

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Porcupine Health Unit



Building a Stronger, Healthier North

As I reflect on 2023, I am proud of the outstanding work our team at the Porcupine Health Unit has accomplished in serving our communities. This was a year of significant progress and transformation in public health across our region.

A defining moment came in August when we announced our plans to merge with the Timiskaming Health Unit. This voluntary partnership will strengthen our ability to provide programs and services to our communities while maintaining strong local connections. The importance of this step was highlighted by visits from both Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Honourable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health who came to learn about our unique northern context and challenges.

I am particularly proud of our vaccination achievements this year. Our region has one of the highest vaccination rates for meningitis, demonstrating our commitment to protecting our communities. We also successfully expanded our RSV vaccination program to better support our Indigenous communities and our populations at increased risk for infection .

Our team showed remarkable innovation in addressing community needs. We launched self-testing clinics for sexually transmitted infections across the region, making these important services more accessible. Our fluoride varnish program saw tremendous success, with almost 1,500 applications provided to help prevent tooth decay in young children.

The year also marked an important step in emergency preparedness, with all staff

participating in Incident Management System training. This comprehensive training ensures we are better equipped to respond to future public health challenges effectively and coordinate our efforts during emergencies.

Looking ahead, we recognize that the region faces unique health challenges. Our population experiences poorer health outcomes than the provincial average across multiple health indicators. While maintaining essential public health services and emergency response, we are expanding our prevention efforts, as demonstrated by the work of the Healthy Families team highlighted in this report.

These achievements would not have been possible without our dedicated staff, who work tirelessly to meet the needs of our communities. Their commitment to public health, especially as we navigate significant changes, has been truly inspiring.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to our mission of protecting and promoting the health of our communities while building stronger partnerships to ensure a healthier future for all.



*Lianne Catton, MD, CFPC EM, MPH
Medical Officer of Health & CEO*



Safer, Healthier Communities

On behalf of the Board of Health of the Porcupine Health Unit, I am proud to share our achievements and progress in 2023. This year marked significant steps forward in strengthening public health across our communities, thanks to the dedication of our PHU team and the active engagement of our residents.

Throughout the year, we focused on building safer, healthier communities through several key initiatives. Our work on mental health, opioid crisis response, and disease prevention reached more residents than ever before, especially in our underserved areas. The launch of innovative programs like Planet Youth Timmins and expanded dental services for seniors shows how we're investing in both immediate needs and long-term community wellness.

Looking ahead to the voluntary merger between the Porcupine and Timiskaming Health

Units, we're creating new opportunities to enhance public health services across the North East. This collaboration will help us better serve our communities while maintaining strong local connections.

I want to acknowledge both our dedicated PHU staff and my fellow Board members who continue to advocate for sustainable funding and support for public health. Together, we're building a stronger, healthier future for all our communities.

*Michelle Boileau, Chair
Porcupine Health Unit Board of Health*



2023 Board of Health

Michelle Boileau, Chair
CITY OF TIMMINS

Drago Stefanic, Vice-Chair
TOWNSHIP OF HORNEPAYNE

Bill Gvozdanovic
Andrew Marks
John Curley
CITY OF TIMMINS

Tory Delaurier
TOWN OF IROQUOIS FALLS

Louise Gadoury
TOWNSHIP OF BLACK
RIVER-MATHESON

Marc Dupuis
TOWNSHIP OF MATTICE VAL-COTE,
OPASATIKA AND VAL-RITA-HARTY

Gary Fortin
TOWN OF KAPUSKASING,
TOWNSHIPS OF MOONBEAM,
FAUQUIER AND STRICKLAND

Peter Politis
TOWN OF COCHRANE,
TOWN OF MOOSONEE

Cindy Campbell
Sue Perras
PROVINCIAL APPOINTEE
(EFFECTIVE AUGUST 31, 2023)

Healthy Families Program

Nurturing Babies and Empowering Families

Healthy development during childhood has a huge effect on our health throughout our lives. The bonds formed between babies and parents or caregivers during the first three years are especially important. These early relationships improve healthy brain development, allowing children to learn, build good relationships, and have positive behaviours as they grow up.

The Healthy Families Program at the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) works to improve the health and wellbeing of children and families. It provides programs and services like:

- One-on-one help with feeding your baby
- The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program
- Home visits through the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program
- Classes to prepare for having a baby
- Parenting education classes

The program also works with partners in the community to create environments that support the health of families.



Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program

This program helps pregnant women who face challenges. It aims to:

- Improve the health of moms and babies
- Lower the number of babies born at an unhealthy weight
- Encourage and support breastfeeding
- Build community support for pregnant women

In 2023, 84 women were screened for the program and 31 of them actively took part. They received individual support, prenatal vitamins, and grocery gift cards.

| 84 *CPNP screens completed*

| 31 *clients participated in CPNP*

Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC)

HBHC provides home visits to pregnant women and parents of young children. The goal is to help children get a healthy start in life by strengthening parent-child relationships. During visits, staff teach parenting skills, watch for any issues with development, encourage healthy behaviours, and connect families to community resources.

In 2023, 599 families were screened for HBHC. This determines whether the family could be helped by the home visiting program. In all, 67 families took part and received weekly or biweekly visits from a nurse and family home visitor. Visits continue for as long as each family needs the support.

| 599 *HBHC screens completed*

| 67 *clients received 2+ HBHC home visits*

Prenatal Education Classes

These classes help expectant parents prepare for pregnancy, birth, and caring for a newborn. The classes:

- Teach healthy behaviours during pregnancy
- Lower anxiety about giving birth
- Provide important information and support
- Help parents feel confident and bond with their baby

This leads to better birth outcomes and health for parents and babies. Partners and support people are welcome to attend too.

| 3 *English virtual prenatal series completed*

| 1 *French in-person prenatal series completed*

| 67 *pregnant participants registered*

Infant Feeding

The Healthy Families Program offers infant feeding support to all new families. Breast milk provides the perfect nutrition for babies and is key to their overall wellbeing. However, breastfeeding rates in the Porcupine Health Unit area are lower than the Ontario average. In 2023, staff did 410 breastfeeding assessments and 88 support visits.

The Healthy Families program also provided training on the Baby-Friendly Initiative which, by working with families, community agencies, and healthcare, improves infant and parent health.

| 410 *breastfeeding assessments completed*

| 51 *formula-feeding assessments completed*

| 88 *breastfeeding visits*

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Research clearly demonstrates that traumatic events in childhood can have long-lasting negative effects on both physical and mental health. These events, known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), can be prevented which can positively influence health outcomes and behaviours, such as substance use, throughout a person's life.

Public health units and external partners are working together in a Community of Practice (CoP) to learn more about ACEs. The goals of this group (ACE CoP) include sharing knowledge, identifying best practices for addressing ACEs, and building resilience. The Porcupine Health Unit is developing programs to teach people about ACEs and resilience. By preventing ACEs, we can help build healthier communities in our area.

The Looksee Project

Many families in the PHU area don't have a family doctor or nurse practitioner. Young children in those families may not be regularly assessed for their growth and development.

In September 2023, a pilot project the Healthy Families team started in Cochrane has parents complete a "Looksee" checklist when their child gets vaccinations. The checklist was designed to be easy to understand and to complete. This helps track milestones and connect families to the services they need. Families and staff that participated in the program were positive about it, saying they learned about important milestones and the help they could get.

The Healthy Families program provides vital support for the wellbeing of babies and families, especially after the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its services foster healthy development, strong families, and supportive communities. Continued development of programs like those above benefits children, families and all our communities.



Planet Youth

Building a Healthier Community for Youth

In early 2023, the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) began work on bringing the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) in Timmins. The model had been successful in reducing youth substance use in Iceland and several other countries. It promotes a community environment that supports healthy choices and activities for young people. There are other benefits, including better mental health, and stronger connections between youth and their community.

In February, the PHU hosted a community event to spark interest and find partners. This led to the creation of the Planet Youth Timmins Coordinating Team, made up of local agencies serving youth.

Next, the team formed a coalition to ensure the process followed evidence-based steps. They completed two steps before officially joining Planet Youth.

Step 1 focused on building a strong coalition. Step 2 was about finding funding and to support long-term prevention efforts. About that time, in July 2023, Planet Youth Timmins (PYT) signed on as a partner. PYT then held workshops with over 12 agencies to boost their prevention efforts and prepare for next steps.

In Step 3, PYT planned data collection and worked on community engagement.

They created promotional materials, engaged parents through public sessions held in both French and English and launched the PYT website.

In October and November 2023, Step 4 focussed on data collection and processing. PYT expanded the survey to include broader wellness aspects. Topics included safety, sleep, screen time, and mental health. They achieved an 83% response rate across the 5 local high schools. This success was due to youth involvement, careful planning, and support from local organizations. Prizes like headphones and gift cards encouraged attendance on the day of the survey.

In Step 5, PYT worked on getting the community more involved. They promoted the Planet Youth model at a number of events, including a local Registered Nurses'





Association of Ontario meeting on substance abuse. This generated a lot of interest and led to invitations to present the model to other communities in Ontario.

This year was important in promoting the Icelandic Prevention Model to the North. Planet Youth Timmins succeeded through community support, a strong team, and effective data collection. It laid the groundwork for implementing the next steps in 2024. By building connections and supportive spaces, they're building the foundation for healthier, more resilient communities.



Oral Health & Vision

School and Preschool Programs

The Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) serves our community through essential dental and vision care programs. We provide screening services and preventive treatments to children and seniors in need, ensuring care is both accessible and focused on preventing health issues.

School-Based Programs

In the 2022–2023 school year, our dental team completed dental screenings for 4,796 students in elementary schools across our region. We normally screen children in JK, SK, and Grades 2, 4, and 7. This year, we added Grades 1 and 8 to make up for screenings missed during COVID-19.

Fluoride Varnish Program

The fluoride varnish program is one of the health unit's key services to prevent tooth decay. This safe treatment puts a protective coating on teeth that helps stop cavities from forming and can even reverse early tooth decay. The treatment is quick and simple to apply and is approved by both Health Canada and the Canadian Dental Association.

2023 Program Achievements

- 1,429 fluoride varnish applications provided over 3 visits to preschool children in childcare settings
- Additional 112 applications for preschool children ages 0–4 in PHU clinics
- Program available to all elementary schools throughout the PHU district for Junior and Senior Kindergarten students

Vision Screening

Our vision screening program identified significant needs in the community. During this campaign, 46% of the students screened were referred to an optometrist for follow-up.

| 654

Senior Kindergarten students had their vision screened

| 298

were referred to an optometrist

PHU Dental Clinic Services

In 2023, our clinics provided comprehensive preventive services to 549 children throughout the district.

| 549

*children were seen in
PHU dental clinics*

Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO)

The HSO Emergency and Essential Services Stream (EESS) provided crucial support to vulnerable youth with 151 children (ages 0–17) enrolled in HSO EESS through PHU screening.

| 192

*dental screenings
completed*

The program covers comprehensive dental services including check-ups, cleaning, fillings, x-rays, scaling, tooth extraction, and emergency dental care.

| 356

*dental examinations
completed*

| 338

*scaling procedures
completed*

Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI)

The Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI) helps prevent tooth decay in First Nations children from birth to age 7. The program also supports caregivers and pregnant individuals in First Nations communities. Through education and early care, COHI works to improve oral health and make dental services more accessible for First Nations families. This year, our team visited eight First Nations communities to provide these important services.

| 350

*preventative treatments
delivered*

Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

The success of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program continued in 2023 through collaboration with 32 dentists and 4 denturist providers.

| 450

*total fluoride
treatments*

| 112

*fluoride treatments for
children aged 0-4*

| 338

*fluoride treatments for children
aged 4 and older*

Program Impact and Outcomes

Our dental and vision programs play a crucial role in:

- Supporting student well-being and academic performance
- Preventing pain and discomfort from tooth decay
- Promoting better physical and mental health
- Improving self-esteem and confidence
- Contributing to overall quality of life
- Identifying and addressing vision concerns early in child development



Looking Forward

The health unit will continue to work towards making dental and vision care easier to access throughout our area. We aim to help all residents in our communities stay healthy through our screening programs, preventive care, and financial support.

452

enrolled seniors accessed dental services

1,129

seniors' dental claims processed

1,039

dentists' claims processed

90

denturists' claims processed

164

dentures and partial plates fabricated

2023 - By the numbers

Environmental Health

Rabies investigations

- total of 225 investigations completed in 2023
- Food premise and PPS inspections
- 99% of all high-risk food premises (3rd term)
- 100% complete in recreational water inspections
- 88% of Small Drinking Water System (SDWS) Inspections

Food handler courses

- 24 courses offered
- 260 participants certified

Infection Protection & Control (IPAC)

Safe needle handling

- 8 handling and disposal training sessions on April 18, 20, 25 and 27, 2023.
- 6 sessions were offered in English
- 2 sessions offered in French
- 64 participants total

Immunization

(2023-24 school year)

Hepatitis B (HepB):

- 985 doses administered

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

- 946 doses administered

Meningitis

- 1,259 doses administered



Financial Report

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES	\$	%
General Public Health	11,349,306	67.45%
COVID Vaccine Program	494,302	2.94%
COVID Response	281,928	1.68%
Unorganized Territories	844,021	5.01%
Preschool Speech and Language Initiative	194	0.00%
Healthy Babies/Healthy Children	982,757	5.84%
COVID 19 School Focused Nurses Initiative	300,000	1.78%
Ontario Seniors Dental Care	702,301	4.17%
Infection Prevention and Control Hub	713,599	4.24%
Fruit & Vegetable Pilot Program	189,623	1.13%
AIDS Bureau Funding Program	257,873	1.53%
Land Control	108,465	0.64%
Indigenous Communities Partnerships	185,610	1.10%
Canada Prenatal Nutrition	111,910	0.67%
Stay on Your Feet	108,684	0.65%
Children's Oral Health Initiative Program	76,828	0.46%
Ontario Active School Travel	879	0.01%
Temporary Retention Incentive Nurses	-	0.00%
Planet Youth	40,000	0.24%
One-Time Merger Planning & Review	78,206	0.46%
TOTAL	\$16,825,486	100.00%

REVENUE SOURCES	\$	%
Province of Ontario	13,418,269	77.25%
Member Municipalities	2,906,861	16.73%
Government of Canada	191,910	1.10%
Other	853,263	4.91%
TOTAL	\$17,370,303	100.00%

