

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release
November 16, 2023



NWHU to engage in a joint feasibility study to explore implications of voluntary merger following Province's 'Strengthening Public Health' announcement

On August 22, 2023, the Ministry of Health [announced](#) its intent to work with partners on a strategy to strengthen public health, with a key piece of the strategy being one-time funding, resources, and supports for local public health agencies (LPHAs) that voluntarily merge.

Given the vast geographic area covered by Northwestern Health Unit, and that covered by Thunder Bay District Health Unit, in addition to the number of rural and remote communities within each health unit's catchment area, it is unclear how a merger would impact public health service delivery for residents in each municipality, unorganized territories, and to urban and on-community Indigenous populations.

In order to determine the feasibility of a merger between Northwestern Health Unit and Thunder Bay District Health Unit, and to determine if such a merger would, in fact, meet Ministry of Health objectives and desired outcomes, the Boards of Health for the two northwestern Ontario health units have passed resolutions to complete a joint merger feasibility assessment with the support of a third-party consultant.

"NWHU's Board of Health and Leadership remains committed to ensuring we are doing what is best for all of our communities – local public health is important for the health and wellbeing of our population, and the results of this assessment will aid us in making an informed decision." says NWHU's CEO, Marilyn Herbacz.

While there is no set date for the assessment to be completed, every effort will be made to follow the Ministry of Health's timeline. Sioux Lookout Mayor, and Chair of NWHU's Board of Health, Doug Lawrance, says "at this time we are not committed to a merger; we believe that local relationships and understanding of each community's needs and demographics are key to providing high quality, relevant care and programming. These factors and more must be considered when assessing a merger of the two Health Units."

-30-

Media Contact
Marilyn Herbacz
Chief Executive Officer
Northwestern Health Unit
lkoch@nwhu.on.ca

Celebrating 75 years of local public health