- Invest in green infrastructure, urban forests and natural spaces that help reduce heat and improve environmental sustainability.

Growing Healthy Families: Children do best when they grow up in safe, stable, and supportive environments. Factors such as affordable housing, financial supports, quality childcare, and strong community partnerships help families thrive and reduce the impact of adversity.



Municipalities can:

- Invest in programs and policies that reduce stress and support children and the adults who care for them.
- Implement policies and practices that promote equity and inclusivity.
- Integrate a trauma-informed approach into all stages of land use planning and development, and all programs and services.

Food Security and Affordability: Food insecurity is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes, increased health care utilization, and reduced quality of life.



Municipalities can:

- Support policies that improve income and affordability.
- Advocate to provincial and federal governments for stronger income supports.
- Consider food access in land-use planning, and promote community gardens, community kitchens, and food hubs.