



# History of Public Health in Ontario

The pattern of local public health services administration for Ontario was established in 1833 when the Legislature of Upper Canada passed an Act allowing local municipalities “to establish Boards of Health to guard against the introduction of malignant, contagious and infectious disease in this province.” This delegation of public health responsibility to the local level has continued to the present day.

There are currently 34 health units in Ontario: 24 autonomous boards of health; six regional boards of health; and four single-tier/semi-autonomous boards of health.

## Selected key milestones:

- 1873** The first Public Health Act was passed.
- 1882** The first board of health was established.
- 1934** The first county-wide health unit was established with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. At this time, Ontario had 800 local boards of health and 700 medical officers of health, most of whom were part-time.
- 1945** The Public Health Act was amended so that provincial grants could be provided to municipalities for the establishment of health units. Six health units were in place by the end of 1945. By 1950, twenty-five county and 12 municipal health units were in place which served two thirds of the population of Ontario.
- 1968** The Waterloo County Health Unit (serving 11 municipalities) was amalgamated with the Kitchener Department of Health, creating a single health unit for the area.
- 1983** The Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) was proclaimed, replacing the Public Health Act. The Act was amended in 1990 making slight changes to its contents.
- 2007** Public Health Ontario was established as the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.
- 2009** The new Ontario Public Health Standards replaced the 1997 Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines and the Initial Report on Public Health was released as the first step in developing an accountability framework and management and governance requirements for all boards of health.
- 2018** The modernized Ontario Public Health Standards came into effect on January 1, 2018, replacing the 2008 Ontario Public Health Standards and Ontario Public Health Organizational Standards.
- 2018** Region of Waterloo Public Health commemorated its 50th year as a public health organization.
- 2020** In January, the first presumptive case of COVID-19 was reported in Ontario (and in Canada); a State of Emergency was declared in March 2020.

The information contained in this fact sheet originates from the Association of Local Public Health Agencies' **2018 Orientation Manual for Board of Health Members** and **Milestones web page**.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.