

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2030






# Land Acknowledgement

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit acknowledges that we are located on the traditional and ancestral home to the Anishinaabe People of the Three Fires Confederacy, comprised of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi People. This territory is within the lands honoured by Treaty 2 and Treaty 35; agreements between the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Lenni Lenape and allied Nations to peacefully share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

We also specifically recognize Caldwell First Nation and other First Nations past and present, who live on and stewarded this land, and who continue to make important contributions to the region. Today, many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples call this region home, and their histories, cultures, and ongoing contributions continue to enrich our community.

Recognizing that a land acknowledgement is only one small step on the journey toward reconciliation, we are committed to advancing reconciliation in tangible and ongoing ways by building respectful relationships, reducing inequities, and ensuring our programs and services are inclusive, culturally safe, and supportive of Indigenous communities.

As our collective Indigenous knowledge and understanding evolves, this land acknowledgement will be reviewed and updated to ensure it continues to reflect respectful and appropriate language.





## Message from the Chief Executive Officer and Medical Officer of Health

In recent years, we have faced a public health landscape marked by rapid change, growing complexity, and significant uncertainty. Through it all, the strength, dedication, and resilience of our staff, partners, and communities have remained unwavering. Together, we have delivered vital services, responded to emerging challenges, and found new ways to support health and well-being across Windsor and Essex County (WEC).

At the same time, the environment we work in has become more challenging. The spread of misinformation, widening health disparities, and shifting political and social conditions have shaped how public institutions are perceived and how services are delivered. Throughout this period, one constant has become increasingly clear. Trust is the foundation of effective public health and maintaining that trust is more important than ever.

Our Strategic Plan rises to that moment. It brings together the insight of staff, the voices of community partners, and the realities of local data to define a clear path forward for the WECHU. Each priority reinforces our mission and values. They call on us to lead with integrity, to act with intention, and to remain adaptable in a changing world. They also remind us that trust is built not through words alone but through consistent, visible efforts.

Thank you to the many people who contributed to the development of this plan. Together, we are shaping a stronger public health system and a healthier WEC for years to come.

*Dr. Ken Blanchette, Chief Executive Officer*

*Dr. Mehdi Aloosh, Medical Officer of Health*



## Message from the Board of Health Chair

As Chair of the Board of Health, I am proud to support the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. This plan reflects the insights, values, and priorities of the people and communities we serve. It lays out a path forward that is ambitious, evidence-informed, and aligned with what matters most to our region.

The Board recognizes that effective public health depends on collaboration. Through this plan, the WECHU strengthens its commitment to working with municipal governments, school boards, healthcare providers, community organizations, and residents to create the conditions for better health for all.

On behalf of the Board of Health, I thank everyone who contributed to this plan and reaffirm our commitment to supporting its implementation over the next five years.

*Joe Bachetti, Chair, Board of Health*

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## The Purpose of our Strategic Plan

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan provides a clear and shared direction for the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) over the next five years. Rooted in our mission, vision, and values, the plan outlines where we are going, how we will get there, and how we will hold ourselves accountable for progress.

This plan is more than a roadmap. It is a collective commitment to working together across teams and with partners and communities to prevent illness and close health gaps. It aligns our efforts around long-term goals that reflect both local realities and the evolving role of public health.

The Strategic Plan supports effective decision-making by guiding how we prioritize programs, strengthen partnerships, and allocate resources. It reinforces our ability to adapt to emerging challenges and community needs while continuing to deliver programs and services that make a meaningful impact.

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## Our Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process began in late 2024 with the formation of the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC), which provided guidance and insight at every stage. Committee members included representatives from the Board of Health, senior leadership, management, and both unionized and non-unionized staff, ensuring a diversity of perspectives and lived experience.

Engagement both within and outside of the WECHU was central to the process. Internally, staff were invited to reflect on the WECHU's strengths, challenges, and future direction. These reflections played a vital role in identifying key strategic issues and shaping a plan that is grounded in local experience and guided by shared values.

Externally, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with community partners representing sectors such as municipal government, education, healthcare, emergency response, and social services highlighted priority issues and underscored the importance of collaboration, equity, and system integration. Insights from these conversations, along with findings from the environmental scan and community-based research, helped identify the most pressing public health needs and emerging opportunities in our region.

Drawing on this full range of input, the planning team, with the guidance of the SPAC, identified the strategic issues that matter most for the WECHU's future. These issues became the foundation for five strategic priorities, each supported by clear objectives and grounded in the organization's core values.

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# Vision, Mission, and Values

## VISION

A healthy community where everyone can thrive.

## MISSION

Working together to prevent illness and close health gaps so everyone can achieve their best health.

## VALUES

- Trust & Integrity
- Advocacy & Empowerment
- Partnership & Collaboration
- Equity & Inclusion
- Innovation & Adaptability



# Strategic Priorities

## Leading Collaborative Action on Community Health Priorities



Building and strengthening community partnerships and collaboration to address local health challenges.

### OBJECTIVES

- Position the WECHU as a trusted, evidence-informed leader across the health, education, and social services sectors.
- Lead the coordination of partners and community members to collaboratively plan, align, and co-design programs that drive local progress.

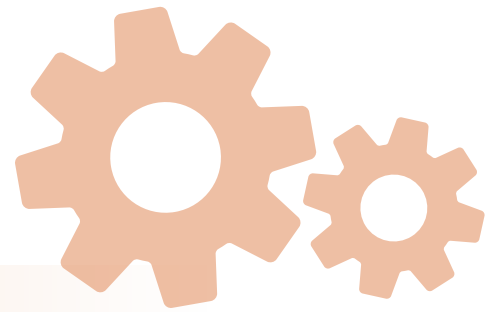
### RATIONALE

Through internal and external engagement, the need for greater alignment across sectors to address complex and overlapping health challenges in WEC was consistently emphasized. The environmental scan pointed to rising chronic disease rates, worsening mental health outcomes, and growing service fragmentation. At the same time, partners expressed a desire for stronger regional coordination and a clear role for the WECHU in convening cross-sector efforts. This priority responds directly to those calls by committing to collaborative action and a system-level approach to improving community health outcomes.





# Strategic Priorities



## Advancing Health Equity

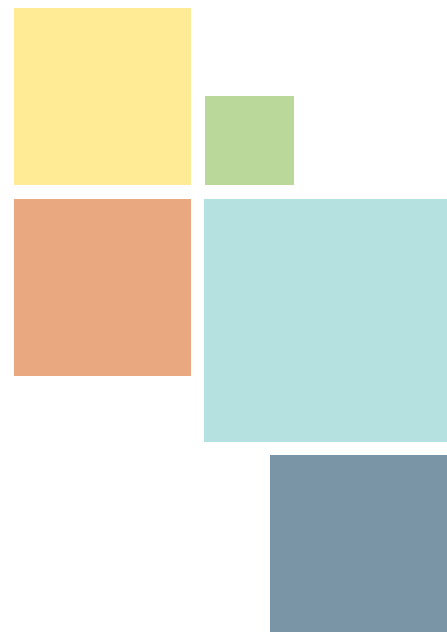
Leading equity-focused public health work through strong community partnerships, meaningful engagement, and action on the social and structural determinants of health.

### OBJECTIVES

- Engage priority populations in program planning and evaluation.
- Strengthen partnerships with community organizations that serve priority populations to decrease health inequities.
- Use equity-focused data and lived experience to inform program planning, resource allocation, and priority setting.
- Advocate for policy change and upstream investments to address the root causes of health inequities.

### RATIONALE

The environmental scan and community engagement revealed deep and persistent health inequities across WEC. Internally, staff also identified the need to better reflect the realities of priority populations in program planning and resource allocation. Building on the WECHU's existing equity frameworks and community partnerships, this priority advances the organization's role in confronting the root causes of health disparities, engaging those most impacted, and advocating for structural change.



# Strategic Priorities

## Strengthening Population Health Surveillance and Transparency



Enhancing access to timely, high-quality data to guide planning, align systems, and drive collective action.

### OBJECTIVES

- Develop and maintain shared indicators for internal and external use.
- Strengthen data-sharing agreements and tools to support intersectoral collaboration and planning.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of public-facing data to demonstrate impact and inform community stakeholders.

### RATIONALE

Across every engagement stream, data emerged as a central theme, both as a strength of the WECHU and as an opportunity for growth. Partners emphasized the need for more timely, local, and equity-focused data to support collective decision-making, while staff highlighted opportunities to strengthen internal data systems and processes for greater efficiency and impact. This priority builds on the WECHU's expertise, aiming to make high-quality data accessible, actionable, and a foundation for collective impact.



# Strategic Priorities

## Investing in Prevention for Long-Term Impact



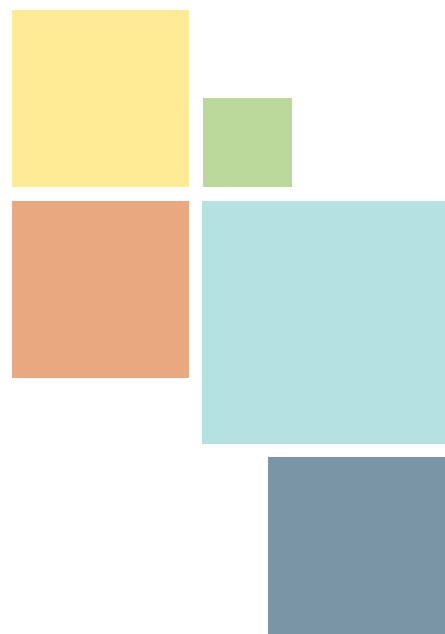
Prioritizing efforts and resources upstream to prevent illness, promote well-being, and reduce health risks at their earliest stages.

### OBJECTIVES

- Prioritize programs that focus on children, youth, and families.
- Embed preventive approaches and long-term health goals across all WECHU programs and services.
- Advocate for resources and investments that address the social determinants of health including housing, food, and income supports.

### RATIONALE

Across all engagement activities, the importance of prevention emerged as a consistent theme and a key responsibility of public health that many feel is increasingly at risk. With limited resources and growing demands, there is concern that reactive services may overshadow proactive interventions. Yet the long-term value of prevention is clear. It reduces downstream costs by addressing health risks before they escalate. This priority reflects strong support for greater investment in early intervention, particularly for children, youth, and families, and aligns with evidence emphasizing the need to act upstream.



# Strategic Priorities



## Fostering Organizational Resilience and Innovation

Strengthening internal capacity, systems, and culture to support adaptability, drive innovation, and deliver meaningful public health impact.

### OBJECTIVES

- Invest in staff training, leadership development, and wellness supports to build capacity and retention.
- Promote a culture of learning, innovation, and cross-functional teamwork.
- Integrate continuous quality improvement (CQI) principles into all programs and services.
- Use data on program impact and cost-effectiveness to drive resource allocation and demonstrate value.

### RATIONALE

Throughout internal and external engagement, there was a clear recognition of the need to build a stronger, more resilient public health organization. Staff expressed deep commitment to their work but also described pressures related to capacity, workload, and change. At the same time, there was strong interest in professional development, cross-team collaboration, and opportunities to innovate. Partners emphasized the importance of a stable and well-supported health unit, able to lead effectively and adapt to evolving needs. This priority focuses on strengthening internal capacity, systems, and culture to support a workforce that is adaptable, forward-thinking, and equipped to deliver meaningful public health impact.





## Next Steps: Implementing, Monitoring, and Adapting

Launching January 1, 2026, alongside the updated Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), this plan aligns with Ontario's renewed vision of a connected, evidence-informed, equity-driven public health system that collaborates across sectors to improve population health and reduce inequities. The updated OPHS place a renewed emphasis on upstream and primordial prevention, addressing the social and structural conditions that shape health long before illness occurs. As the WECHU and other boards of health transition to the updated OPHS, this plan provides the local framework for operationalizing these expectations by embedding population health assessment, equity, quality improvement, and system coordination into all aspects of programming.

Each strategic priority in this plan will be implemented and monitored using indicators that track progress over time and identify opportunities for learning and improvement. Progress will be reported quarterly to the Board of Health, providing timely updates on achievements, challenges, and course corrections. A mid-cycle review in 2028 will allow the organization to assess progress, revisit goals, and adapt to new realities as needed.

Throughout implementation, staff will remain essential partners in bringing the plan to life, aligning programs and services with its strategic direction and supporting a workplace culture grounded in trust, collaboration, and shared purpose.

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## Acknowledgements

The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) played a key role in informing the development of this plan. Their diverse experiences and collaborative approach laid the foundation for a strategic plan built around a common purpose and focused on what matters most to our organization and the communities we serve.

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