

June 23, 2022

Marty Pearce
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor St., Toronto, M7A 1E9

Maureen Perrin
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor St., Toronto, M7A 1E9

Dear Mr. Pearce and Ms. Perrin:

RE: Requested epidemiology supports for the integration of all diseases of public health significance into the new expanded solution

On behalf of the Association of Public Health Epidemiologist in Ontario (APHEO) and its membership, I am writing to request the Ministry of Health conduct more active engagement with local public health epidemiologists, through APHEO, on the design and decision-making teams of the new diseases of public health significance (DoPHS) data system. In order to ensure the success of the design and implementation, APHEO requests that the Ministry of Health also allocate funding to public health units to resource local epidemiologists for the implementation of the new system within health units.

The COVID-19 pandemic created demand for more rapid access to high quality data, both internally, from public health for planning and service delivery, and externally, from the public, media and government organizations. This put additional pressures on epidemiologists and analysts to ensure quick and flexible reporting, while trying to maintain a high calibre of data quality. As planning begins to develop a new data management system for all DoPHS, epidemiologists across the province are concerned. In the initial roll-out of the provincial Case and Contact Management (CCM) system as a COVID-19 case and contact management tool, epidemiological reporting needs of public health units were not consistently considered, resulting in an inefficient system that requires extensive manual adjustments and validation for accurate reporting.

While each health unit has a designated CCM liaison (the CCM Champion) with the Ministry of Health and CCM development teams, these individuals are not always data reporting or epidemiology specialists and consequently, epidemiological and reporting requirements are not brought to the table. In order to meet the Ontario Public Health Standards, as both a clinical documentation and provincial reporting system, the data users of the new data system must be part of the design process.

Extensive expertise in infectious disease epidemiology and iPHIS/CCM exists within the public health unit epidemiological and analytical workforce, who are represented through APHEO. Not adequately engaging and resourcing local epidemiologists in the development and implementation of the new DoPHS system risks creating a database that is inefficient and ineffective, inconsistently used for reporting, and labour intensive for ongoing reporting needs.

On behalf of APHEO, I ask that the Ministry of Health:

1. Ensure epidemiologists are involved in the design of the new DOPHS system by establishing a Ministry-led working group through APHEO, to focus on epidemiological reporting from the new DOPHS system.
 - a. This working group should be established immediately in order to ensure efficiency and reduce duplication of efforts.
 - b. This working group should be through APHEO to ensure appropriate representation from the variety of local public health units.

2. Allocate funding to local public health units for the added epidemiological resources needed for the development, implementation and integration of reporting from the new DoPHS database system.

APHEO supports the integration of DoPHS into a new system to modernize both documentation and reporting. However, public health unit epidemiologists must be part of the conversation for how the data systems are designed and utilized. The new system must build on the successes and lessons learned from iPHIS and CCM to ensure that it is not only a modern system, but a better system: robust, agile, valid and timely. In order to ensure that the migration from iPHIS and CCM, is successful from both a case management perspective and an epidemiological database and reporting perspective, health unit epidemiologists must be funded and resourced to support the design and implementation of the new system, to ensure that the system optimises government money and public health capacity, while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards.

APHEO's Executive Committee would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this request.

Kind regards

Erica Clark

Erica Clark, President

Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario

The Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO) is an organization of over 300 members and affiliates, devoted to advancing and promoting the discipline and professional practice of epidemiology in Ontario public health units since 1991.