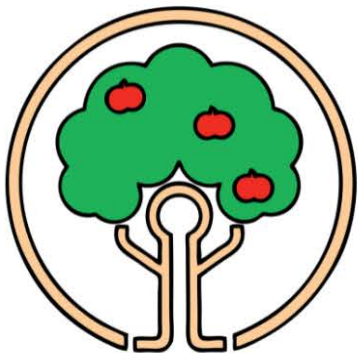


Annual Report 2023



**Renfrew County and District
Health Unit**

"Optimal Health for all in Renfrew County and District"



Connect with us



www.rcdhu.com



@RCDHealthUnit



(613) 732-3629 or 1-800-267-1097



141 Lake Street, Pembroke ON

Mission

Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District.

Vision

Renfrew County and District Health Unit protects and promotes the health and well-being of all.

Land Acknowledgement

Renfrew County and District Health Unit is located on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe People.

We honour the land and peoples of the Algonquin Anishinaabe, whose ancestors have lived on this territory since time Immemorial, and whose culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land.

We honour all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, their elders, their ancestors and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

Migwech



Welcome Message

The 2023 Annual Report for Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) illustrates the tremendous commitment of our staff. It was a year of renewal and optimism as we worked together with community partners to advance our vision of “*Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District.*”

Several new initiatives began across RCDHU’s infectious diseases and immunization programs. The respiratory illness data summary tool was launched as an accessible way for community members and partners to view the local respiratory virus risk level. Also newly introduced this year, the Getakit program provides residents with access to sexual health services from the privacy of home, increasing testing access and linking people to treatment. Finally, a new publicly funded vaccine program was introduced in the fall of 2023 to protect higher risk older adults against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

RCDHU strengthened and renewed additional key services. School dental screenings were increased, and more dentures and dental services were provided through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care program. Public health inspectors further increased their food safety work with local restaurants, conducting over 1300 inspections. The You’re the Chef food literacy program for local schools was reinstated, promoting healthy eating habits among students. Additionally, the newly launched Yellow Ribbon Dog campaign raised awareness about rabies prevention and reducing the number of animal bites in Renfrew County and District (RCD).

There were 41 suspect drug-related deaths in RCD - higher than any previous year. Naloxone, a medication that can prevent opioid-related deaths, was increasingly promoted and 50% more kits were distributed from RCDHU than in 2022. RCDHU staff continued to play a leadership role in coordinating the opioid overdose response table, issuing four overdose alerts with partners and communicating about the local impact of the opioid crisis.

Continued on next page.



RCDHU responded to emergencies with partners, including localized flooding, a military helicopter crash into the Ottawa river, and wildfire-related adverse air quality events. Communications and guidance were provided to community members and partners to protect residents' health.

We thank our staff, the Ministry of Health, local municipalities, partner agencies, and community members for their support throughout 2023.



Respectfully submitted,

Heather Daly,
Chief Executive Officer

Joanne King,
Chair, Board of Health

Dr. Jason Morgenstern,
Medical Officer of Health



PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

Reportable Infectious Diseases

Each year, staff work to prevent and reduce the spread of infectious diseases in our communities. Staff supported, monitored, and managed respiratory infections, sexually transmitted infections, blood borne infections, and other infectious diseases in our communities, supporting both individuals and congregate settings (including hospitals, retirement homes, and long-term care). This work included education, infectious disease investigations, contact tracing, outbreak management, infection prevention and control guidance, and communications.

There are approximately 70 diseases of public health significance that must be reported to Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU). Staff investigated and responded to **more than 2,000 confirmed cases of these diseases.**

Refer to the new infectious disease dashboard for detailed information: [Infectious Disease Trends in Renfrew County and District Dashboard | Renfrew County and District Health Unit \(rcdhu.com\)](#).

476

Tuberculin
Skin Tests
provided



286

IPAC
inspections



75

facility
outbreaks





COVID-19 Outbreak Response

COVID-19 response was integrated into regular operations and managed like any other disease of public health significance.

Over the year, staff managed **61 COVID-19 facility outbreaks**, a significant decrease from the previous year. This trend reflects increased population immunity, continued community responsiveness to public health messaging, and strong collaboration with partners.

61

COVID-19
facility
outbreaks



GetaKit Sexual Health Testing

The sexual health team implemented [Getakit](#), an at-home sexual health testing initiative, working in partnership with Ottawa Public Health and the University of Ottawa. GetaKit offers self-testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, providing residents with access to sexual health services from the privacy of home. This service aims to decrease the spread of sexually transmitted infections in our communities by increasing the rates and frequency of testing, as well as the number of people linked to treatment and care.



Vaccination Against Respiratory Illnesses

COVID-19

Vaccine services were offered to all eligible residents to ensure protection against COVID-19.

In April, RCDHU rolled out the bivalent vaccines to all residents eligible for Spring immunization. Forty-one bivalent vaccination clinics were held across RCD. Later in the year, the new XBB vaccine was introduced for residents aged 6 months and older. From September to December, the immunization team administered more than **6,100 doses** of COVID-19 vaccine.

To enhance access to the COVID-19 vaccine, RCDHU offered immunization support and training to community partners and managed the vaccine inventory. The immunization team also organized community clinics, mobile retirement home/congregate care clinics, and in-home vaccine services to homebound individuals.

In collaboration with community partners, a total of **27,088 doses** of COVID-19 vaccine were successfully given throughout RCD. Furthermore, throughout 2023 RCDHU held **151 COVID-19 clinics**.

27,088

COVID-19 doses administered in RCD

151

COVID-19 vaccine clinics



121

cold-chain fridge inspections





Respiratory Syncytial Virus

In the fall of 2023, Ontario launched its first publicly funded vaccine program for RSV for older adults at higher risk of experiencing severe illness. RSV is a common respiratory virus that can cause severe lung infections such as bronchiolitis and pneumonia, especially in infants, young children, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems. Through focused efforts the immunization team quickly mobilized to ensure that eligible residents across RCD received the RSV vaccine.

Flu

Through the strategic deployment of resources and proactive outreach efforts, the fall flu campaign successfully offered **52 flu clinics** across RCD and administered **over 3,700 doses** of flu vaccine to protect residents against seasonal influenza. This represented a significant 62% increase compared to the previous respiratory season (September-December 2022).

3,700

doses of a flu vaccine administered



52

flu vaccine clinics

20,000

flu vaccines distributed to healthcare providers



Responding to Substance Use Harms

In recent years, rising rates of opioid-related deaths have been seen in Renfrew County and District (RCD), provincially, and nationally. In 2023, there were 69 opioid overdose-related emergency department visits and 41 suspected drug poisoning deaths in RCD, with both increasing relative to 2022. The rate of suspect drug poisoning deaths in 2023 was over 3 times the rate in 2018 to 2019.

Throughout 2023, RCDHU coordinated the Opioid Overdose Response Plan to inform a timely response to any surge in opioid overdoses or the detection of high-potency opioid formulations in the local toxic street drug supply. The plan required ongoing surveillance and communication with partners in emergency departments, emergency services, and addiction treatment to inform the early warning system and community alerts. In 2023, **4** alerts were issued due to a notable increase of overdoses or the detection of high potency opioid formulations.

Harm reduction staff promoted and increased access to naloxone, a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and prevent opioid-related deaths. **942 naloxone kits** were distributed to clients and community partners through the Ontario Naloxone Program, an increase from the previous year's distribution of 610 kits. Clients were also able to access sterile equipment and safe disposal methods to help reduce the risk of bloodborne infections due to substance use equipment in the community.

Expanded efforts by RCDHU and increasing needs in the community resulted in increased utilization of harm reduction services. Over 2023, harm reduction clients accessed services **1,723 times**, compared to 1,231 times the previous year.

1,723 # of times services were accessed

942 naloxone kits distributed



Ontario Seniors Dental Care

The dental services team offered the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program to eligible seniors (65 or older) who are residents of RCD with free, routine dental care. In 2023 a dentist joined the team, treating clients in RCDHU's Pembroke and Barry's Bay dental clinic locations.

The dental services team supported seniors in accessing dental treatment, facilitating **879 client visits to a dentist** and **780 dental hygiene appointments**. Additionally, **118 clients received new dentures**.

879

client visits
to a dentist



780

dental hygiene
appointments
provided

118

clients
provided new
dentures



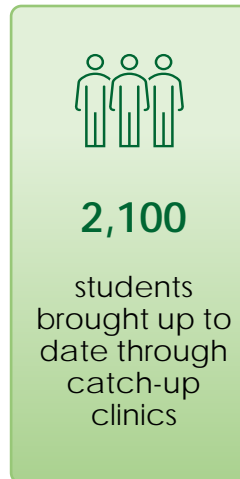
SUPPORTING OUR SCHOOLS



Immunization for Children and Adolescents

The immunization team increased community protection against vaccine-preventable diseases, offering both routine clinics and targeted catch-up sessions for children and adolescents who missed vaccination opportunities during the pandemic.

Immunization staff notified parents and guardians of students who were behind on vaccinations designated under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act*. To increase access to vaccination, **18 school-based clinics** and **16 community-based catch-up clinics** were hosted, supporting the catch-up efforts of **more than 2,100 students** across RCD.



101
grade 7 school-based clinics provided

4,000+
doses provided through school-based clinics

The immunization team provided an additional **101 school-based clinics** during the spring and fall for grade 7 students. Through these clinics, over **4,000 doses of vaccines were given**, including Meningococcal, Hepatitis B, and Human Papillomavirus vaccines. As a result of these efforts, vaccine coverage rates for Grade 7 students in RCD were 12-34% higher than the provincial average.



School Vision Screening

The School Vision Screening program continued through to the end of the school year. Vision screenings were offered to all senior kindergarten students at publicly funded elementary schools across RCD. Between January and June, a total of **508 vision screenings were provided**, with **151 students referred to an optometrist** for a comprehensive eye exam (30% of students screened).



3,995

student dental screenings



445

students identified as having dental areas of concern

School Dental Screening

RCDHU's School Oral Health Screening Program successfully delivered a total of **3,995 student screenings**.

Following in-school screenings, **445 students were identified as having dental areas of concern**, representing 11% of the screened population. For those needing follow-up, the dental services team offered the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program to eligible families, providing free preventative and emergency dental services for children and youth.

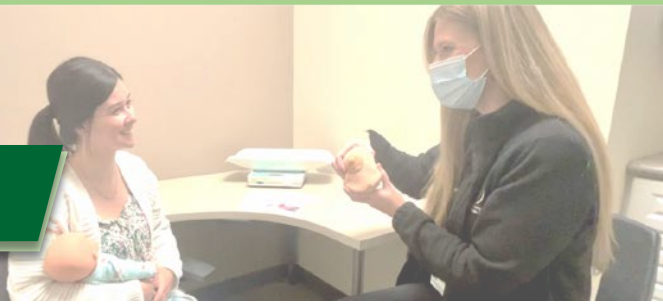
You're the Chef School Program

After an extended pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic, RCDHU was once again able to offer the You're the Chef food literacy program to local schools. This program teaches students to develop the skills and confidence to cook nutritious foods.

In-person training was offered to new and previous leaders who were interested in delivering the program in their respective schools. Staff hosted an interactive two-part training session where participants engaged in educational learning and hands-on cooking in the kitchen. Following this training, the You're the Chef program was successfully implemented in local schools. Leaders and students both reported that the program helped to develop the skills and confidence required to cook nutritious foods.



SUPPORTING FAMILIES

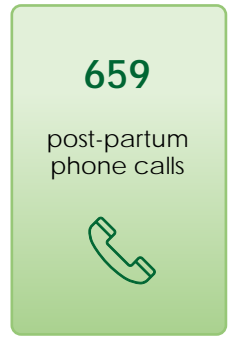


The Healthy Families team offered programs and services to foster the healthy growth and development of children and families within RCD.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children

Through the Healthy Babies Healthy Children home-visiting program, RCDHU's team of Public Health Nurses (PHNs), family home visitors and social workers provided families with opportunities to achieve their full potential.

RCD had **838 births**. PHNs responded to **659 postpartum calls**, providing support, health teaching, and in-home visits as needed. In addition to telephone support, the Healthy Families team provided **1,371 home visits**.

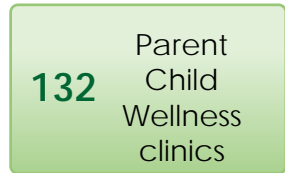


RCDHU continued its partnership with Pembroke Regional Hospital to meet the needs of families and ensure continuity of care once discharged from the hospital. Through the hospital liaison program, PHNs completed postpartum HBHC screening with clients and reviewed a variety of postpartum health teaching, including promotion of the HBHC program and healthy growth and development services.

Healthy Growth and Development



Online prenatal education for expectant parents was offered through the Growing a Healthy Baby program. **118 expectant parents** participated in the program.



Parent Child Wellness Clinics (PCWCs) were offered, supporting families with children aged zero to transition to school. **132 PCWCs** were delivered, supporting **223 clients**.

Additionally, PHNs provided various supports to families through the Family Health intake lines via telephone, email, and fax. A total of **406 inquiries** were addressed related to Family Health.



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS



Public health inspectors investigated health hazards across RCD, providing key public health programming around vector-borne disease management, food safety, water safety, and animal bites.

Ticks and Vector-Borne Disease Management

Diseases spread by ticks such as Lyme Disease, Anaplasmosis, Babesiosis, and Powassan virus are a concern in Ontario. Staff monitored for the local presence of these diseases through tick dragging activities in targeted areas around the southern portion of RCD and along the Ottawa river. Tick dragging helps to identify the presence of deer ticks, which are capable of transmitting diseases. Risk areas were identified around Annprior, Calabogie, and Cobden.



60

ticks submitted for testing

17

ticks tested positive for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease

Public health inspectors also collected ticks from the public through passive surveillance, with **60 ticks submitted for testing**. Of these ticks, **51 were deer ticks** and **17 tested positive for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease**.

RCDHU inspectors monitored for West Nile virus in the mosquito population over a 10-week period in the summer across various locations around RCD. There were **no positive mosquito pools** detected.



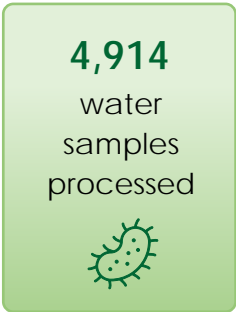


Food Safety Inspections

All public food establishments (any person or business serving or supplying food to the public) are required to be inspected by public health inspectors to minimize the risk of food-related illness. A total of **1,348 food safety inspections were completed.**

Safe Water

RCDHU continued to support the community by offering free drinking water testing service for private residences sourcing water from wells or surface water bodies, such as rivers or lakes. Water samples are checked for the presence of harmful bacteria, including Escherichia coli (E. coli) and Total Coliforms. RCDHU **processed a total of 4,914 water samples,** helping residents ensure the safety of their drinking water.



From June through August, RCDHU also conducted beach water testing across RCD. A total of **29 beaches were regularly sampled** to monitor for high levels of E. coli, a key indicator of water quality and potential health risks to swimmers. As a result of this monitoring, 3 beaches were posted with E. coli warnings.



Public health inspectors inspected recreational swimming pools, spas, and splashpads. These mandatory inspections ensure that regulatory requirements are in place to protect users from illness and injury. Areas of inspection include water disinfection, equipment use and maintenance, availability of safety equipment, and recordkeeping practices.

RCDHU inspectors also inspected small drinking water systems (SDWS). A SDWS is a water system that provides publicly accessed drinking water that is not provided by a municipally treated source. There are **approximately 380 SDWS that provide drinking water** access to the public.



Rabies and Animal Bite Investigations

Rabies is a fatal disease in humans once symptoms develop, but it can be prevented through precautionary measures and timely treatment following animal bites. Public health inspectors investigate all incidents of animal bites or scratches involving humans to assess the risk of rabies exposure.

Staff conducted a total of **238 rabies investigations**. Of these, 18 animal specimens were sent to a laboratory to be tested for the rabies virus. **Twenty-five individuals received rabies post-exposure prophylaxis** as a result of an animal bite. **One positive animal rabies case** was detected in a bat.

In May, RCDHU launched the Yellow Ribbon Dog campaign, encouraging pet owners to use a yellow ribbon or marker to signal to others that their pet needs space. This campaign focuses on raising awareness about rabies and reducing the number of animal bites in RCD.

238

rabies investigations



25

Individuals received rabies post-exposure prophylaxis





EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

RCDHU responded to emergencies with partners in 2023, including flooding, a helicopter crash, and adverse air quality caused by wildfire smoke. Through proactive planning, coordination, and effective communication, RCDHU strengthened its ability to respond to these challenges and safeguard the health and well-being of the community.

Spring Flooding

In the spring, RCD experienced increased water flow and local flooding due to rapid snowmelt. In response, RCDHU collaborated in freshet meetings with local municipal partners, provincial partners, and involved organizations.

RCDHU participated in Emergency Control Group meetings and offered emergency response support and guidance regarding health effects of contaminated well water, malfunctioning private septic systems, and mouldy living spaces. Increased access to well water testing was made available to communities in need by setting up water bottle pick up locations near the affected area.

Throughout the emergency, RCDHU promoted awareness of health hazards and shared safety messaging with residents, leading to **over 78,143 social media views** for flooding messaging.





Helicopter Crash

In June, a military helicopter crashed into the Ottawa River, near the Town of Petawawa. Tragically, two pilots died in the crash. As part of the response to this emergency, RCDHU conducted a risk assessment to ensure the safety of the Town of Petawawa's drinking water supply, which is sourced from the Ottawa River. In collaboration with Garrison Petawawa, the Town of Petawawa, Ontario Clean Water Agency, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks, and provincial public health partners, RCDHU was able to confirm the safety of the water supply from the Ottawa River and ensure its ongoing protection. After briefly stopping water intake from the river as a precautionary measure, the water intake was resumed.

Wildfire Smoke

Over the summer, RCD experienced **23 days** when poor air quality statements were released. Smoke plumes from forest fires throughout Ontario and Quebec led to reduced visibility and deteriorated air quality across the region. RCDHU offered guidance to municipal partners, healthcare organizations, school boards, daycares, and the public on managing health effects and reducing health impacts related to poor air quality.

Broad health safety messaging was provided through various channels including media releases, website updates, and social media posts. This resulted in a total of **135,141 online views** throughout the wildfire smoke events.



COMMUNICATIONS



Communications staff kept residents and community partners informed with accurate public health information, recommendations, and guidance. As the need for COVID-19 emergency messaging lessened, RCDHU's many other public health services and programs were increasingly highlighted through media releases, social media messaging, daily website updates, and public health resources.

An online [respiratory illness data summary](#) tool providing weekly updates was introduced to help residents and community partners make decisions about respiratory illnesses and understand their risk levels.



1.9 million social media views

21 media releases

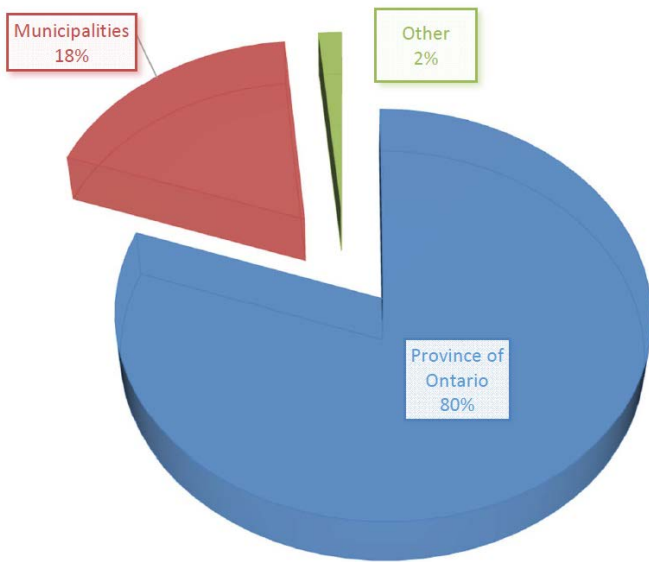
1,762 social media posts

101,561 website views



FINANCIAL REPORT

2023 Funding Sources



2023 Expenditures by Category

