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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: Public Health – Risk Management Reporting for 2022**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To inform Regional Council, as the Board of Health, of risks and challenges facing Public Health in 2022, after more than two years of pandemic response efforts, and to identify ongoing mitigation efforts and supports that may be required.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- To inform Regional Council, as the Board of Health, of risks and challenges facing Public Health in 2022, after more than two years of pandemic response efforts, and to identify ongoing mitigation efforts and supports that may be required.
  - As one of the Region of Peel’s divisions most impacted by the longest emergency response undertaken by the Region of Peel, significant risks for Public Health pertain to the:
    - remobilization of programs and services;
    - impacts on employee wellbeing and competitive healthcare labour market;
    - priority population needs and health equity;
    - limited funding for a growing population; and,
    - changing provincial policies for public health.
  - In 2022, Public Health is balancing the evolving response to COVID-19 along with re-starting other priority mandated public health programs and services as possible.
  - As Public Health plans to remobilize other mandated programs, while transitioning from emergency response, sufficient time and support in the next two years will be needed to support staff recovery, needs assessment, and fulsome review and consideration of public health programs and services that were paused or severely scaled back.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

In January 2018, the Ministry of Health Public Health Accountability Framework came into effect, outlining the requirements to which Boards of Health are held accountable. As part of these requirements, public health units are required to submit an annual risk management report to the Ministry of Health to assist in the process of risk identification, assessment, prioritization, and mitigation. This year’s report aims to inform Peel Regional Council as the

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Board of Health of significant risks faced by Public Health in meeting its strategic priorities and remobilizing mandated programs after two years of focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic work in response to community needs.

### 2. Risk Findings

#### a) Significant risks for Peel Public Health

Peel Public Health has identified the following five significant risks based on likelihood and impact to achieving strategic priorities, as endorsed in the Peel Public Health Strategic Plan titled, 2020 - 2029 Strategic Priorities for the Future and the 2021-2022 Interim Strategic Priorities, as approved by Council on October 24, 2019, and February 25, 2021, respectively. The five significant risks to Peel Public Health relate to the following:

- **Remobilization of programs and services:** Peel has been one of the hardest hit communities by COVID-19 in Ontario, and unpredictability remains around future response needs. As such, the COVID-19 response, including vaccination services, remains the top priority for Public Health and the Region while the need to reopen programs and services is increasing. Pandemic response functions may entail but are not limited to, responding to new waves of COVID-19, offering boosters and meeting increased needs to communicate with the public. There are additional significant human resource limitations and implications as mandated public health programs and services are restarted and service backlogs need to be addressed.

Uncertainty of remobilization timelines, with reduced levels of service and temporary closure of programs, and finite human resources present a risk to meeting community needs and exacerbating health inequities.

- **Impacts on employee wellbeing and competitive health care labour market:** The historical low ratio of public health staff to Peel residents coupled with the prolonged demands and unpredictability of COVID-19 have negatively impacted employee wellbeing, due to high workloads, community harassment, higher staff turnover and recruitment challenges. There is a risk that employee burnout and retention concerns may present challenges in continuing to adequately respond to COVID-19 and further delay transitioning to reopening mandated public health programs.
- **Priority population needs and advancing health equity:** Peel Public Health has limited capacity and ability to meet the public health needs of high priority populations outside of the extended COVID-19 response. This could result in risks to the reputation and credibility with community partners, and worsening health outcomes for equity-seeking populations. The unintended consequences of the pandemic have further exacerbated existing population inequities. For the COVID-19 response, ongoing surveillance and planning are being conducted to ensure adequate vaccination coverage in protecting vulnerable groups most impacted by COVID-19 due to sociodemographic factors.

Current tools and capacity continue to be developed to permit Peel Public Health to fully and equitably address the non-COVID-19 health needs of vulnerable populations. As reopening progresses, additional resources, efforts and time will be

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required to effectively engage with communities and integrate health equity capacity within public health programs.

- **Limited funding for a growing population:** Historic pre-pandemic funding deficits for Peel Public Health has not kept pace with population growth, and there is uncertainty regarding the municipality's capacity to continue to absorb larger than expected municipal contribution and announced changes in the public health cost-sharing ratios. Public Health's Provincial funding has remained stagnant since 2018 and a similar amount is projected to continue into 2022. The maximization and optimization of existing resources has reached a limit and the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the current and anticipated future need for additional resources. Sufficient time and resources will be needed to support staff wellness through leave while also reassessing how the pandemic has impacted pre-pandemic priorities and community needs as previously outlined in the Council approved Public Health Strategic Plan titled, 2020 - 2029 Strategic Priorities for the Future.

The one-time COVID-19 mitigation funding for 2020 and 2021 has been crucial in offsetting provincial funding shortfalls for public health to respond to the pandemic. Mitigation funding is required on an ongoing basis to manage the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and associated cases and outbreaks and vaccination needs as the virus is projected to become endemic. Continuous COVID-19 funding support is needed.

- **Changing provincial policies for public health:** The Provincial Modernization of Public Health initiated prior to the pandemic is on hold due to the emergency response. However, the uncertainty of this structural shift generates an operational risk to serve the Peel community and leverage efficiency/economy of scale to effectively deliver programs and services.

The long-term role of Public Health in COVID-19 prevention and control is presently unknown and remains to be defined by the provincial government. Further clarity around local public health's role in ongoing COVID-related functions (e.g., case and contact management, vaccination) will facilitate and influence future planning for 2022 onwards.

### b) Risk mitigation strategies

Remobilization of other public health programs and services will be a journey over the next couple of years and will require patience and flexibility while continuing to respond to COVID-19. A variety of mitigation strategies and processes are being employed to minimize the impact of the risks identified, including but not limited to:

- Taking sufficient time (well into 2023) and resources to reopen programs and services given the unpredictability of COVID-19 and the scale of remobilization being undertaken compared to other municipal services. Concurrently, also supporting employee wellness through leave of absences, rest and reconnection, reboarding employees, and providing training and wellbeing resources to address trauma exposure and working within high stress work environments.

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- Collaborating with internal stakeholders to prioritize and plan the gradual reopening of remaining programs and services by assessing the impact of the pandemic on strategic priorities and communities.
- Providing transparent, targeted, and timely communication to keep the public informed on the reopening of programs and services and calibrate expectations of a slow remobilization, emphasizing empathy and flexibility with public health employees.
- Implementing redeployment strategies and strengthening recruitment strategies to support immediate COVID-19 response needs as well as planning the eventual transition out of the acute phase of the pandemic response with consideration to prioritizing the gradual reopening of remaining programs and services.
- Advocating for ongoing funding to support the transition, reopening and recovery of programs and services while also maintaining an adequate COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts.
- Continuing to build and maintain strong partnerships between all levels of government and numerous health and community partners to allow and enable stronger collaboration in the current emergency response structure.

It is important to emphasize that recovery planning will take time to effectively plan and rollout while maintaining an adequate COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts and ensuring employee wellbeing needs are considered.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial details have been discussed in the body of the report. These financial risks include historical pre-pandemic funding deficits for public health, uncertainty of ongoing COVID-19 funding, and resources required to support the transition, reopening and recovery of public health programs and services while also maintaining an adequate COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts.

### **CONCLUSION**

A report will be brought to council in June 2022 to provide more detail on the remobilization of public health programs and services. Peel Public Health will continue to use a risk management framework to identify and mitigate risks to achieve its strategic objectives. This includes adequate time taken to plan for pandemic recovery and a continued focus on respite and employee wellbeing. This will help to ensure a healthy and stable workforce that is ready to restart and provide mandated public health programs and services to the community.

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