



CANADIAN  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION

The Voice of Public Health



## STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS in Canada

### FAQs

Have a question about our [policy brief](#) or [executive summary](#)? Maybe it's one of these:

**Q** *Are you suggesting that the federal government should define the mission of public health and qualifications for public health workers?*

**A** No, we're not recommending that the federal government do this! Instead, we're asking the federal government to convene a 'Public Health Working Group' – comprised of federal, provincial and territorial authorities as well as public health employers, professional associations and academics – that would collectively define core functions and goals of public health as well as public health workforce competencies and training needs.

**Q** *You must want new federal funding for public health—where's your money ask?*

**A** We know that throwing money at health systems doesn't necessarily improve the systems themselves. Our first priority is to get structural policy foundations in place to ensure that funding gets effectively directed into a strong, coherent system. (For example, the federal government should know what kinds of public health data are needed by high-performing public health systems before funding

development of a national health data system.) More funding down the road is important, but we're not asking for it right now.

**Q** *What other countries can we look to as models for a cohesive, comprehensive approach to a public health system? Who's doing it right?*

**A** Many countries are trying to reshape their public health systems in the face of weaknesses underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, experts in the United States are calling for a new unified [national public health system](#) and a [public health data system](#).

**Q** *How can Canadian public health systems regain public trust to function effectively?*

**A** We believe that most Canadians still implicitly trust the public health systems that are working effectively to protect and improve their health and well-being. Rebuilding trust with the minority begins with getting systemic foundations in place. This means recognizing that health communication and community engagement are central to public health systems: defining the mandate and goals for these activities and resourcing them

properly; and having a workforce with specialized skills to do the job.

**Q** *You're calling for a new Canada Public Health Act--don't you know how long that would take?*

**A** A strong federal mandate for public health enshrined in a new Act will be a foundational piece for building a strong, cohesive national framework for public health, and we think it's worth aiming high. We realize that achieving such a goal may take some time and there is lots of other work that needs to be done first.

**Q** *How does the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and its activities fit into your recommendations?*

**A** We want to see a stable, high-performing PHAC carrying out many federal responsibilities for public health, but our recommendations don't bear on its specific structure and activities.

Do you have other questions about our recommendations? Please [get in touch](#) and ask us!

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

*We call on the Government of Canada to:*



## CORE FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

- 1 Convene provincial and territorial governments to create a pan-Canadian statement of core public health functions, establishing a shared commitment to the mandate of public health services.

## POPULATION HEALTH GOALS

- 2 Work as a partner with provincial and territorial governments to translate agreed-upon core public health functions into a set of high-level population health goals specifying outcomes that public health services will be accountable to deliver for Canadian populations.
- 3 Seek agreement on pan-Canadian outcome indicators to measure progress toward achieving these population health goals.

## WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES

- 4 Collaborate with provincial and territorial governments, and with relevant stakeholders, to produce an updated list of public health competencies.

## WORKFORCE TRAINING

- 5 Lead consultations on a pan-Canadian training program for public health professionals based on a renewed set of public health competencies. Determine optimal formats for training delivery.
- 6 Commit to funding an online training platform for the public health workforce, to be developed and delivered by the Public Health Agency of Canada or delegated to a qualified stakeholder organization.

## GOVERNANCE

- 7 **LEAD THE CREATION OF A NEW CANADA PUBLIC HEALTH ACT THAT WOULD:**
  - Define core functions and goals of public health services in Canada;
  - Detail the federal mandate for supporting public health at the national level and in collaboration with provinces and territories;
  - Allocate targeted new funding transfers to provinces and territories that would fill gaps in their capacity to provide public health services;
  - Assign accountabilities for reporting, monitoring and evaluating public health outcomes within provincial and territorial health systems, and require annual reporting on nation-wide progress toward meeting public health goals; and

- Support public health emergency planning and define in legislation federal public health emergency powers related to areas in which pan-Canadian coordination is essential (e.g., immunization, manufacturing capacity, and data reporting).

- 8 **ADOPT GOVERNANCE PRACTICES ENABLING PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTISE TO INFORM HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY BY:**

- Identifying performance measurement indicators best suited to assess the impacts of public health in improving health and promoting health equity;
- Establishing targeted governmental mechanisms to foster cross-departmental collaboration to promote population health; and
- Structuring governance bodies and processes to increase the voice and authority of affected communities both in routine governance of public health and during public health emergencies.



**CANADIAN  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION**

**Canadian Public Health Association is the independent national voice and trusted advocate for public health, speaking up for people and populations to all levels of government.**

**OUR VISION** Healthy people and communities thriving in inclusive, equitable, sustainable environments.

**OUR MISSION** To enhance the health of all people and communities in Canada, particularly those who are structurally disadvantaged, and to contribute to a healthier and more equitable world.