



2021 Annual Report



Porcupine

Health Unit • Bureau de santé



IN LAST YEAR'S ANNUAL REPORT, we reviewed the unprecedented challenges and recognized the significant sacrifices many people made due to the pandemic. I finished my MOH message and the year on a hopeful note. Vaccines were coming! We knew that they would be our most powerful defence against COVID-19. However, just getting the vaccine would not be enough. It would require a huge mobilization of PHU staff—full-time, part-time, and numerous additional casual health professionals and support staff; community partners; local municipal leaders and staff; First Nation community leaders and staff; local Indigenous partners; health care providers; health and social service agencies; and many, many local volunteers and residents. Each and

every person and organization involved in this once-in-a-generation vaccine program saved lives. They helped us return to visiting loved ones and to beloved activities, and I am grateful for the tremendous support and dedication of everyone involved.

Many of the themes in the 2020 report are here as well. The logistical challenges of coordinating such a massive response over such a massive area were substantial. Northern Ontario is not one uniform area. Even within the PHU region, there are organizations, needs, cultures and traditions that vary from community to community. Working with local partners was critical to our success. Even in smaller communities, with fewer resources and smaller populations, working with people who knew the community well was essential and core to our effort, and informed the vaccine program at every stage.

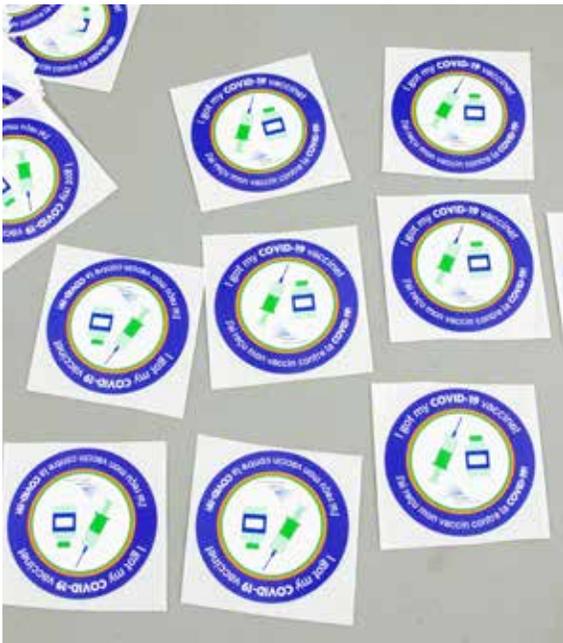
And in 2021 the North was different in another way. COVID came later to the PHU region and stayed later, delaying the move to stage one of the province's pandemic plan. At one time in the summer of 2021, even with our relatively small population, we had the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in Ontario.

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Our experience in working over large distances and our strong local ties allowed us to respond quickly to local needs, sometimes moving faster than the province. We were one of the first to have “vaccine buses” in our communities. We offered alternatives to the large “mass immunization” clinics, ensuring access to vaccine clinics in safe and welcoming spaces, besides drive-through, door-to-door and pop-up clinics. Local response was critical in helping us, as a region, move more quickly in immunizing youth. You'll read more about that later in this report.

The previous annual report ended on a note of hope. This one ends on a note of pride. I know I reflect the feelings of our Board of Health members when I say, sincerely, not just to the immensely dedicated PHU staff, but also to community partners, community leader and community members, “Your work matters. Local public health matters; and merci, meegwetch, thank you all!”

*Lianne Catton, MD, CFPC EM, MPH
Medical Officer of Health & CEO*



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2021: THE YEAR OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE

On Tuesday, January 26, 2021, the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) issued a media release informing residents that the health unit had received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine.

It was very good news. As Dr. Catton said in the release, “This is definitely welcome news, especially after the tragic outcomes experienced by our communities in recent days.”

In line with Ontario’s COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan, the first doses were given to residents of long-term care facilities, retirement homes, and elders in First Nations communities receiving care.

At this point, the health unit had already been working for several weeks with partners in the James and Hudson Bay regions as part of “Operation Remote Immunity”. Those partners included the Weeneebayko and Area Health Authority (WAHA), ORNGE, Health Canada's First Nation Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB), First Nation communities and other local partners.

After a trying year, public health nurses from the PHU were pleased to provide vaccines to community elders and congregate living setting residents in Moosonee earlier in the month.

This was the first of many innovations and partnerships that would happen in 2021, as the PHU moved into action, mobilizing hundreds of staff and volunteers over thousands of person-hours. The goal? To get COVID-19 vaccine into as many peoples’ arms as possible. As the year went on, demand for the vaccine grew. In response, Dr. Catton would often re-assure the public, saying “Anybody who wants the vaccine will get it.”

Early clinics focused on the people most at-risk of serious illness or outcomes from the virus. By the end of the year, 156,015 COVID-19 doses were given in the PHU area. Getting that many people vaccinated would, at times, require creative problem solving by health unit staff and community partners.

The PHU was quick to offer a number of innovative options for community members to access vaccines. With the help of Cochrane District Emergency Medical Services, the health unit hosted:

- over 150 mobile clinics held in campgrounds, parks, remote mine sites, workplaces, school yards, grocery store parking lots, urban markets, fairs and events;
- travel vaccine clinics in rural and outlying communities along Highway 11 corridor to offer first and second doses of the vaccine;
- pop-up clinics in Seniors' housing units and higher-risk clinics;
- door-to-door neighbourhood vaccine clinics in Timmins, Iroquois Falls and Kapuskasing; and
- 4 drive-through clinics.

These were in addition to in-home vaccinations offered to home-bound residents.

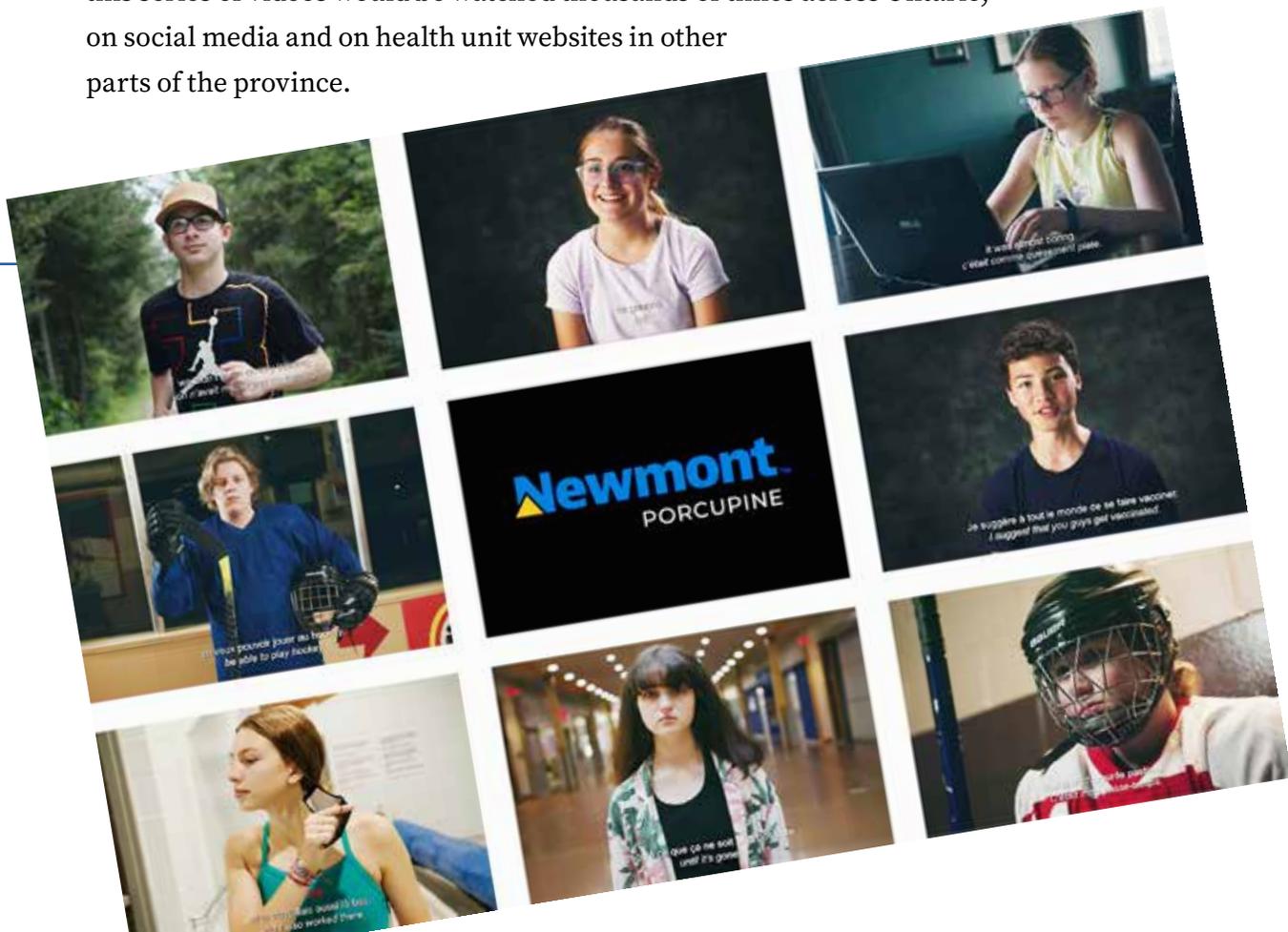
In order to make all residents feel welcome and to increase the number of people protected by the vaccine, the health unit also offered specialized clinics, including ones for adults and children with sensory processing issues. These low-stimulation clinics included therapy dogs and child development specialists on-site to provide support to clients and families.

Other clinics were hosted in smaller spaces and featured a quiet setting, dim lighting and longer appointment times. Specific child- and family-friendly clinics were offered in welcoming spaces, including Science Timmins and the Cochrane-Timiskaming Children's Treatment Centre. "Youth Den" clinics were set up in school gyms in several communities. Timmins Police Services Youth Ambassadors attended several clinics to support students receiving vaccines.

Youth were also involved through an exciting partnership with the Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League (NOJHL). As part of the friendly “Vaccine Playoffs” competition, vaccination rates for all the hockey teams in the NOJHL were posted weekly beginning in July and by mid-summer showed 100% full vaccination for all teams.

Where transportation posed challenges for residents, community partners provided shuttle services from smaller rural communities to vaccine clinics in PHU branch office communities. Timmins Transit and local Indigenous partners provided free transportation to Timmins residents. They also provided buses as locations for some of the mobile community clinics. Members of the PHU Harm Reduction Outreach team were accompanied by public health nurses on their “foot patrols” so they could provide vaccinations to clients.

Videos were an vital way to get information to the public. The PHU made dozens over the course of 2021, featuring local community members, partners, and PHU staff. Turning the focus on youth, and with the generous support of Newmont, the PHU commissioned a series of videos featuring youth from our communities, speaking on how COVID-19 had affected their lives. Over the last half of the year, this series of videos would be watched thousands of times across Ontario, on social media and on health unit websites in other parts of the province.





Porcupine

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Welcome Bienvenue



**Thank you for
getting your
COVID-19 vaccine.**

**Merci de vous être
fait vacciner contre
la COVID-19.**

Meegwetch



We're protecting our community

by getting the COVID-19 vaccine.



Nancy Dubé
Hearst



Cheryl Fort
Hornepayne



Dr. Tammy Hopkins
Timmins



Dr. Lesley Griffiths
Timmins



Dr. Danelle Martin
Kapuskaing



Dr. Christine Quirion
Timmins

Top 3 Reasons Why We Recommend You Get the COVID-19 Vaccine:

- The vaccine is safe and effective.
- The vaccine helps reduce your risk of becoming really sick, being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19.
- The more people that get vaccinated, the safer our community will be.

Protected, together.



COVID-19 Vaccines | Vaccins contre la COVID-19



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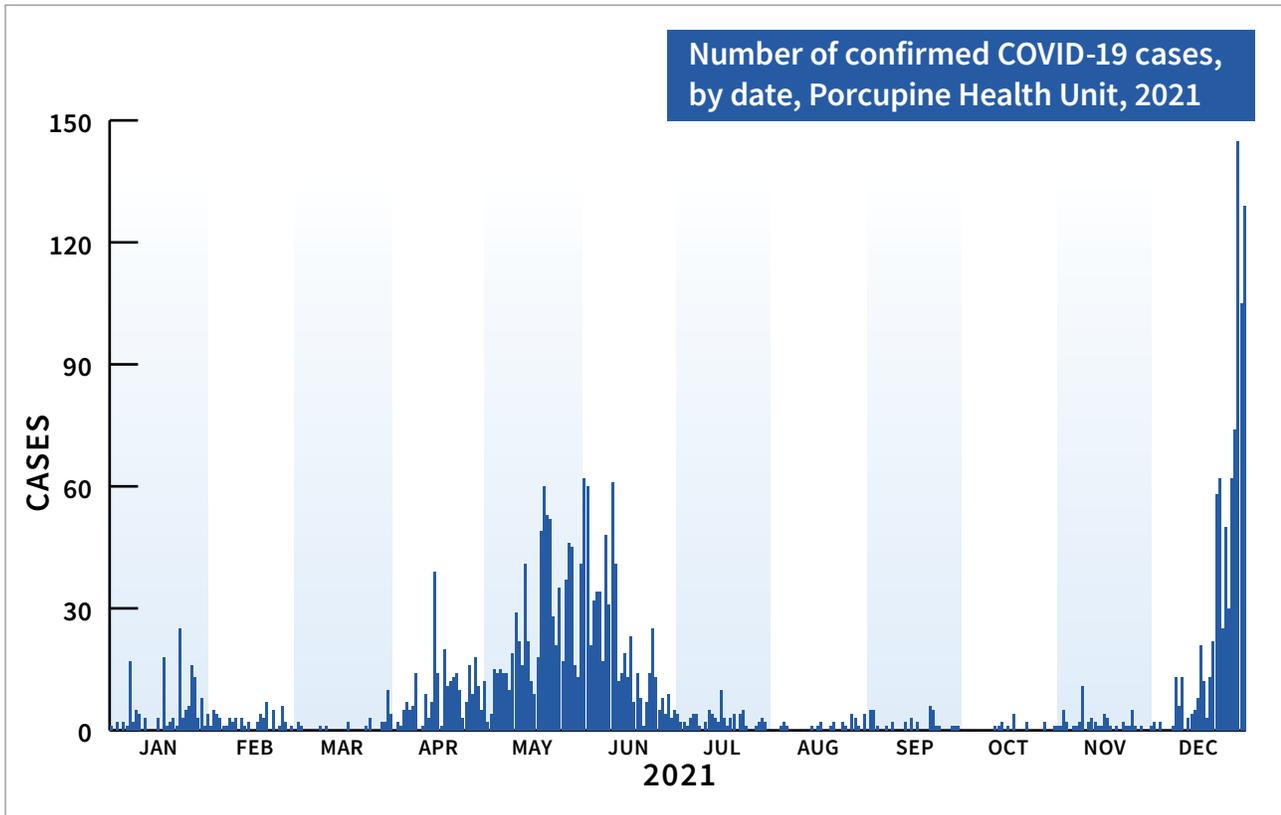
LET'S STOP COVID!

VACCINE PLAYOFF²¹



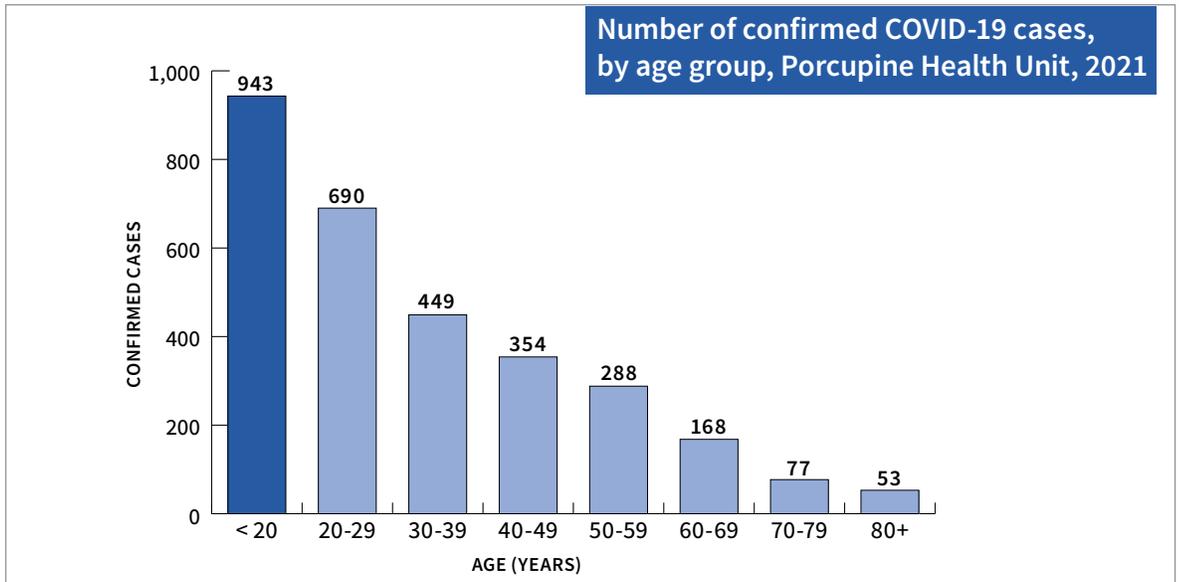
COVID-19

2021 IN NUMBERS

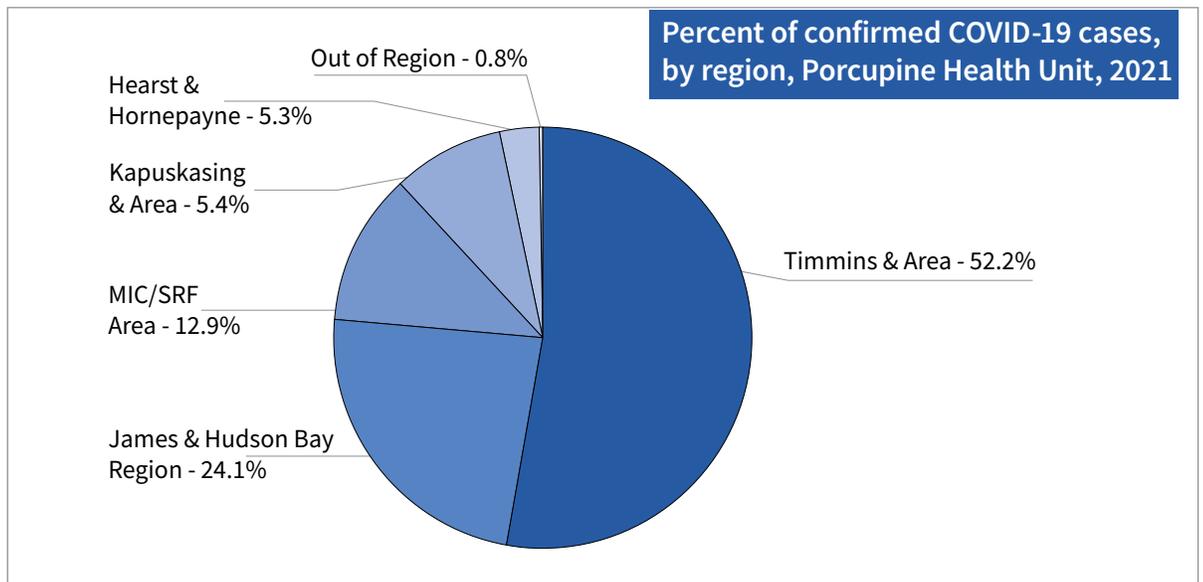


There were 3 COVID-19 waves in 2021: the first in Jan-Feb, the second between May and July, and the third wave began in mid-December and continued into 2022. In May to early June, the Porcupine Health Unit region had the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in the province.

A total of 3,022 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in the Porcupine Health unit area during 2021.

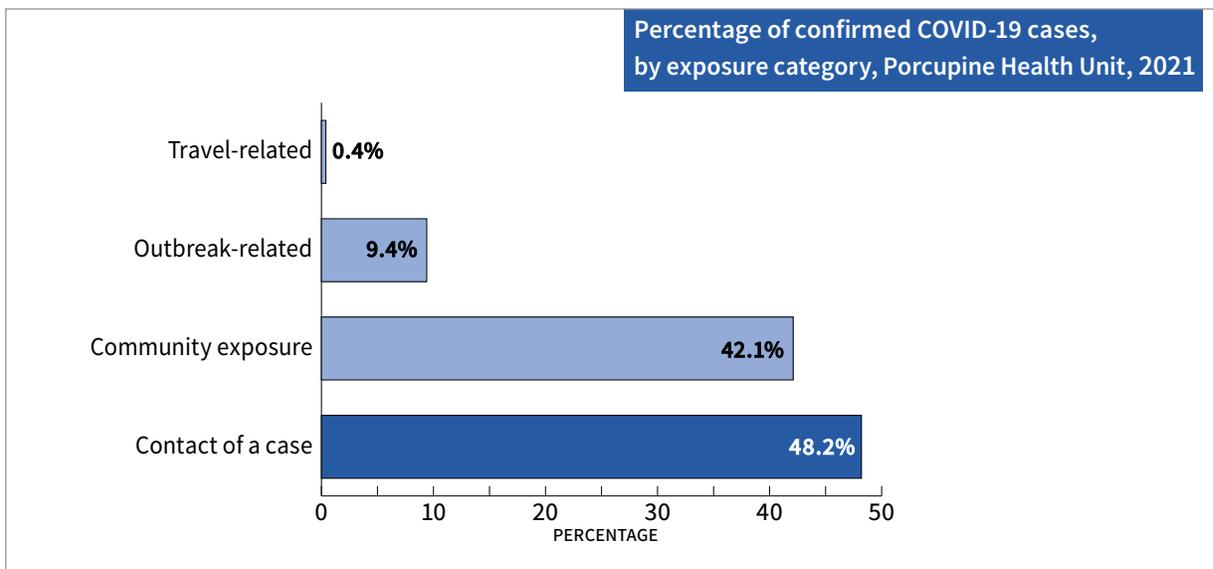


Cases in 2021 were younger on average (31.0 years) than cases in 2020 (45.9 years). The greatest number of cases in 2021 occurred amongst those less than 20 years of age with the fewest number of cases among those 80 years of age and older.



The majority of cases were in the Timmins area (52.2%), followed by the James and Hudson Bay (JBHB) area (24.1%), and the Matheson, Iroquois Falls, Cochrane and Smooth Rock Falls (MIC/SRF) area (12.9%). In 2020, the JBHB area (11.5% of cases) and the MIC/SRF area (23.1%) were reversed.

48.2% of cases contracted the disease from a close contact, 42.1% had a community exposure, 9.4% were outbreak-related and 0.4% were travel-related cases. By comparison, in 2020, the percentage of outbreak-related (13.8%) and travel-related (9.2%) cases were far greater.



OTHER COVID-19 DATA OF NOTE

A total of 54 outbreaks occurred in the PHU area and almost half of these were in workplaces. In contrast, in 2020, half of the outbreaks were in long-term care homes whereas in 2021, only 11.1% were.

Of the 3,022 cases, 110 (3.6%) were hospitalized and of these, 35 (1.2%) were in Intensive Care Units (ICU). The percentage of cases hospitalized and in ICU during the second year of the pandemic was a lot less than in the first year: 3.6% hospitalized in 2021 compared to 18.5% in 2020 and 1.2% in ICU in 2021 compared to 5.4% in 2020.

The average age of those hospitalized was 49.5 years and the majority were female (52.7%). In 2020, hospitalized cases were older (66.1 years) and more often female (62.5%).

Twenty-two (0.7%) of the 3,022 cases died as a result of COVID-19. This is far lower than in 2020 when 6.9% of cases died. The age range of those who died in 2021 was between 47 and 96 years, with an average age of 76.9 years. This is slightly older than the 2020 average age of 72.0 years.



ADDRESSING THE OPIOID CRISIS

AN EPIDEMIC DURING A PANDEMIC

In 2020, the Porcupine Health Unit had the second-highest opioid-related death rate in Ontario. That year, 40 people in the area died from an opioid-related overdose as compared with 22 people in the year before — an 81.8% increase — equating to a rate of 25.8 and 46.9 per 100,000 for 2019 and 2020, respectively. These rates are significantly higher than Ontario rates at 16.4 in 2020 and 10.4 in 2019.

These alarming levels of tragic losses continued in 2021. Most of the deaths occurred in Timmins. In the previous year, 31 of the opioid-related deaths were in Timmins (although other substances may have contributed to the deaths). The rate of opioid-related deaths in the Timmins area increased more than threefold between 2018 and 2020, from 23.4 to 75.3 per 100,000. Timmins continues to have the highest opioid-related death rate in the province, compared to other medium population centres.

In February 2021, Timmins and Area Drug Strategy (TADS) created a working group to look at viable options to reduce community death rates. It quickly became clear that supervised consumption services were needed to save lives. While continuing to explore other approaches, the PHU and other dedicated community partners successfully obtained a temporary site and worked towards applications for a permanent site.

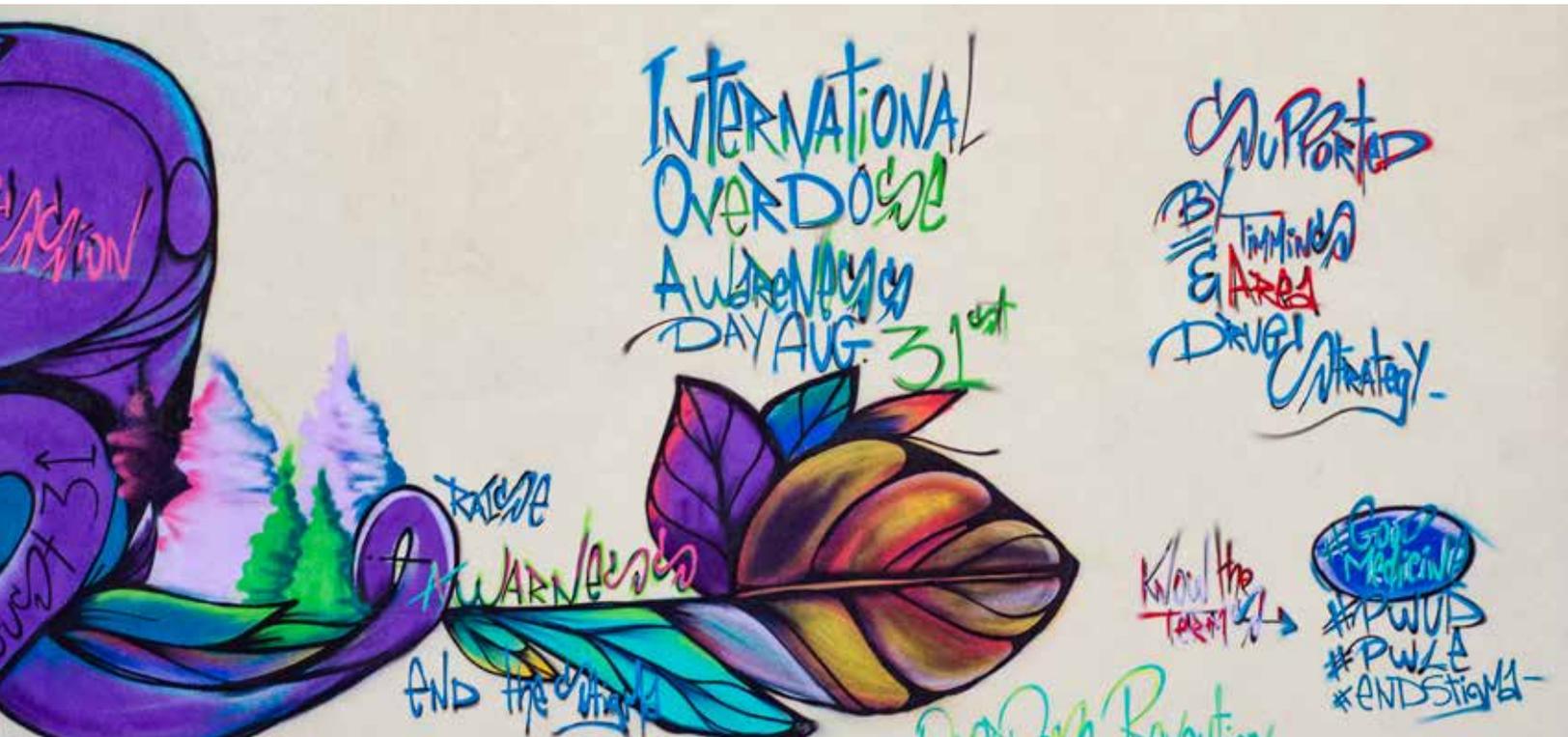
Initially, the group started planning for a provincially funded site (in Ontario, referred to as Consumption Treatment Services or CTS). In 2021, Health Canada announced a more streamlined process so communities could apply for a temporary site to meet the

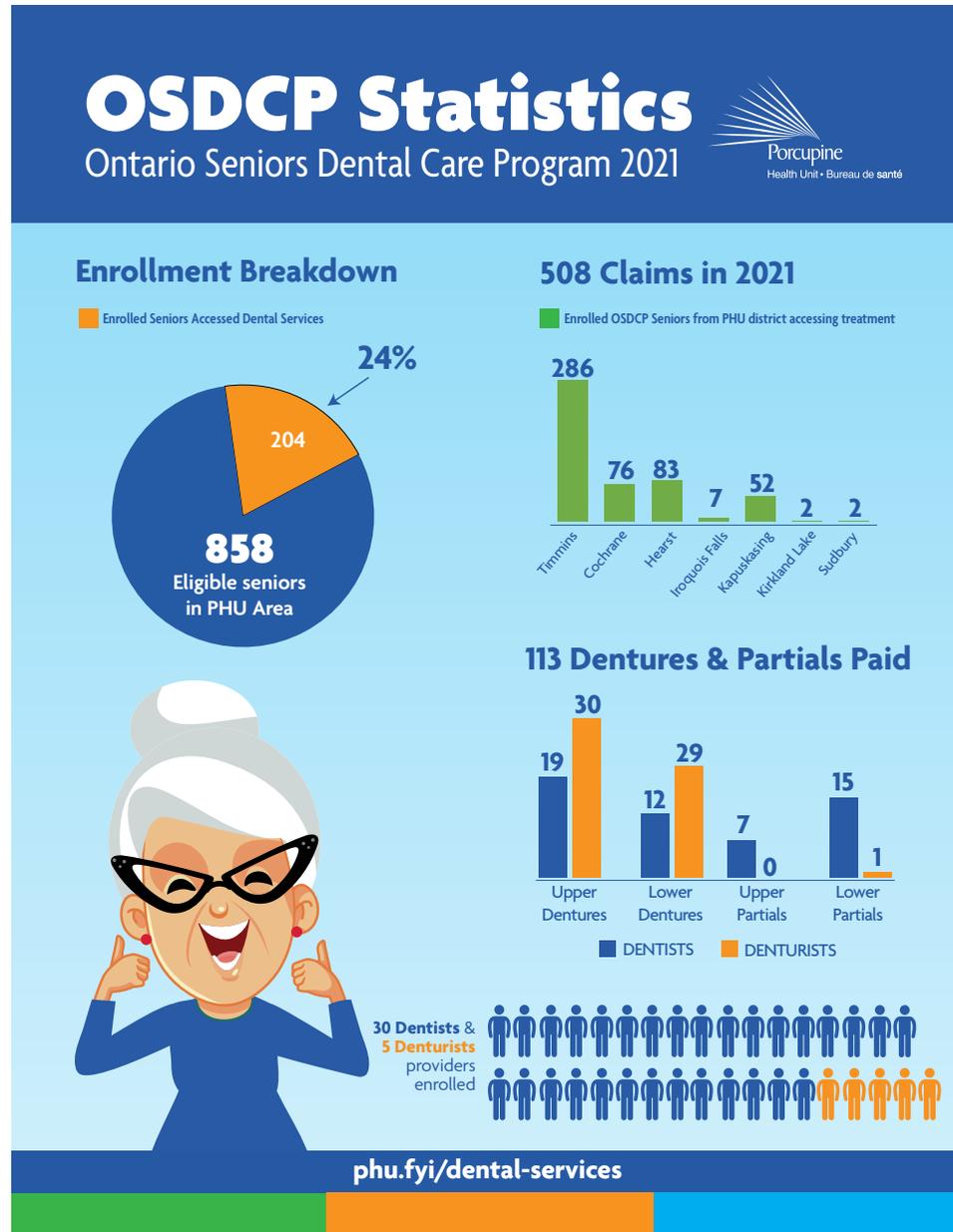
unprecedented need that COVID-19 had created — calling them “Urgent Public Health Needs” sites. The group quickly switched gears and within 8 months applied, successfully, for a temporary site.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on capacity, the agencies in the municipality of Timmins saw this as a priority. They mobilized their resources and through collective effort, completed the application process in December of 2021.

The doors of the temporary site, known as Special Health Site Timmins (SHST), opened July 4, 2022. It featured a unique model that had the Timmins and District Hospital as operator.

TADS and its partners have been addressing the complex issues surrounding substance use through a comprehensive approach. Community initiatives are required, continuing to address specific needs with each falling under one of five pillars: treatment, prevention, enforcement, harm reduction, and emergency management. These strategies work together to create a more comprehensive system, having greater overall impact: meeting more people’s needs by meeting them where they are at.





The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) was announced by the Ontario government in April 2019 and launched later that year. Through this 100 percent Ministry of Health funded program, local public health units are to ensure the provision of dental treatment to low-income seniors. The program is free to residents of Ontario, 65 years of age or older that meet certain income eligibility requirements.

In 2021, 204 seniors were enrolled in the program in the Porcupine Health Unit area, less than a quarter of those eligible.

Seniors with question about enrolment in the OSDCP can contact the Porcupine Health Unit at 1-800-461-1818, or visit the web page "Dental care for low-income seniors" on the Ontario government website (www.ontario.ca/).

PREPARING FOR BABY, VIRTUALLY

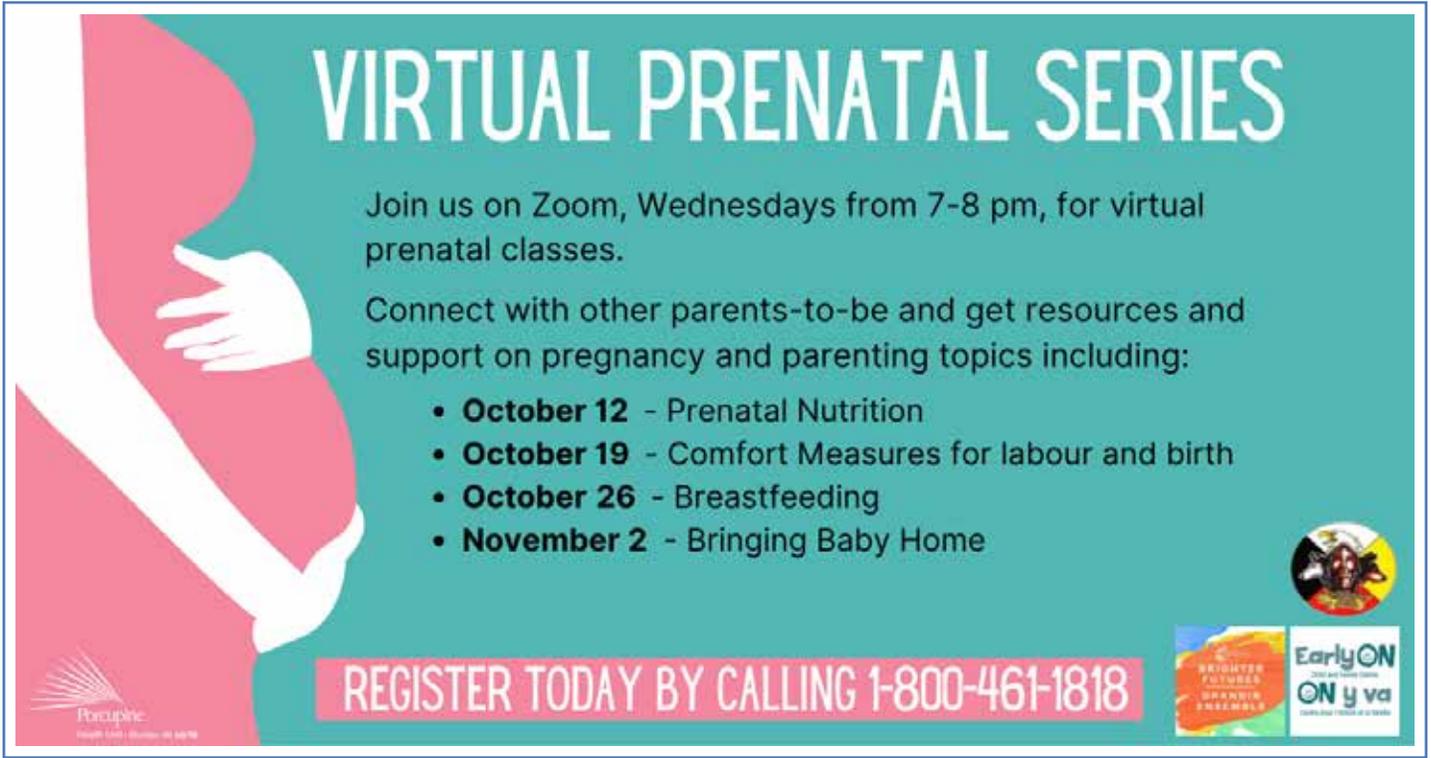
Lockdowns and reduced gatherings affected many services during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) also saw a decline in clients accessing the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP).

CPNP is a national program that helps improve the health of pregnant women, new mothers and their babies. It's one of several programs offered at the health unit to help pregnant individuals.

To support clients who might not have known where to reach out for support in pregnancy, the PHU teamed with the Early On sites across the district to offer, for the first time, a virtual prenatal series.

The PHU promoted the series via social media and through existing health unit clients. Participants were able to sign up by calling the PHU or via Early ON's social media & websites. A PHU dietitian called all the participants who registered to complete the CPNP intake questionnaire. Based on the intake questionnaire clients were offered appropriate follow-up.

All participants were sent a resource package which included a \$60 gift card to a local grocery store. Clients also received resources and more information about health unit programs. Clients received an e-mail with the private link to the online session (organized by Early On). Sessions ran weekly, during the evening.



VIRTUAL PRENATAL SERIES

Join us on Zoom, Wednesdays from 7-8 pm, for virtual prenatal classes.

Connect with other parents-to-be and get resources and support on pregnancy and parenting topics including:

- **October 12** - Prenatal Nutrition
- **October 19** - Comfort Measures for labour and birth
- **October 26** - Breastfeeding
- **November 2** - Bringing Baby Home

REGISTER TODAY BY CALLING 1-800-461-1818

Porcupine Health Unit • 2021 • 461-1818

BRIGHTER FUTURES
PARENTS & CHILDREN

EarlyON
2021 and 2022
ON y va
TOGETHER WE THRIVE AT 16

Sessions featured presentations adapted to the one-hour time slot and to be “virtual friendly”. Before and after, the public health nurse and dietitian shared resources and encouraged participants to ask questions.

For this first virtual series, 32 pregnant women signed up, with 21 women attending at least one session. Afterwards, participants said the sessions were “very informative”, the resources had “accessible information” and that the presenter was “knowledgeable”. Additional feedback about what else families would like to have covered — including more on birth and labour, milestones and breastfeeding — will help the health unit improve on future prenatal sessions.

For many families in the Porcupine Health Unit area, prenatal classes are an important part of getting ready to grow a family. Feedback from the participants will help improve the program, allowing the PHU to better serve a new generation of parents over a larger geographical area.

FINANCIAL REPORT

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES	\$	%
General Public Health	11,280,178	52.99%
COVID-19 Vaccine Program	3,859,700	18.13%
COVID-19 Response	1,157,900	5.44%
Unorganized Territories	849,254	3.99%
Preschool Speech and Language Initiative	829,129	3.89%
Healthy Babies/Healthy Children	826,024	3.88%
COVID-19 School-focused, Nurses Initiative	622,704	2.93%
Ontario Seniors Dental Care	454,683	2.14%
Infection Prevention and Control Hub	279,593	1.31%
Genetics	199,459	0.94%
Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program	192,478	0.90%
AIDS Bureau Funding Program	166,450	0.78%
Land Control	124,204	0.58%
Indigenous Communities Partnerships	112,279	0.53%
Canada Prenatal Nutrition	112,204	0.53%
Stay on Your Feet	102,320	0.48%
Children's Oral Health Initiative Program	80,726	0.38%
Case & Contact Management Solution	24,700	0.12%
Ontario Active School Travel	14,336	0.07%
	\$21,288,321	100.00%

REVENUE SOURCES	\$	%
Province of Ontario	18,949,326	86.64%
Member Municipalities	2,457,036	11.23%
Government of Canada	191,910	0.88%
Other	273,759	1.25%
	\$21,872,031	100.00%