



CANADIAN  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION

The Voice of Public Health



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

## STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS in Canada

Doing so will improve population health outcomes nation-wide and protect the primary and acute care systems from being overburdened. In a country that so highly values portable and universal medical care for individuals, the same standards should hold for the public health services that protect and improve the health of Canadian populations.

The six core functions of Canada's public health systems are population health assessment, health protection, health surveillance, disease and injury prevention, health promotion, and emergency preparedness and response. In practice, however, many details of their content and translation into action are not well defined or well realized. The federal government should establish a cross-jurisdictional Public Health Systems Working Group whose mandate would begin by defining a common set of core public health functions, along with a common framework of high-level goals and outcome metrics for the provision of public health services.

The public health workforce draws on diverse professional and disciplinary backgrounds yet requires a common grounding in foundational approaches and skills of public health as well as skills to meet evolving public health needs. For this reason, strengthening Canada's public health systems requires updated workforce competency descriptions to be developed and embedded into workforce planning and resourcing.

Across Canada, there is a significant gap in training resources for practitioners entering the public health workforce or seeking to upgrade their knowledge and skills. This presents a substantial obstacle both to the delivery of high-quality public health services and to workforce mobility. Federal leadership is needed to design and deliver flexible, comprehensive training for public health practitioners in Canada.

In the area of governance, the federal government should lead by establishing

a new Canada Public Health Act that would detail the federal mandate for supporting public health services, allocate new targeted public health transfers for provincial and territorial capacity-building, ensure reporting on outcomes, and support emergency planning. It should also introduce governance mechanisms enabling public health expertise to inform other departments' policies and programs affecting population health.

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**Federal leadership is just a first step. With collaboration by provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders, we can build the cohesive, comprehensive and accountable public health systems that citizens deserve, and that will strengthen Canada as a whole.**

# 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.



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**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