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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: 2021 Communications Update for COVID-19 and the Mass Vaccination Plan**

**FROM: Kathryn Lockyer, Interim Commissioner of Corporate Services  
Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with a summary of COVID-19 communications from 2020 and opportunities to augment and amplify communications strategies planned for 2021 that will:

1. Need to evolve as the pandemic evolves over time.
2. Provide key messages related to the Core Four as a re-booted campaign.
3. Ensure messaging related to testing and self-isolation continues as an important aspect of COVID-19 management.
4. Ensure all Peel residents have the right information about the COVID-19 vaccine, and know when, where and how they can get it.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Highly targeted and responsive communications in 2020, reached residents in Peel with an aim to inform about and encourage adherence to public health measures, use of personal protective behaviours, COVID-19 testing and self-isolation.
  - Community engagement and partnerships have amplified key messages.
  - The Region of Peel - Public Health's profile has risen significantly through effective communications tactics including, Dr. Loh as spokesperson, community engagement and partnerships and by leveraging new and existing channels.
  - Success is demonstrated in the dramatic growth in traffic and engagement on digital (web) and social channels as well as person-to-person interactions.
  - Vaccine communication, including managing expectations, building readiness, reducing barriers, and centralizing clinical information, will be prioritized for 2021, while the current, highly targeted behaviour change and risk communications continue.
  - Never has adherence to public health measures been more critical. Augmenting the Region's ongoing campaigns with agency support will build on the success of the existing effort, provide fresh tactics, and allow the Region to manage communications for mass vaccination.
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### **DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Background**

The pandemic has been the focus of Public Health action since January 2020. The three goals of the pandemic response are to:

1. Prevent illness and save lives to the greatest extent possible.
2. Protect our healthcare system.
3. Minimize the societal and economic impacts of COVID-19 on our community.

Communications is a key enabler to support Public Health to achieve its goals. Communication goals are to effectively:

- Provide access to timely and relevant information, including data, on COVID-19.
- Provide knowledge and education about COVID-19 and preventative measures.
- Anticipate, identify, and manage issues and risks.

#### **2. 2020 Communications Plan**

Drawing on the best practices of how to change behaviour, as well as health-based risk communications, communications strategies and messages were developed and deployed to support the achievement of the above goals. Four communication strategies were identified and enacted:

1. Public communication – Proactively collaborate with partners and key stakeholders to prepare and provide Peel communities with updated information to support behaviour change/skill building and to influence workplace practices using multiple channels.
2. Issues management – Effectively anticipate, identify, and manage issues and risks in collaboration with partners and to provide a strategic lens to respond to emerging trends or changes in the socio-political environment.
3. Education and outreach – Deliver timely and up to date information to the community to build their education on COVID-19 and preventative measures. To provide Health Professionals with up-to-date information on COVID-19 that they can share with their patients.
4. Inquiries and media management – Provide Peel communities, Regional Council and local media with accurate and timely responses to their queries.

The strategies focused on communicating with key audiences and communities in Peel which includes but are not limited to:

- Peel's residents and diverse communities
- Businesses/workplaces
- Schools
- Local municipalities
- Places of worship
- Health care professionals
- Media (local, provincial, and federal) broadcast and print; social media

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The Core 4 community code of conduct and critical messages for testing and self-isolation were launched and sustained to ensure continued individual, organizational, and business compliance. Staff employed methodologies that were designed to change behavior and used audience-specific tactics to reinforce proper preventative measures and to avert behavioural relapse as COVID fatigue set in. Further, staff collected resident input and concerns through many channels (i.e. PH COVID call center, email enquiries and Peel's COVID Community Response Table) to continuously improve the communication strategies and to meet evolving community needs. The following communications tactics were used to reach as many Peel residents, organizations, and workplaces as possible using accurate information, compelling messages and images, and the Peel brand:

- Credible messages from a respected spokesperson in Dr. Loh
- Paid print media and digital marketing
- Targeted email marketing
- Translation tools and virtual assistant on the website
- Multi-language advertising and social media (organic and paid)
- Ambassador partnerships and marketing
- Ethnic and local radio
- Outdoor and transit advertising
- Targeted webinars and town halls in collaboration with partners
- Communication toolkits for Councillors and community partners
- Traditional (municipal and community partners) and non-traditional partnerships (COVID-19 Taskforces)

Refer to Appendix I for a sample of creative assets across platforms.

### 3. Outcomes and Success Measures

Specific outcomes were identified to measure effectiveness:

1. Peel residents have access to information through various audience-appropriate communications channels, using a targeted approach to achieve broad reach.
2. Information is up-to-date, relevant, and appropriate for each identified target audience, including multicultural, at-risk, and high priority (workplaces, schools, congregate, household).
3. Increase in the proportion of Peel residents and businesses that understand COVID-19 and proper preventative measures to prevent spread.
4. Public Health is prepared to respond to emerging risk and issues and maintain community confidence during crises.

Success was demonstrated through several measures. The Region has significantly grown and sustained its digital and social reach to and relevance to residents and stakeholders through 2020. It has also engaged with a record number of residents through person-to-person channels. Specifically:

- Web users grew approximately 64 per cent (to >5 million) and web page views increased approximately 55 per cent (to >21 million), compared to 2019.
- Web home page views increased 717 per cent since early Jan. 2020.
- Social channels grew in followership and achieved record engagement:

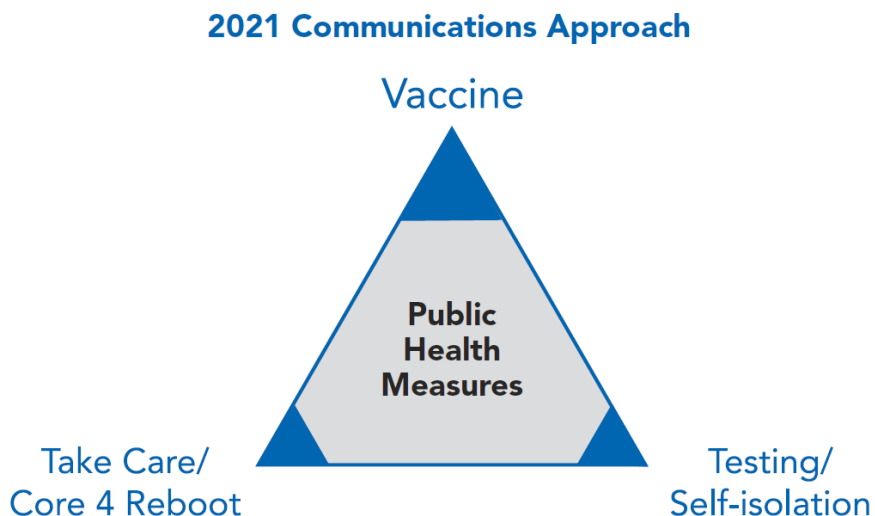
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- Twitter followers increased 40 per cent and tweets saw a 380 per cent increase in impressions (views) and 822 per cent increase in engagements (meaningful interaction).
- Instagram channel was launched, and new methods (Instagram Reels) of connecting with audiences drew record engagement (25,000 views on mask wearing tips).
- Facebook advertising targeting Peel's top 11 languages reached more than 1.6 million people.
- YouTube subscribership grew by over 30 per cent and the channel boasts one of the highest numbers of video views (13.1 million) for a Canadian municipality, surpassing Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary.
- Media requests totalled more than 500.
- Phone inquiries to public health call centres surpassed 73,000 calls.
- E-mail inquiries topped 3000.

New and existing partnerships helped to amplify and extend the Region's messages. Key messages and marketing assets were requested by and shared with partners to ensure alignment and consistency of information for Peel residents. This group includes community-led COVID-19 task forces (South Asian, Muslim, Hispanic), religious leaders, municipalities, hospitals and health care providers, Ontario Health, Canadian Mental Health Association, member agencies at the Peel COVID-19 Community Response Table, schools, businesses, local and national media, Vaccine Community Planning Table and more.

### 4. Strategic Approach for 2021

The communications plan for 2021 builds upon the existing 2020 communication strategies, approaches, and engagement tactics. Multiple, simultaneous campaigns will be required to reach the population across three Focus Points; Take Care/Core 4 Reboot, Testing/Self Isolation, and Vaccine (Figure below).



Broad awareness and behaviour change messaging related to COVID-19 vaccination is underway. Vaccine messaging will span topics such as access, hesitancy, readiness, centralized clinical information, and behavioural norms and practices as vaccination coverage grows across Peel.

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Expanding reach and increasing engagement is critical given the urgency to vaccinate the population quickly. In addition to the existing marketing and communications mix used in 2020, staff are exploring the use of additional channels and tactics for 2021. These include, but are not limited to:

- Increased and targeted print, ethnic and digital media.
- Influencer marketing.
- Mobile marketing.
- Indoor/outdoor advertising, including point-of-sale video, billboard, etc.
- Expanded toolkit development for grassroots and community partners, and workplaces.
- Sponsored content.
- Elevator advertising.
- Peel Living residential signage.
- Vehicle wraps (fleet).

Refer to Appendix II for an overview of tactical examples both planned and in progress itemize under each pillar. Please note this is a working document and items included within are not comprehensive.

### **5. Agency Support to Secure a Broader Impact and Reach**

The Region of Peel is engaging the services of a creative marketing agency to augment current work. This will support media planning and buying and assist to coordinate and deliver messaging on the three unique yet connected message pillars. Staff will continue to engage the cities of Brampton and Mississauga, and the Town of Caledon to support the delivery of aligned messages.

Due to the urgency to expand our efforts, staff used the emergency procurement protocols to complete a direct negotiation with Publicis.

Expected Outcomes/Deliverables for Publicis include:

1. Expanded reach with priority, multicultural and multilingual audiences.
2. Further amplification of messaging by employing new channels and media outlets.
3. Continued provision of consistent, credible information to Peel residents, in line with relevant public health guidance and vaccination messaging.
4. Development of creatives informed by public health expertise and communications science.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be established by Peel Public Health and Publicis in February following the approval of the specified approach. KPIs will be monitored monthly.

### **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

Risks related to effectively engaging with the community through proactive communication, given the COVID-19 fatigue which has worn down the desire and ability of residents to consume information. The plan outlined is designed to mitigate this risk as much as possible.

Risks related to providing timely and accurate information to our audiences due to factors beyond Regional control, including changes to restrictions and changes in vaccine supply which

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may impact clinic operations and associated communications, as well as testing and personal protection imperatives. To mitigate this risk, the team has established routines to be able to respond effectively and adjust information on-the-go and will use applicable channels to update information to keep residents informed.

Overall, regardless of efforts to communicate effectively, health risks and disparities related to COVID-19 will continue to exist. A strong commitment to targeted messaging, engagement, and refreshed methods and messaging will be used to mitigate these risks as much as possible.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Staff recommend that all costs related to the work of the Agency be funded from the Region's Provincially funded Safe Restart Funding, subject to any other sources of funding that may be announced over the year. Costs associated with agency work are estimated to be not more than \$150,000 per month for up to eight months.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through this comprehensive communication strategy and tactical rollout, the Region is committed to supporting the goal of controlling COVID-19 spread in Peel. This will be achieved through large scale messaging to reinforce adherence to public health guidelines, the vaccine program, infection prevention actions (Core Four Reboot/Take Care), COVID-19 testing and self-isolation.

Ultimately, the proposed plan, including the services of the Agency, will augment and amplify communications planned for 2021 in order to equip residents with the knowledge needed to stay safe and help put an end to the pandemic.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I – Sample of Creative Assets  
Appendix II – Tactical Examples

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*For further information regarding this report, please contact Lisa Duarte, Director, Marketing and Communications, [lisa.duarte@peelregion.ca](mailto:lisa.duarte@peelregion.ca)*

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### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioners, Division Directors, Medical Officer of Health, Financial Support Unit and Legal Services.