

 <p>Northwestern Health Unit www.nwhu.on.ca</p>	<b>REPORT TO THE BOARD OF HEALTH</b>	
	<b>Meeting Date</b>	November 15, 2023
	<b>Reference #</b>	2023.11.15
	<b>Title</b>	Strengthening Public Health Feasibility Assessment
	<b>Submitted by</b>	Dr. Kit Ngan Young Hoon, Medical Officer of Health Marilyn Herbacz, Chief Executive Officer

## **PURPOSE**

To provide context to a Board of Health decision to begin engaging in exploratory discussions and feasibility assessment of a merger between Northwestern Health Unit and Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU).

## **BACKGROUND**

On August 22, 2023, the Ministry of Health [announced](#) its intent to work with partners on a strategy to strengthen public health. This announcement also indicated that there will be one-time funding, resources, and supports available for local public health agencies that voluntarily merge.

The Ministry's strategy is centred on three priorities:

1. Clarifying roles and responsibilities through the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS).
2. Supporting voluntary mergers among Local Public Health Agencies (LPHAs).
3. Providing stable, sustainable funding to LPHAs.

And indicates that voluntary mergers, as one of the components of the strategy, particularly among smaller LPHAs, have potential to address long-standing challenges in the public health system and present an opportunity to work towards a vision for an optimized and better coordinated public health system.

The timeline associated with funding to support voluntary mergers would require a request for in-year funding to be submitted prior to year-end, with a merger proposal, should that be the direction taken by local public health agencies, to be submitted with the Annual Service Plan (ASP) in March 2024 for implementation by January 1, 2025.

## **REFERENCES (LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS, STRATEGIC PLAN, OTHER)**

- [Health Protection and Promotion Act s.77](#)

## **BUDGET**

In-year requests for one-time funding to support feasibility assessments will be accepted for those local public health agencies who are unable to manage the cost through their existing funding/budget.

## **DISCUSSION & RISK ANALYSIS**

- Given the vast geographic area covered by Northwestern Health Unit, and that covered by Thunder Bay District Health Unit, in addition to the number of rural and remote communities within each health unit's catchment area, it is unclear how a merger would impact public health service delivery for residents in each municipality, unorganized territories, and to urban and on-community Indigenous populations.

- The approach laid out by the Ministry does include language recognizing that mergers of geographically large, remote, and sparsely populated LPHAs may result in geographic challenges that outweigh the benefits of achieving a minimum population base of 500,000. In order to determine the feasibility of a merger for Northwestern Health Unit and Thunder Bay District Health Unit and to determine if such a merger would, in fact, meet Ministry of Health objectives and desired outcomes, a feasibility assessment would need to be completed, and would best be completed jointly with Northwestern Health Unit and Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

## **APPENDICES**

- Strengthening Public Health – Outcomes and Objectives to Support Voluntary Mergers (*Ministry of Health*)

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Board of Health pass a resolution to support a joint feasibility assessment with Thunder Bay District Health Unit, to be facilitated by a third-party consultant and joint working group

BOARD OF HEALTH FOR THE NORTHWESTERN HEALTH UNIT	
Motion / Resolution	
Meeting Date: November 15, 2023	Resolution # 93-2023
MOVED BY	Trudy Sachowski
SECONDED BY	Nicole Brown

WHEREAS the Ontario Ministry of Health has announced its strategy Strengthen Public Health in Ontario, centred on three priorities:

1. Clarifying roles and responsibilities through the Ontario Public Health Standards;
2. **Supporting voluntary mergers among Local Public Health Agencies (LPHAs);**
3. Providing stable, sustainable funding to LPHAs;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit agrees to engage with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU) Board of Health on this provincial strategy;

AND FURTHER, THAT the Board embark on a joint RFP process with TBDHU's Board of Health to engage a third party consultant to **assess and report on considerations and implications of a merger of the public health units** in Northwestern Ontario;

AND FURTHER, THAT the Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit appoints the Board of Health Chair, and Vice-Chair, to work along with the Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer to lead this work on the Board's behalf, with updates and engagement of the full NWHU Board of Health as appropriate, throughout this process.

	Yea	Nay	Abstained	Disclosure of Interest
D. Lawrance				
T. Sachowski				
W. Brunetta				
N. Brown				
R. Bernie				
B. Vineberg				
L. MacDonald				
J. Kristoff				
J. Zacharias				
CARRIED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DEFEATED <input type="checkbox"/>				

Chair: Dhawana