



Introduction

This report is the first comprehensive community health status report completed in Huron County.

The overall aim of this report is to describe the health of Huron County residents so that needs may be identified. To accomplish this, a variety of data and information sources are used to report on key population health indicators for the following health topics:

- Demographics
- Social Determinants of Health
- Self-Reported Health
- Risk Factors
- Mortality
- Morbidity
- Chronic Health Conditions
- Reproductive Health
- Unintentional Injuries and Injury Prevention
- Communicable Disease
- Environmental Health
- Oral Health

This report will be useful to health unit staff and others in the community who plan and evaluate services which support and promote the health of Huron County residents. The report will also serve as a baseline for future reporting of Huron County's health, allowing the health of the community to be monitored over time.

Addressing the impact of social and economic factors, such as income, education, housing and employment, on the public's health has become an important priority in the field of public health. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer recently released a report on the state of public health in Canada, which focused on these social determinants of health and discussed how they contribute to differences in health. Similarly, the Ontario Public Health Standards highlight the impact social and economic factors have on the

health of the population and recognize that addressing determinants of health and reducing health inequities are fundamental to the work of public health in Ontario.

In 2005, the Huron County Health Unit underwent an organizational restructuring and central to this restructuring were the social determinants of health. Services were reviewed to ensure that programs and services addressed community need and determinants of health. Questions were asked to determine how equal access services could be provided. Where programs were more prescriptive in nature, strategies were sought to identify and deliver the program to those most at risk or to those for whom the program was potentially the least accessible. In addition, the health unit created four strategic directions (known as "pillars") rooted in the determinants of health – poverty, water, e-health and primary health care. From this direction, a "poverty strategy" was created which included hiring community developers, describing poverty in Huron County, securing external funding to modify or create programs to address poverty in Huron County, collaborating with primary care and providing services through e-health to improve accessibility, and improving staff understanding of how poverty impacts health through education and training. **Figure 1** visually outlines this restructuring.

Given the health unit's dedication to addressing the social determinants of health in program planning and service delivery, this report has been created using a social determinants of health framework. To accomplish this, the report describes the impact of social factors on health throughout a lifetime using the board game Snakes and Ladders (with permission of the Interior Health Authority, British Columbia) and examines key social determinants in Huron

County. Where possible, traditional health indicators such as self-reported health status are examined with a social determinants of health lens to provide a better understanding of how social factors influence the health of residents in Huron County. In the absence of local data linking social determinants with health outcomes, discussions are offered on the impact of the social determinants on particular health outcomes using available literature.

Huron County Health Unit

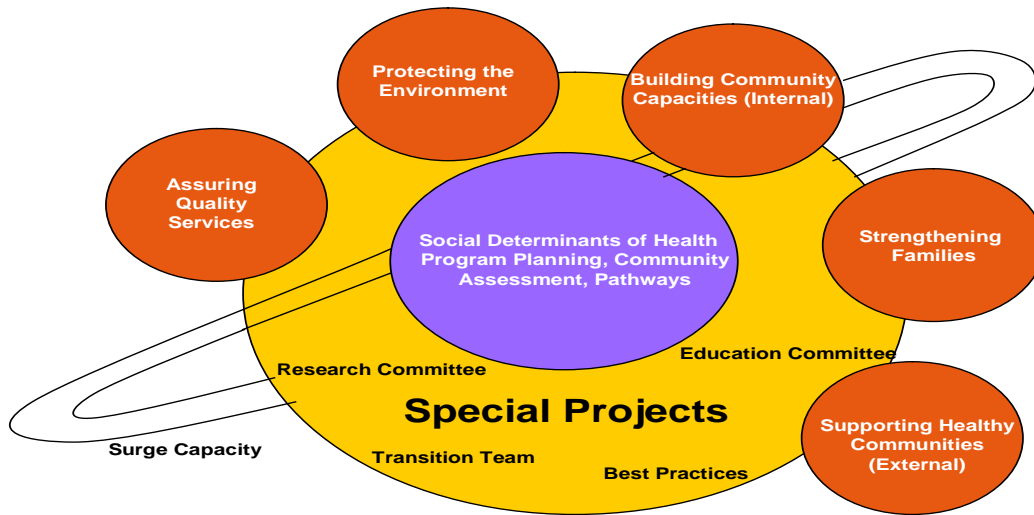


Figure 1. The restructuring process included reorganizing staff into five, interdisciplinary “quads”, shown by the orange circles, to improve efficiency and communication between staff. Central to this reorganization were the social determinants of health, which were addressed as part of a service review and as part of the health unit structure. Other projects integral to the restructuring process were: developing surge capacity for the organization, resurrecting Research and Education committees, ensuring programs and services were based upon best practice information and developing a Transition Team to guide this reorganization process.