Elgin St. Thomas Public Health and Oxford County Public Health continue to work towards the merger of their two health units on May 1, 2018. The neighbouring health units already share a history of collaboration as well as similar geographic, demographic, health status and population characteristics.

The health units first began exploring a potential merger as a way to strengthen their ability to deliver exceptional programs and services now and in the future. The merger was endorsed by the health unit boards in November 2017 as a local solution offering equitable representation from across all municipalities.

The driving benefit of the merger was the opportunity to maintain programs and services by pooling resources, thereby positioning the health units to better respond to the unique needs of their small urban and rural communities.

How will the merger accomplish this? The current provincial funding formula has resulted in a funding freeze for both health units since 2014. A freeze, in actual fact, is a reduction in funding; as such, program and service reductions were imminent in some cases. Combining resources will enable the new health unit to be as efficient as possible, positioning it to direct any potential savings towards program and service delivery.

The health units are confident that establishing one health unit serving Oxford, Elgin and St. Thomas has the potential for broader benefit and impact: the opportunity to build a stronger, more unified rural voice for public health in Ontario. The health units believe they are stronger together than they are as individual small public health units.

The merger is consistent with previously published provincial reports that call for fewer health units, autonomous boards, and strong connections to the health sector.

The health units are committed to maintaining a strong community presence and effective relationships with community partners. Offices will remain open in both Elgin/St. Thomas and Oxford County to continue to serve clients in their communities.
Timeline

November 10, 2017
Elgin St. Thomas Public Health and Oxford County Public Health announce their intent to merge into a single health unit serving the communities of Oxford, Elgin and St. Thomas, a combined population of about 204,000.

November 15, 2017
A delegation from the two health units appears before the Standing Committee on Bill 160, the Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, 2017, to ask for the removal of special distinctions for Oxford County under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. This marks the first procedural step allowing the merger to proceed.

December 12, 2017
The Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, 2017, receives Royal Assent with the Oxford County amendment.

January 10, 2018
Health unit boards for Elgin St. Thomas and Oxford County approve reports at their respective meetings to advance the next procedural step in the merger: a petition for changes to regulations under the Health Protection and Promotion Act that will set out the new health unit’s legal name, boundaries, municipal board membership, and merger date.

February 28, 2018
The Transition Governance Committee is announced to provide oversight on governance tasks directly related to the merger.

April 4, 2018
Regulatory changes to the Health Protection and Promotion Act are approved and posted on the Government of Ontario’s e-Laws website.

May 1, 2018
Effective date of the legal merger of the two health units, although the process of merging operations will continue over the following year.