

INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

2021-2022 BIENNIAL REPORT



Association of Public Health
Epidemiologists in Ontario

Introduction

Throughout 2021 and 2022, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic was the primary focus for APHEO and its members. APHEO members faced several challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those challenges included implementing new databases for case and contact management and immunizations, initiating socio-demographic data collection, and continuing to provide timely, local epidemiological analysis to support decision-making. These challenges were compounded by an unprecedented appetite for daily updates of real time surveillance data from the public. Collaboration between APHEO members across Ontario aided in the development and deployment of innovative solutions to address problems as they arose.

Suspension of non-essential APHEO operations that began on March 13, 2020, continued until September 14, 2022. Essential activities maintained by APHEO included facilitating collaboration between members, data advocacy, and establishing working groups for pandemic specific needs. APHEO began a gradual return to pre-pandemic activities in the fall of 2022, with a small number of pre-pandemic working groups restarting activities before the end of the year.

Collaboration

Collaboration amongst APHEO members was an invaluable resource throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. APHEO members continued to share expertise and resources through the APHEO listserv and in the working groups that were operational during the pandemic. This supported the rapid sharing of solutions by public health units, allowing for widespread adoption and reduced impact of commonly encountered problems. It also supported collaboration between health units in problem solving.

TABLE 1: OPERATIONAL WORKING GROUPS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Working Group	Chair(s)
COVID-19 case and contact management (CCM)	Jordan Robinson & Kristen Wheeler
COVID-19 vaccine	Emily Shing
Combined COVID-19 CCM and vaccine	Kristen Wheeler & Jenny Santos
COVID-19 modeling	Lydia Cheng
Pandemic indirect impacts	Stephanie Wolfe
Social media	Zeinab El-Masri

Data advocacy

The pandemic fueled a desire for timelier and more granular health information amongst decision makers and the public; however, there remained significant gaps in available population health information. In 2022, APHEO authored two letters to the Ministry of Health. The first letter addressed the development of a new provincial database for diseases of public health significance (DoPHS) and the second endorsed a recommendation for standardized sociodemographic data collection in Ontario. Both letters aimed to ensure that Ontario public health units have access to granular, timely and accurate data to inform local decision-making. The Ministry of Health acknowledged receipt of the letters and responded by including an APHEO representative on the steering committee for development of the new DoPHS database and on the advisory group for the public health digital platform development.

Local epidemiological work

Local epidemiologists provided analysis to support local decision-making, assisted health unit staff in identifying outbreaks that may not be evident through provincial analysis, undertook data cleaning and validation activities and developed and implemented local tools to capture data and provide analysis for local decision-making. Analytic products displaying local trends and risk assessments were shared with the public in a quantity and frequency not previously seen. Although Public Health Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Health provided a separate analysis of provincial COVID-19 data and COVID-19 vaccination data on their respective websites, demand for local epidemiological analysis and support remained high.

Financial Summary

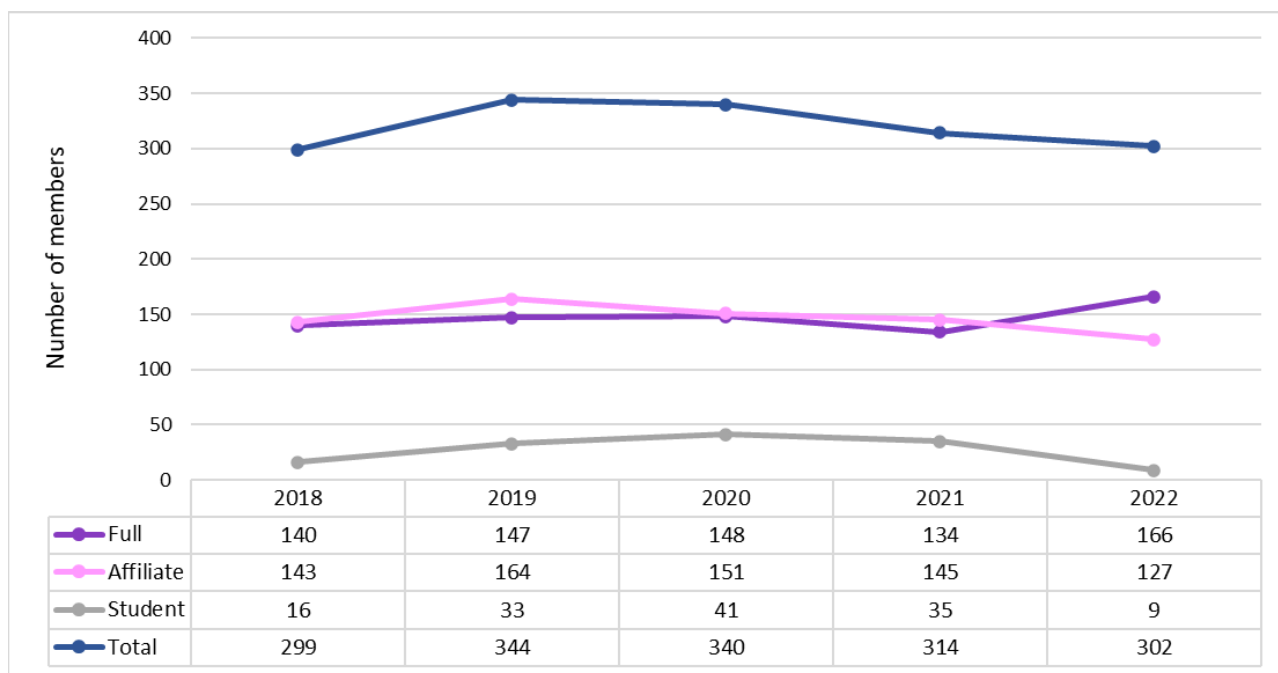
TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF APHEO FINANCES

	2021	2022
Revenue	\$16,762.06	\$20,530.00
Expenses	\$7,005.72	\$6,879.84
Net Revenue / (Net Expenses Over Revenue)	\$9,756.34	\$13,650.16
Total Assets in Dollars	\$105,729.30	\$118,801.16

Membership

As non-essential activities were suspended, the emphasis was on maintaining collaboration opportunities rather than tracking membership status and doing outreach to postsecondary institutions. Participation in working groups operating during the pandemic were open to non-members and efforts were made to ensure that each health unit had at least one active member who could forward listserv emails to other staff. Epidemiologists and analysts hired on contract to support pandemic work were able to participate in working groups regardless of their membership status. Ontario public health units maintained or expanded full time equivalents for epidemiologists and analysts in 2021 and 2022 but this is not necessarily reflected in the membership numbers.

FIGURE 1: APHEO MEMBERSHIPS BY TYPE AND YEAR



Social Media

Most social media engagement activities were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. The social media working group chair did maintain the X (formerly Twitter) account and sent a small number of messages each year.

Executive Committee Members

TABLE 3: APHEO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	2021	2022
President	Erica Clark	Erica Clark
Vice President	James Macintosh	Ainslie Butler
Secretary	Ainslie Butler	Dorian Lunny
Treasurer	Stanley Ing	Alison Rothwell
alpha Representative	Sarah Collier	Sarah Collier / Emma Tucker
OPHA Representative	Alison Rothwell	Danielle Hachborn
Member-at-Large	Stephanie Hughes	Katie Bradley