



# Annual Report 2018

## BOARD OF HEALTH

### County of Elgin

Bernie Wieghele  
David Marr

### City of St. Thomas

Heather Jackson  
Steve Wookey

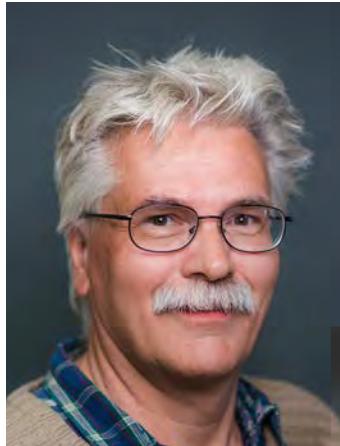
### County of Oxford

David Mayberry  
Larry Martin  
Margaret Lupton  
Sandra Talbot

### Order in Council

Lee Rowden

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Bernie Wiegle

At the end of 2017, the Boards of Health in Oxford and Elgin Counties announced their intent to merge. On March 29, the required regulatory changes to the Health Protection and Promotion Act were approved, allowing us to proceed with the merger. And on May 1, 2018 we legally became Southwestern Public Health, Ontario's newest public health unit serving Oxford, Elgin and the City of St. Thomas.

This merger was both prudent and necessary. The province's formula had resulted in a funding freeze for both health units since 2014. A freeze is a reduction in funding as expenses for wages, goods and services continue to increase. As such, program and service reductions were imminent. The driving benefit of the merger was the opportunity to maintain programs and services by pooling resources, thereby positioning the health unit to better respond to the unique needs of their small urban and large rural communities.

I would be remiss if I did not devote a significant amount of this message to acknowledging the people who made this happen. Thank you to:

- The members of the Boards of Health that served from January 1 – April 30
- The Transition Governance Committee struck for the period of January – April who reviewed new bylaws, policies and standing committees while stewarding the merger
- The new Board of Health effective May 1
- The staff at LBCG Consulting for so capably supporting us throughout the entire process.

Finally, I thank CEO Cynthia St. John for her strategic leadership during an anything but average year!

I look forward to watching the new Strategic Plan, mission, vision and values roll out, and most importantly, watching Southwestern Public Health become a leader in the provision of rural public health services in Ontario.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Cynthia St. John

In reflection, 2018 was a remarkable year on so many levels! On January 1, 2018, 166 passionate, committed public health professionals started their year as employees of either Oxford County Public Health or Elgin St. Thomas Public Health. By the end of the year, they were employees of Southwestern Public Health – a new organization serving the nearly 200,000 residents of Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas.

Faced with consecutive years of provincial funding rates below inflation and an expanded mandate under the new Ontario Public Health Standards, the decision to voluntarily merge two neighbouring health units – with a history of collaboration and similar geographies and populations – made sense. It allowed us to pool our resources, expertise and knowledge to eliminate duplication while continuing services that might have been cut due to insufficient funding.

I must recognize the incredible amount of work by frontline and management staff who maintained quality service delivery without disruption throughout the merger process. Simultaneously, they embraced new teams, ideas and processes. I also thank our tremendous community partners who have shown their support for our new organization.

Finally, I thank Lynn Beath, who retired as the CEO of Oxford County Public Health after eight years of service, and Dr. Doug Neal, Acting Medical Officer of Health, for their wisdom and their commitment to the vision of this coming together. Both Lynn and Dr. Neal embraced the idea of building a health unit that provides a stronger voice for small urban and large rural public health in Ontario.

Public health is about everybody – the entire community. It is about keeping people healthy and improving outcomes for those experiencing a variety of health challenges. We play an important role in the provincial health mandate of ending “hallway medicine” because we keep people healthy in the communities where they live, work and play. We will continue to respond to the needs of our local communities with the responsive, evidence-informed and compassionate services our residents know and trust.

## MESSAGE FROM THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH



Dr. Joyce Lock

The World Health Organization defines health as the “state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” In large part, Ontario’s “healthcare” system is a “sickness” care system. Generally, we see a healthcare provider when something is wrong with our health. In contrast, public health works to optimize health and protect people from getting sick in the first place. Our goal goes beyond not getting sick but moving further to create a society where we can all thrive and reach our full potential to live a healthy life. To be optimally healthy, people need affordable housing, income, employment, education, transportation, family and community support, and a sense of belonging.

Essentially, we need to build a society that helps us to stay healthy. Public health works with municipalities, community organizations, schools, and others to create this type of society. The Age-Friendly Community Plan, The St. Thomas Affordable Transportation Working Group, Active and Safe Routes to School, Community Drug Strategies, the Coalition to End Poverty, Active Elgin, and You are the Chef are just a few examples of the work that we are doing with community partners so that all of us thrive. Together, we create good health by building a society that makes the healthy choice, the easy choice.

A risk factor is a condition or behaviour that increases risk. Four behaviours contribute significantly to the risk of getting a chronic disease: physical inactivity, smoking, unhealthy eating, and excessive alcohol consumption. These four risk factors cost Ontario almost \$90 billion in health care costs between 2004 and 2013. Health promotion, on the other hand, saves dollars. A recent review of multiple studies found that the median cost benefit ratio for public health interventions was 8.3, meaning a benefit of 8.3 for every \$1 invested. Other studies have shown that for every \$1 spent on mental health and addictions, we save \$7 in health costs and \$30 dollars in lost productivity and social costs. Every

>>

## MESSAGE FROM THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH



dollar spent immunizing children with the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine saves \$16 in health care costs. Every dollar invested in tobacco prevention programs saves up to \$20 in future health care costs. Locally, Southwestern Public Health works to promote and protect health across the life span from prenatal breastfeeding classes, early years and parenting programs, vaccination programs, dental and vision screening, school health, stop smoking programs, preventing the spread of infectious disease, and more.

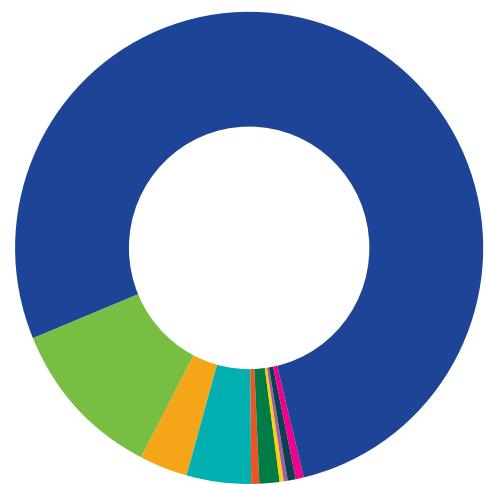
In conclusion, our aspiration at Southwestern Public Health is that all of us in Oxford, Elgin and St. Thomas have an equal opportunity to be as healthy as we each can be.



# FINANCIALS

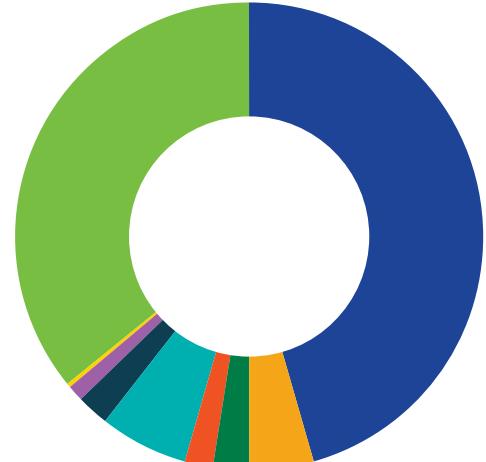
## REVENUE

Canada Health Infoways	\$	26,159	
City of St. Thomas	\$	454,709	
Clinics	\$	19,491	
County of Elgin	\$	585,088	
County of Oxford	\$	1,457,565	
Healthy Kids Community Challenge	\$	84,486	
Interest	\$	43,485	
Other fees and recoveries	\$	158,536	
Province of Ontario	\$	10,183,870	
Public Health Agency of Canada	\$	83,642	
Student Nutrition	\$	54,591	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>13,151,622</b>	



## EXPENSES

Administrative Expenses	\$	299,688	
Amoritization	\$	250,485	
Cost Shared Program Expenditures	\$	5,578,958	
Equipment	\$	575,964	
Other Programs and One Time Expenditures	\$	4,396,460	
Program Supplies	\$	283,552	
Rent and Utility Services	\$	740,303	
Small Drinking Water Systems Program	\$	27,293	
Vector Borne Diseases Program	\$	132,925	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>12,285,628</b>	



[2018 Audited Financial Statements](#)

# HEALTH STATUS

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Lower incidence rates of chlamydia than Ontario per 100,000 population.

SWPH - 260.4 Cases

Ontario - 317.2 Cases

## MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

A higher proportion of women in the SWPH region than in Ontario reported concerns about depression during pregnancy.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



**54.1%**

of adults (18 years or older) met or exceeded the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity aerobic activity per week.

## ALCOHOL



**50.8%**

of people living in the SWPH region drank more alcohol than is recommended by the Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

## AIR QUALITY

**88%**

of days in 2017 had an Air Quality Health Index of

**LOW RISK**

## FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS

The SWPH region had low rates of food-borne illnesses in the past 5 years. **Campylobacteriosis** was the most common with:

**280 cases**

## HEALTH EQUITY

Over a 2-year period, if everyone were able to attain basic material needs like income, quality housing and education, we could prevent the following number of deaths:



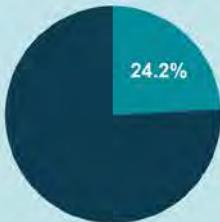
**122**  
Elgin St. Thomas

**73**  
Oxford

**12.4%**



of people have a **low income** but many more struggle to make ends meet.



Almost one-quarter of SWPH residents have **less than a high school education**.

## VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASES

Higher rates of whooping cough in the SWPH region than in Ontario. From 2013-2016 SWPH had 8.3 cases per 100,000 population, while Ontario had only 2.5 cases per 100,000 population.



## FALLS

Injuries due to falls were the #1 cause of injury related emergency department visits from 2013-2017.

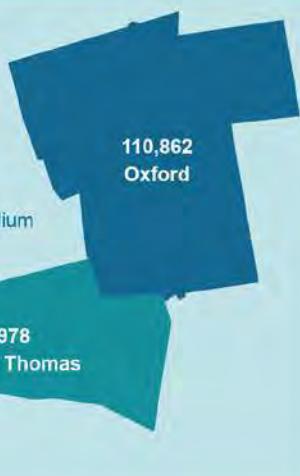
**4,743.4**  
per 100,000 population

**199,840**

Total population (2016 census)

**58%**

of the population resides within population centres (small to medium sized urban municipalities).



# PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

## HEALTHY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



**2,394**

live births



**1,848**

post-partum screens completed



**6,000**

nursing and parent support visits to families

## TOBACCO ENFORCEMENT

**96.82%**

of retailer tobacco displays/promotions in the SWPH region were inspected by Tobacco Enforcement staff.

**96.12%**

of Tobacco Vendors in the SWPH region were in compliance with the Smoke Free Ontario Act prohibiting sales to minors.

**92.41%**

of E-Cigarette Vendors in the SWPH region were inspected by Tobacco Enforcement staff.

**88%**

of E-Cigarette Vendors were in compliance with the Smoke Free Ontario Act prohibiting sales to minors.

## ORAL HEALTH

307 children and youth received 2 or more fluoride varnish applications.



**307**

## NEEDLE EXCHANGE

3,653 client interactions through the needle exchange program.



**3,653**

## SMOKING CESSATION

**349** clients enrolled in Oxford Quit Clinic and Elgin St. Thomas Cessation Partnership Program



**65%** - Oxford

of clients indicated they made 1 or more quick attempts (stopped smoking for at least 24 hours) within the first 30 days of the clinic/program.

**73.9%** - Elgin St. Thomas

**37%** - Oxford

of clients enrolled in the clinic/program indicated they did not smoke at the 30 day follow-up mark.

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

**650** flu doses administered by SWPH staff.



## VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASES

In the 2017-18 school year, SWPH provided a total of:

**9,930** school-based immunizations

**123** grade 7 school immunization clinics

**514** child care records flagged as not up-to-date with SWPH records

**4,932** school records flagged as not up to date with SWPH records

## SCHOOL-BASED ORAL HEALTH SCREENING

**62** schools in the SWPH region received oral health screenings, resulting in...

**6,092**

student assessments

in the 2017-2018 school year.



**90%** of schools were screened as **low intensity**  
(9.5% or less of students have 2 or more suspected cavities)



**5%** of schools were screened as **medium intensity**  
(9.5 - 14% of students have 2 or more suspected cavities)

**5%** of schools were screened as **high risk intensity**  
(greater than 14% of students have 2 or more suspected cavities)

**34.8%** of students screened  
needed **dental hygiene preventative services**  
(cleaning, fluoride, oral hygiene education)

Nearly **83%** of students  
were **cavity free**



## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



**2,394**

Food premises inspections completed



**238**

Tattoo, piercing & salon inspections completed



**234**

Pool & spa inspections completed



**35**

Licensed childcare inspections completed



**230**

Migrant farm inspections completed



**165**

Animal bite reports received and reviewed

## STUDENT NUTRITION IN OXFORD



**420**

volunteers helped shop and prepare nutritious snacks



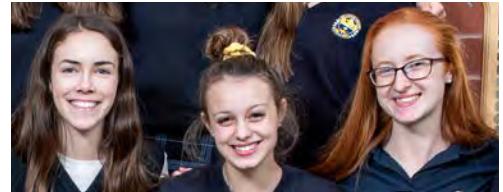
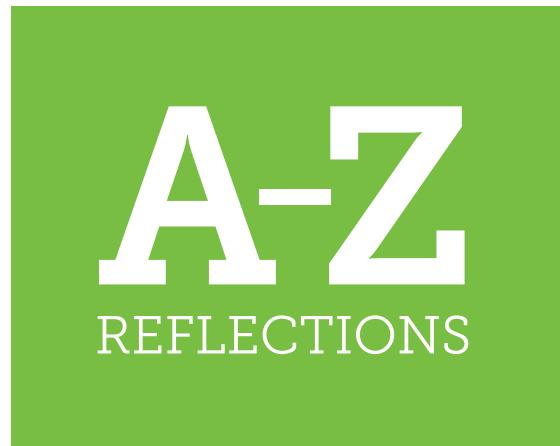
**37**

schools chose to participate in the student nutrition program



**11,100**

students benefitted



## A Selection of Activities and Accomplishments

# 2018





## CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION

In 2018, Southwestern Public Health signed an agreement with eight community agencies to deliver smoking cessation services to clients with a low income or a mental health diagnosis. The Agreements allowed for acceptance, distribution or referral of nicotine replacement therapy by all partnering agencies. By working with community partners, this program has the potential to increase quit attempts and quit rates within these populations.

In partnership with local agencies, we also participated in the **Oxford County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy** and released a blueprint for action that includes 89 action items to address problematic substance use in the county. Actions were informed by a review of local data, a review of evidence-based best practices in the literature, and community consultations with more than 50 individuals from 28 community agencies and 15 network tables/groups, as well as 11 people with lived experience.

## CORPORATE SERVICES



We undertook major initiatives in 2018 to support the consolidation of practices and support for all our employees across St. Thomas, Elgin County and Oxford County. The amalgamation of all existing digital data from two independent IT networks into one unified system allows everyone to share information and access digital tools and support seamlessly. Harmonization of payroll for all employee groups – with no disruption – was a significant success and a milestone in the merger of two separate organizations into one. The rollout of a harmonized telecommunications system ensures that community members, clients and staff may contact SWPH without barriers. New digital systems allow easier access to corporate finance information as well as site-to-site video conferencing capabilities for team meetings or one-on-one discussions among team members.



## FOUNDATIONAL STANDARDS

In 2018, the Foundational Standards team led a new program and service planning process for the entire health unit. Staff champions from each team were trained to use an updated version of the former Elgin St. Thomas Public Health program planning database and help their colleagues understand and describe the five components of program plans: goals, objectives, interventions, outputs and outcomes.

The result is a database with more than 150 individual plans which were then exported to complete our Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which describes how our organization will improve population health in 2019.

Our team was also pleased to release the following population health assessment reports to our stakeholders.

- **Sleep as a Public Health Priority**
- **Characteristics of Natural Environments Associated with Mental Health and Well-being**  
(in partnership with members of the Knowledge Broker Working Group)
- **Experiences of Delivering and Accessing Opioid-Related Services in Oxford County**

[To view these reports click here](#)

## HARM REDUCTION

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use defines harm reduction as an evidence-based, client-centred approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with addiction and substance use, without necessarily requiring people who use substances from abstaining or stopping.

The Needle Syringe Program is part of the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program and provides sterile, single use equipment – distributed and collected at various fixed and mobile sites in the health unit region – to help prevent the spread of HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Preventing one case of Hepatitis C is estimated to save taxpayers anywhere from \$45,000 to more than \$100,000 per fully-treated patient in drug costs alone.

Southwestern Public Health monitors unintentional opioid overdoses and reports of potentially toxic opioids to support timely community response. With our community partners, we developed a system that collects information from various administrative and on-the-ground sources and analyzes it to determine public risk of experiencing harm. We issue notices, advisories and alerts based on this analysis and make sure key stakeholders know what to look for. From there, service providers can enact their own response plans to ensure their clients and the broader community are informed and supported to avoid opioid-related harms. Responses may include investigating causes, providing education and removing contaminated or counterfeit drugs from circulation.

The distribution of Naloxone kits through needle syringe programs and eligible community organizations provides people at risk of an opioid overdose and their friends and family with doses of a drug to reverse an opioid overdose. Through the Take Home Naloxone Program people are informed about steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of an overdose. First responders such as fire fighters and police have access to kits to use if they encounter an opioid overdose emergency.





## HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

With funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Healthy Communities Partnership secured a consultant to lead the [Elgin County Trails Study](#). The study was conducted in response to municipal, community and public health interest in improving the current state of trails and walkability across the region. As part of this study, existing municipal plans were reviewed, field investigations were completed, and the community was engaged to learn more about what they valued and wanted in a trail system. The results of this study were shared with all members of the Healthy Communities Partnership and will be brought to the attention of Elgin County Council and other municipalities for their consideration in 2019.

Another significant success of the new organization was the December soft launch of [Health Inspect Southwestern](#). This web portal offers convenient access to inspection results for local food establishments, as well as personal services like salons, spas and tattoo parlors. Members of the public can also find information about public facilities like swimming pools and splash pads, details about convictions under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the Health Protection and Promotion Act, drinking water advisories, beach water quality testing, and much more.

## HEALTHY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



The goal of this program is optimal preconception, pregnancy, newborn and family health. We aim to achieve this through coordinated approaches, including prenatal education and resource sharing, early identification of risk factors, breast feeding information and support, and through partnerships and collaboration.

Parenting programs like the **Healthy Babies Healthy Children** home visiting program, **Nobody's Perfect**, and **Triple P** are evidence-based programs effective in supporting developmentally appropriate parenting practices, modifying attitudes and beliefs, and improving caregiver mental health and parent-child relationships. This can sharply increase children's odds of healthy social, behavioural and cognitive development, helping them become engaged, productive citizens.



## INFECTIOUS & COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

While vaccination is the most effective strategy to prevent outbreaks of diseases such as measles and rubella, there are populations within our region who remain vulnerable to these diseases due to health status or immunization refusal. In addition, many communicable diseases cannot be prevented through vaccination. People who become sick with these diseases risk transmitting the disease to others and starting an outbreak. To prevent outbreaks and to minimize adverse effects of an outbreak, SWPH staff monitor for these illnesses and provide direction to health care providers and patients about how to minimize the spread.

Despite easier access to influenza vaccine through primary health care providers, pharmacies and public health, some members of the community remain vulnerable to the effects of influenza and are unable to obtain a flu shot at partner sites. SWPH ensures the availability of influenza vaccine by holding targeted clinics for those vulnerable to the complications of influenza.

The Sexual Health Program is reducing the burden of communicable diseases in our communities – including chlamydia, gonorrhea and other infectious diseases of public health importance – through timely testing, evidence-informed treatment, community outreach and client and health care provider education. Contact tracing is another area of focus. We continue to identify, test and treat individuals who may have come in contact with an infected person, thus reducing infections in the population and reducing cost to the health care system.

Finally, public health staff with specialty training in Infection Prevention and Control respond to complaints or internal disease investigations implicating community health care sites in the transmission of blood-borne infections. Sites may include dental offices, surgical and non-surgical cosmetic services and settings that provide personal services such as manicures and pedicures.



## SCHOOL HEALTH

Public Health Nurses offer services to all elementary, secondary and private schools across our region. Evidence-based programs and interventions are delivered to promote optimal student health and are offered to priority populations in close collaboration with school administrators, teachers and students. Over the past year, topics such as cannabis, physical activity, mental health, healthy eating and healthy sexuality were covered in more than 60 schools.



## SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Nutritious foods help kids learn. SWPH's Student Nutrition Program offers school-age children and youth nutritious food through breakfast, lunch and snack programs. The goal of the program is to support learning and healthy development. Community partners such as United Way Oxford, VON, First Ontario Credit Union and individual donors ensure success by providing the funding necessary to purchase food and equipment.



## SUCCESS STORY

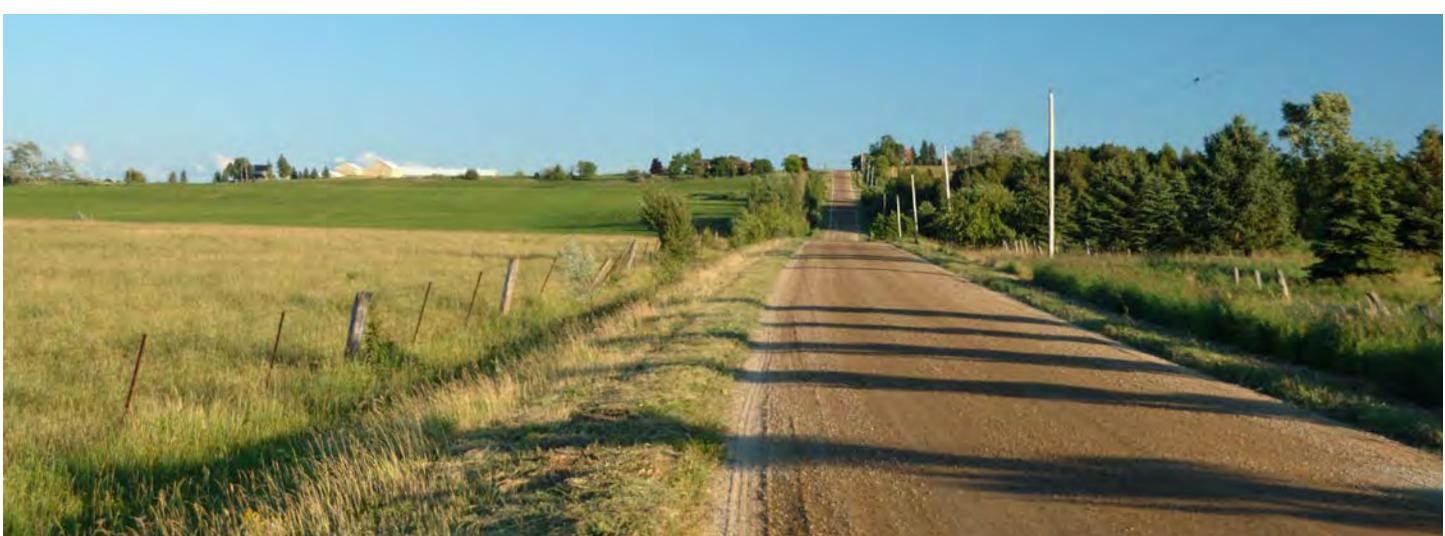
**"I WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT THESE WOMEN!**

**THIS IS A SERVICE EVERY MOTHER SHOULD GET.  
PUBLIC HEALTH IS AN ASSET TO OUR COMMUNITY."**

Anna

While public health is known for its large-scale health promotion and protection activities, such as executing mass immunization campaigns or enforcing drinking water safety legislation, it is also involved with the health of the community on the most intimate level – the family.

After the birth of Anna and Paul's first child, a public health nurse called and became involved with the family. Anna had a lengthy history of methamphetamine use, domestic violence, childhood trauma and multiple criminal charges. Both Anna and Paul had a history of mental health concerns as well. The public health nurse worked with the family and had a parent resource worker join to help the family with parenting questions and challenges that arose. Anna developed a series of health complications, so the public health nurse helped her to navigate the medical system by getting her to her physician and to St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital. Due to a series of events that occurred with the family, the public health nurse and parent resource worker supported this family through working with Family and Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin, Addiction Services of Thames Valley, and a local parole officer. The public health nurse and parent resource worker continue to work with Anna and Paul to ensure their child is growing well and that they are learning things they can do to support their child's development. Paul has gone with the parent resource worker to discover the St. Thomas Public Library and their children's area, and Anna is looking forward to attending a play group with EarlyON Child and Family Centre to discover more that she can do with her child.



## SUCCESS STORY

While much of the news related to the opioid crisis in Canada has centred around large urban centres, small urban and large rural communities are equally hard hit. In 2018, Southwestern Public Health teamed up with Addiction Services of Thames Valley and Regional HIV/AIDS Connection to provide mobile harm reduction services to community members across the counties.

In rural areas, transportation is often a barrier to access. SWPH is reducing service barriers by bringing supplies to individuals in the communities in which they reside – or in the case of Oxford County – right to their homes. This gives harm reduction staff the opportunity to connect on a variety of health topics in a location that is comfortable, familiar and accessible for the client.

According to CATIE, Canada's source for HIV and Hepatitis C information, outreach is a crucial component for HIV prevention programs and for programs for people who use drugs as it penetrates into hidden and marginalized communities, expands the scope of services and delivers information and services to a greater number of people – all critical to helping reduce the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne infections.

**Woodstock Site**

519-421-9901

1-800-922-0096

[info@swpublichealth.ca](mailto:info@swpublichealth.ca)

410 Buller Street

Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 4N2

**St. Thomas Site**

519-631-9900

1-800-922-0096

[info@swpublichealth.ca](mailto:info@swpublichealth.ca)

1230 Talbot Street

St. Thomas, Ontario, N5P 1G9



[www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca)