



# STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS in Canada

The Canadian Public Health Association calls on the federal government to lead provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders in creating cohesive, comprehensive and accountable public health systems in Canada.

## How public health is organized

Beyond the structural components of ‘what’ and ‘who’, the strength of public health systems also depends on how jurisdictions organize themselves and govern their interactions with other systems that shape the broader determinants of health for Canadian populations.

### **Insufficiently defined federal responsibilities for public health**

Some major gaps in the governance of public health systems in Canada originate with the currently ambiguous role of the federal government in public health. While a narrow set of federal responsibilities is assigned by *The Constitution Act* (1867), in practice the federal government currently takes on broader responsibilities in the public health landscape and should embrace some new ones.

### **The impacts of administrative models on public health service delivery**

Across Canada, jurisdictions set up responsibilities, authorities, organizational models and leadership for their public health systems in different ways, with intersections between the governance of public health and the broader health care systems varying widely. Scant evidence exists to substantiate what the actual impacts of structural reorganization and funding reallocations have been on the quality of public health services delivered, or to establish which forms of governance would produce better results.

### **Prioritizing health promotion in public health governance**

Many policy levers shaping population health outcomes belong to other government departments’ mandates, and public health expertise is not easily transferred into these departments’ policymaking.

### **The governance role of chief medical officers of health**

Across most public health jurisdictions, chief medical officers of health exist to provide high-level scientific advice to decision-makers. Much confusion arises because the internal and outward-facing mandates of this role are unclear to the public and officials.

## CALLS TO ACTION

CPHA calls on the federal government to:

1. Lead the creation of a new Canada Public Health Act that would define core functions and goals of public health services in Canada, and detail the federal health mandate for supporting public health at the national level and in collaboration with provinces and territories.
2. Adopt a range of governance practices enabling public health expertise better to inform public policymaking that supports the health of Canadian populations..

# 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