



Algoma
PUBLIC HEALTH
Santé publique Algoma

Child Development Physical Blind River
 Employment Wawa Biology COPING Health Equity Income
Partnering for Better Health
 Public Health Personal Health Employment Conditions
 Gender Education Social Status Elliot Lake
 Sault Ste. Marie LITERACY 2013



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MESSAGE from: Board Chair and Medical Officer of Health

Improving health equity is a key strategic direction for Algoma Public Health. Assessing and reporting on effective strategies to address those inequities is an essential role for public health.

This report aims to:

- make the role of public health in health equity work more visible;
- highlight the ways we impact the social determinants of health and inequities in the lives of our clients and communities; and,
- showcase the critical partnerships that we have with other agencies to achieve these outcomes.

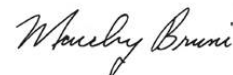
In the future, we will look to fulfill additional public health roles and action including:

1. Engage in our communities and collaborate with multiple sectors to address the health needs of priority populations;
2. Participate and support other stakeholders in policy analysis, development and advocacy for improvements in the health determinants and reduction in existing health inequities.

Over the next two years, we are committed to developing a comprehensive community well-being report that includes a prominent focus on the social determinants of health and highlights the critical roles and programming offered by all of our community partners. Moving beyond just a health status report, this community well-being report will showcase the importance of working together.

Because, together we can!

Marchy Bruni
Chair, Board of Health



Kimberly Barker
Medical Officer of Health



*“No single organization can impact
the social determinants of health
alone...but collectively we can.”*

Look for these icons throughout the report. They will help you recognize the social determinant that is affected in each article.

It's true that health starts where we live, learn, work and play.

The problem is that not everyone has the same opportunities to be healthy. People with fewer resources are less healthy than those with more money or social status.

Health inequities are the differences in health outcomes between population groups that are unfair, avoidable and related to social inequality and disadvantage...and beyond the individual's control. In fact, 50% of health outcomes are directly related to social and economic conditions.

These conditions are collectively known as the social determinants of health.

Algoma Public Health (APH), in close collaboration with our community partners across Algoma, aims to reduce the impact of health inequities. This report provides a snapshot of some 2013 initiatives across the district that made a difference to the people we serve.

Income and Social Status



People with higher income and social status have more control over life's circumstances, as well as more financial and social resources to cope with stress.

Biology and Genetic Endowment



Genetic makeup predisposes some people to certain diseases and health problems; however, early diagnosis and treatment can lessen their impacts.

Health Services



Timely access to health care can restore health, prevent disease, and promote wellness. However, many people cannot afford services such as dental care, prescription drugs, and mental health counselling.

Education and Literacy



Health improves with level of education by providing knowledge and skills to solve problems, obtain employment, and to understand information to stay healthy.

Gender



Society assigns specific roles, personality traits, and attitudes to men and women, including gender-based health issues (eg. women are more likely to suffer from depression than men).

Personal Health and Coping Practices



People who are able to cope with life's challenges are more likely to adopt and sustain healthy lifestyles and behaviours.

Physical Environment



Our physical and emotional well-being is significantly affected by the safety of our air, water, and soil, as well as the design of our communities and transportation systems.

Social Environment



Communities that promote strong social networking opportunities, such as volunteerism and community involvement, create social stability, acceptance of diversity, and other benefits that reduce risks to health (eg. crime and family violence).

Employment and Working Conditions



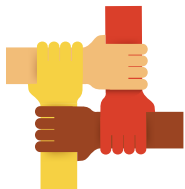
Paid work provides income, as well as a sense of identity and purpose, social contacts and opportunities for personal growth.

Culture



Some persons or groups face additional health risks due to marginalization, stigmatization, loss or devaluation of culture and language, and lack of access to culturally appropriate health care and services.

Social Support



Care and support from family, friends and communities fosters a sense of well-being and the ability to cope more effectively with life's challenges.

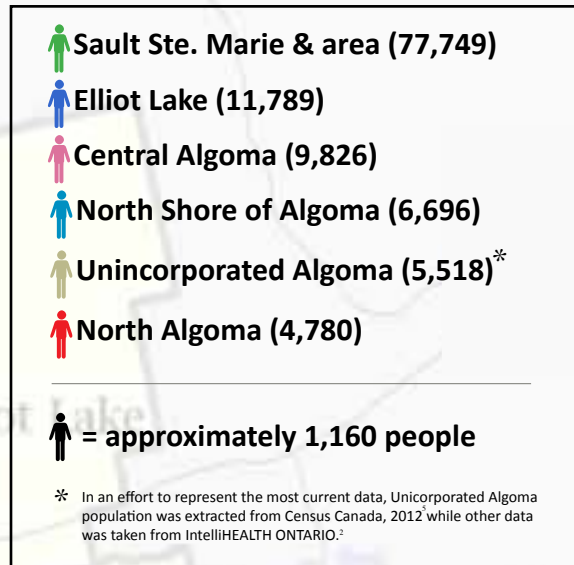
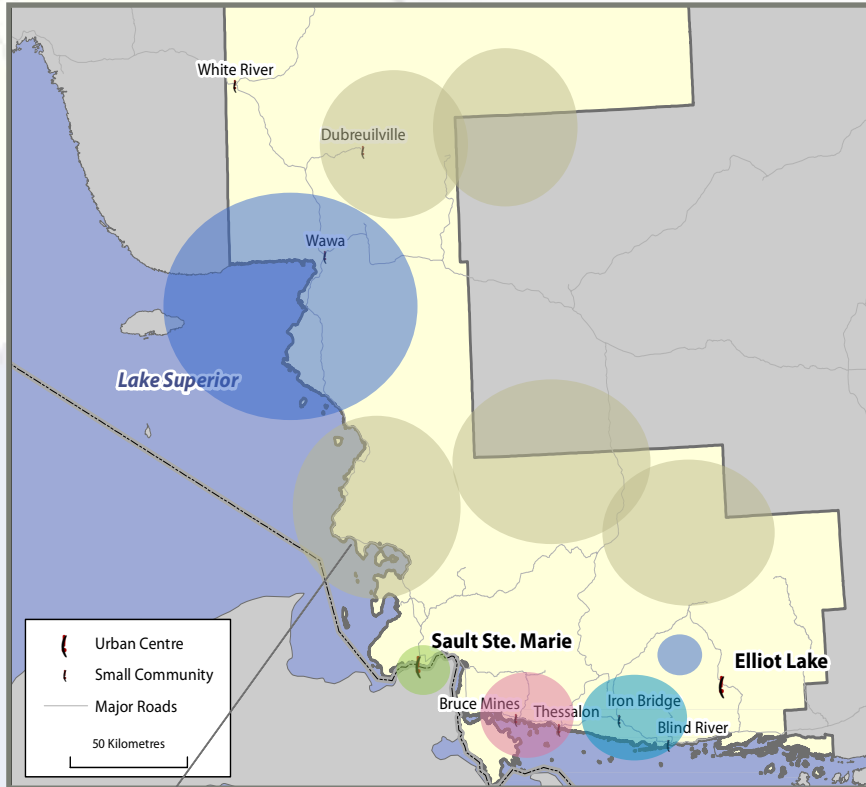
Healthy Child Development



A child's development, particularly from conception to age six, is greatly affected by family income, poverty, parental education, access to nutritious food and physical recreation, genetic makeup, and access to medical and dental care.

Algoma: A Snapshot

Where we live ^{2, 5}



Adults with a University Degree^{3,4}



In Algoma, **17.4%** of adults have a University degree.³

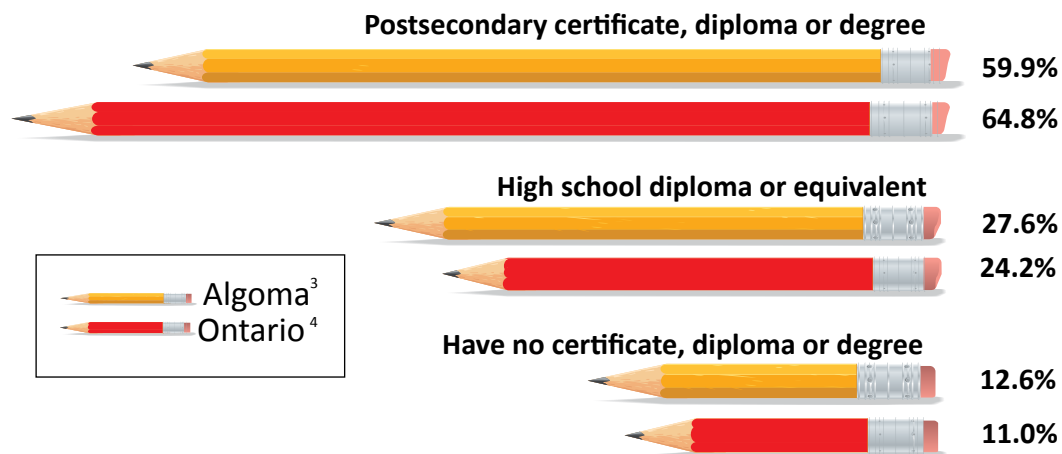


In Ontario, **28.9%** of adults have a University degree.⁴



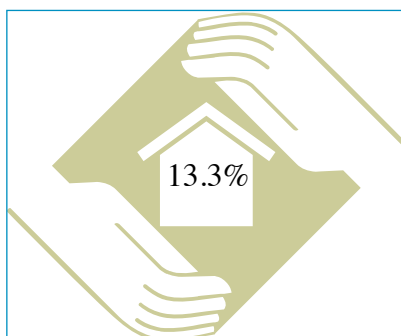
Why does Algoma have significantly less adults with a university degree than the province does? Could this be related to out migration of our youth 19-24 years?

Education of total population 25-64^{3,4}

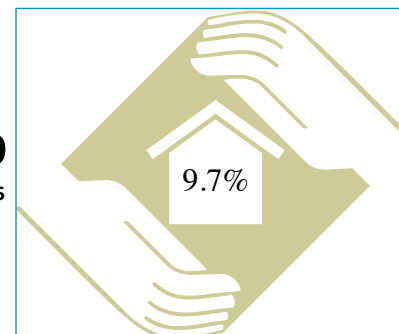


Living alone⁵

In Algoma, **13.3%** of people live alone.⁵

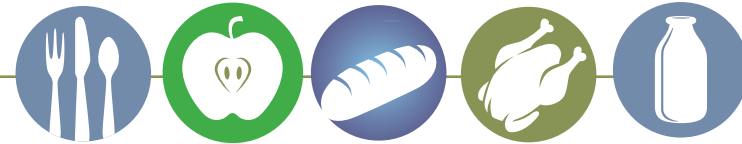


In Ontario, **9.7%** of people live alone.⁵



Did you know that 18.3% of the population of Elliot Lake lives alone. This is the highest percentage in the province with cities that have a population above 10,000.⁵

Food security^{6,7}



The average weekly cost of feeding a family of four in 2013.⁶

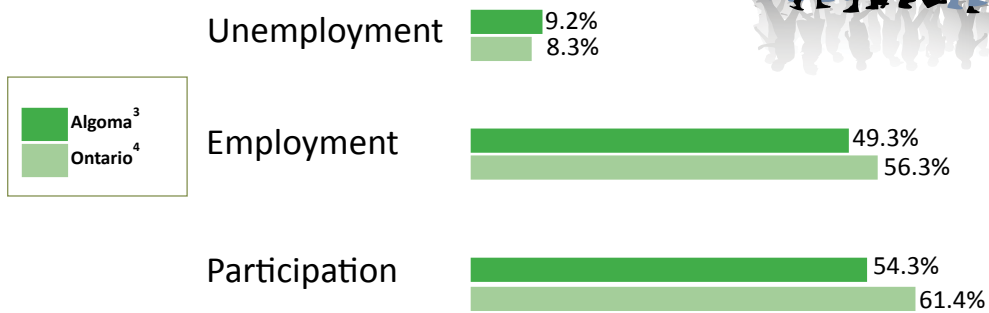


Did you know that a family of 4 making the average wage spends 11% of their total income on groceries while the same family living on minimum wage must spend 35% of their total income to purchase the same groceries.⁶

Population 12 and over reporting moderately or severely food insecure.⁷

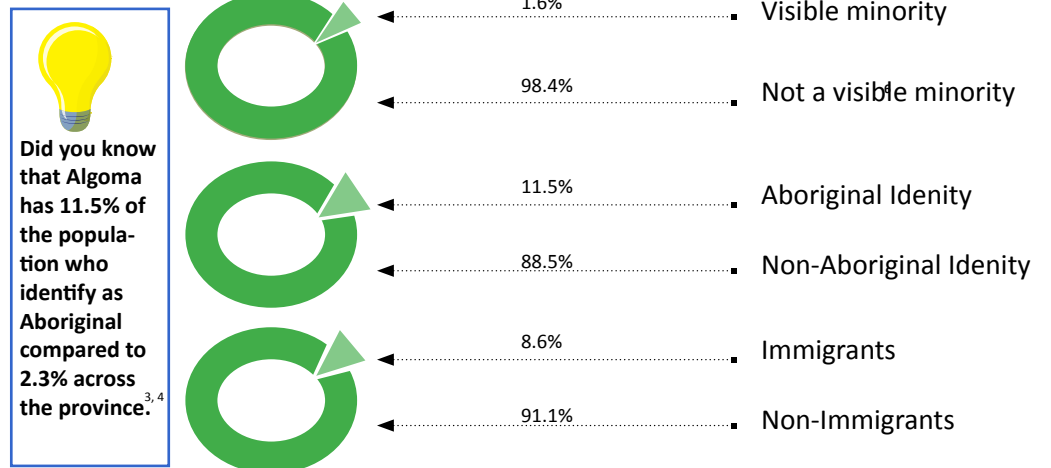


Labour Force^{3,4}



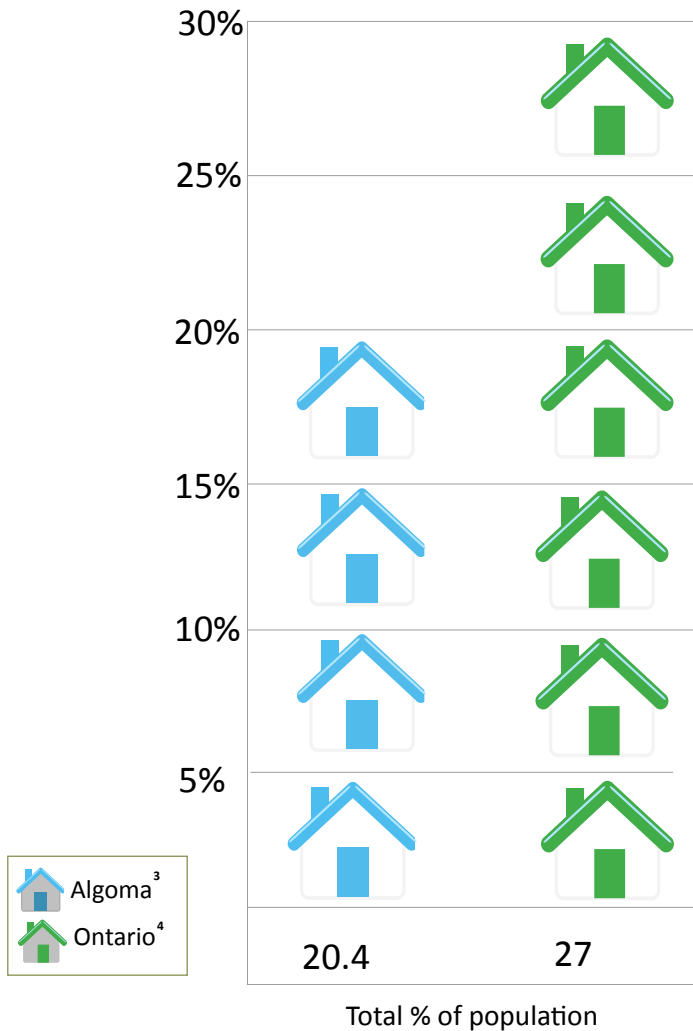
Labour force stats refers to whether a person was employed, unemployed or not in the labour force. Participation rate refers to the number of employed or actively looking for work.

Cultural Diversity in Algoma³



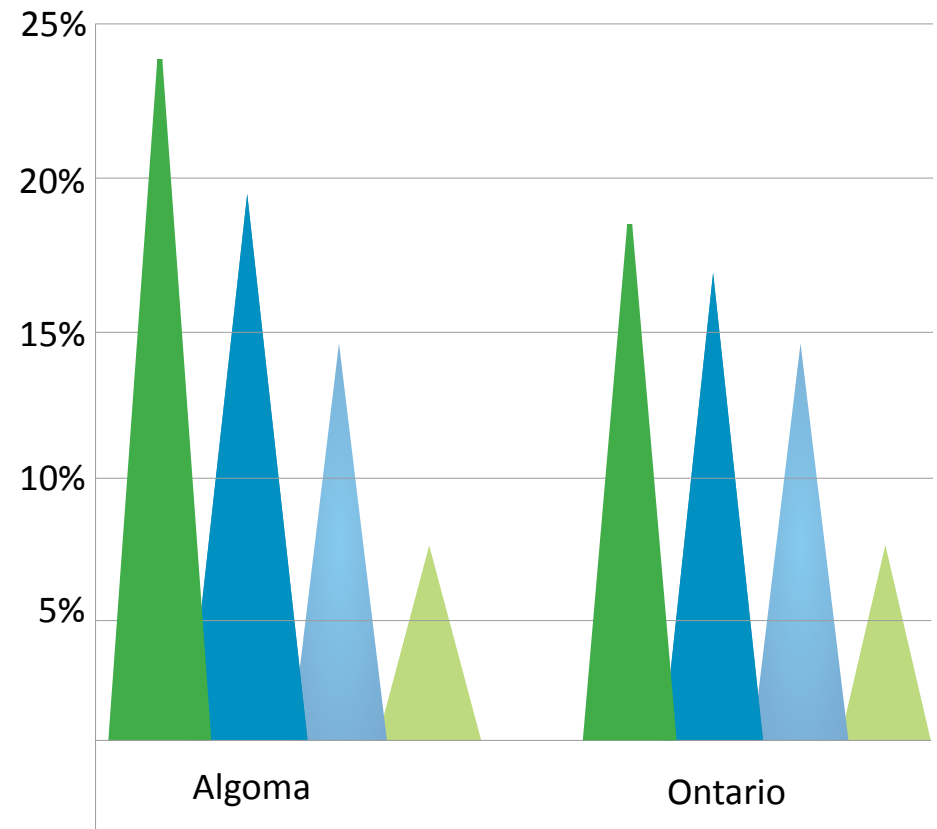
Income and Cost of Shelter ^{3,4}

Percentage of population that spends more than **30%** of household total income on shelter costs.




Low Income ^{3,4}

Percentage of total population living in poverty ^{3,4}



- ▲ Less than 6 years of age
- ▲ Less than 18 years of age
- ▲ 18-64
- ▲ 65+

 Did you know that in Algoma 1 in 4 children under 6 years of age lives in poverty?"

A large, diverse crowd of people, seen from behind, filling the frame. The people are of various ages and ethnicities, and the image is slightly blurred, suggesting a large gathering or event.

Health Equity: What does Public Health have to do with it?

Public Health [staff] practice at that intersection where societal attitudes, governmental policies and people's lives meet. Such privilege creates a moral imperative to work to change social conditions contributing to poor health.

Dr. Adeline Falk-Rafael

Health inequity is defined as differences in health that individuals or groups experience that are considered unfair and avoidable.

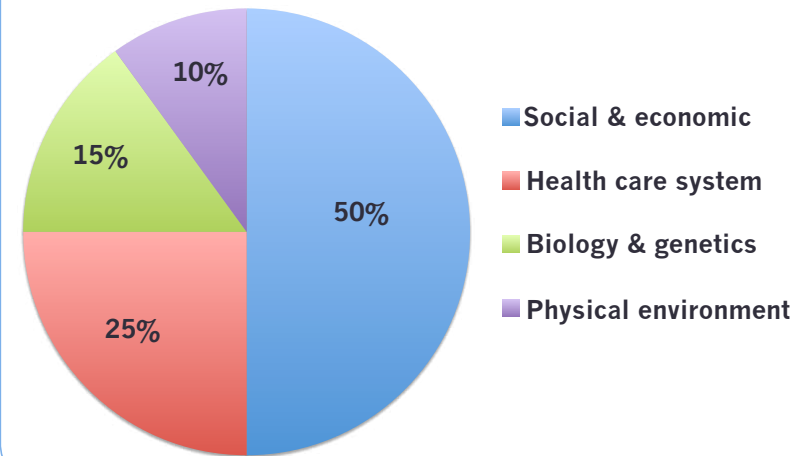
Social and economic factors, also referred to as social determinants of health, play a huge role in whether or not someone is healthy. These factors include things such as: **education and literacy, employment and working conditions, culture, physical environments and income and social status.**

In particular, limited income has been linked to poorer health outcomes. Basically, the poorer you are, the more likely you are to have poor health and a shorter lifespan.

Health equity is about leveling the playing field and ensuring that the resources needed to have the best health possible are available to everyone.

Algoma Public Health recognizes that some people have more obstacles to attaining good health than others. Every day, we see people living on low incomes who face challenges in areas such as food security, affordable housing, transportation and access to certain health services. Public health has a mandate to promote health equity and to reduce barriers to health and wellness for those living in our community wherever possible.

50% of health outcomes are related to social and economic conditions⁸

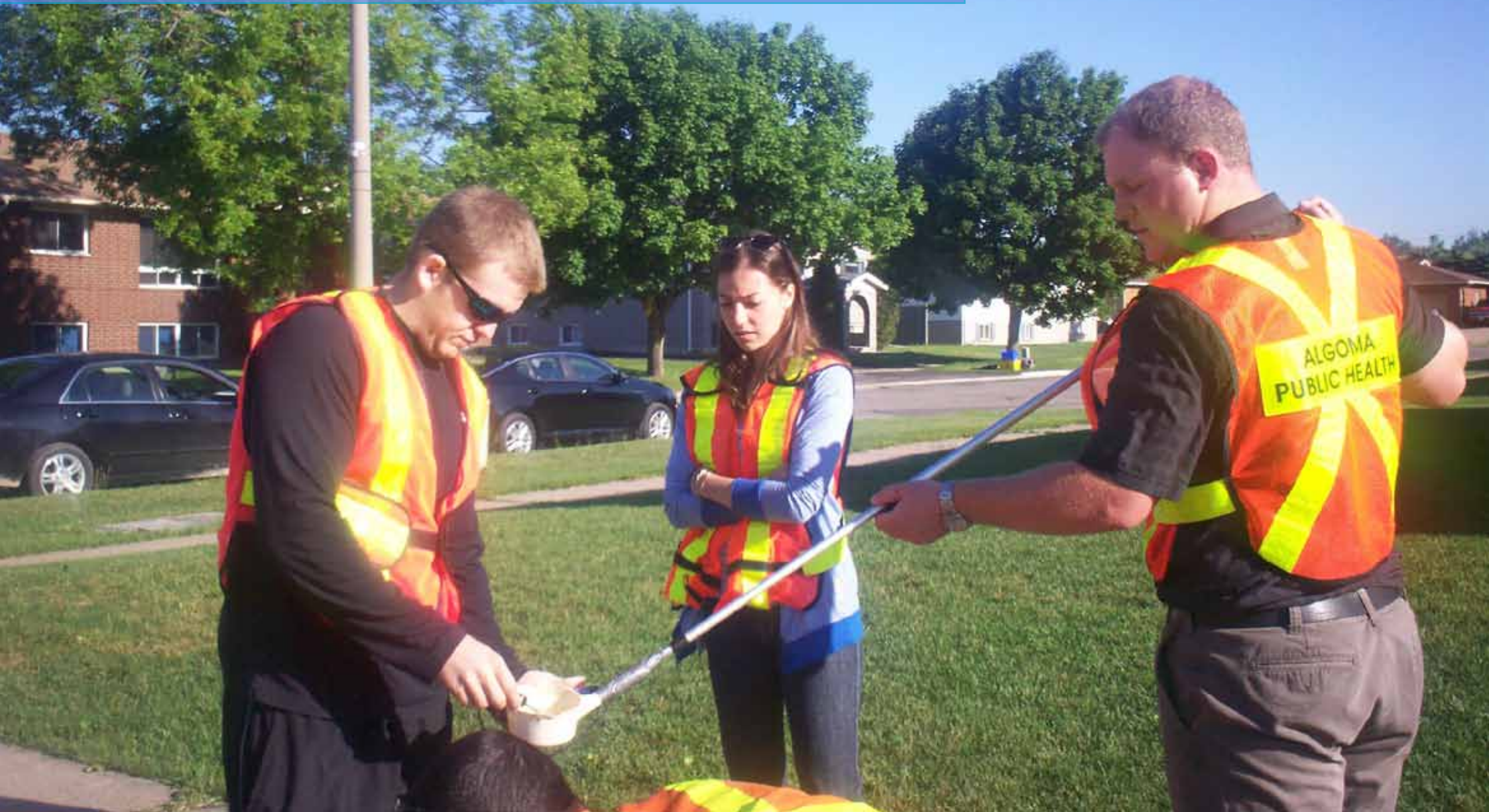


Algoma Public Health works to reduce health inequities by:

- promoting access to services
- reporting on evidence and information that acknowledges the impact of health inequities, as well as implementing strategies to improve them
- advocating for changes in unfair conditions
- partnering with others to improve the health, economic and social conditions of the citizens of Algoma

While these are certainly lofty goals, they can be attained by forming strong partnerships with the community we service and taking collective action.

Health Protection



Have you ever worried or wondered if something you are eating or doing is safe or if anyone has inspected a restaurant behind the scenes to ensure your health? As the manager health of environmental health services I can tell you that the answer is yes!

Algoma Public Health protects the health of all the residents in Algoma and any visitors by inspecting all public venues for safe drinking water, safe food handling practices, infection prevention and control practices, protection from second hand smoke, and other potential health hazards. One example of this occurred when a Public Health inspector assessed a venue prior to a big event – the inspector discovered that the water treatment system was not working properly and found E. coli in the water. The inspector was able to work quickly with the event coordinators to ensure all issues were corrected before the event potentially saving a Walkerton-like E. coli outbreak.

Additionally, as part of protecting the public, we participate in emergency planning with communities, monitor environmental issues such as exposure to West Nile Virus, rabies and Lyme disease and test pool and beach water for pathogens. Algoma Public Health is unique because our staff comes to you for investigations, complaints or concerns. We also

work with other agencies such as the Ministry of the Environment for your protection related to water safety and land control issues.

We provide training for people to build their skills that may help qualify them to get local jobs. We certify food handlers, educate new building inspectors about Radon, teach estheticians and tattoo artists about infection prevention and control, educate pool operators on how to manage pool chemistry and safety, and teach septic system installers about the building code. By providing free and low cost training to people working or wanting to work in various jobs in our community we are protecting public health by ensuring best practices are followed.

Housing issues affect many people in Algoma. They range from heating concerns, indoor air quality and mold, and in some cases, hoarding and living with pests such as bedbugs. Helping individuals with housing issues is challenging and often requires that agency partners in Algoma work together to help solve the concerns. I remember a person coming to the health unit in distress about having bed bugs and not having the physical or financial capability to help themselves--they were at their wits end. We were able to provide education and support and even gave mattress and pillow

case covers to help them at least protect themselves and be able to try to get a restful sleep.

No matter where you live or what you do we are working behind the scenes for everyone.

Other ways Public Health protects you includes ensuring that:

- food premises are inspected for sanitary and food safety operation
- the water that you have access to from a public venue is safe
- the tattoo you are about to get follows infection control best practices
- the pool or beach you swim in is safe
- the licensed daycare where you leave your child is inspected and following hygiene practices
- the group homes, long term care homes and homes for special care where your loved ones live are safe



In 2013, 446 food handlers throughout Algoma were certified, compared to 305 participants who were certified in 2012.



Food Handlers Certification Course

Unemployed people have more health problems and a shorter life expectancy than people who have a job. Lack of income limits one's choices around necessities like food, housing, and health care—all of which affect overall well-being. Therefore, helping individuals acquire job skills improves their chances of finding meaningful and sustainable employment.

The Environmental Health program provides formal training in Food Handler Safety at a significantly reduced rate to low income participants, qualifying them to work in the food service industry. Course participants gain knowledge of food safety principles and learn about their legal requirements under Ontario Food Premise Regulation 562.

Food safety is an important part of everyday life. The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that over 4 million cases of food-related enteric illnesses occur annually. However, most of these cases can be prevented by following the principles of safe food handling, preparation and storage. Employers are likely to favour applicants who possess this formal certification, since they do not have to spend the time and money training applicants about safe food handling once they are hired. Furthermore, the important skills gained throughout the session can also be used in the home environment.



Communicable Disease (Needle Exchange)

The Needle Exchange Program is a confidential service that provides a way for those who continue to inject to safely obtain and dispose of sterile syringes at no cost.

The Needle Exchange Program is a partnership between Algoma Public Health and Group Health Centre in Sault Ste. Marie to enhance the health and well-being of individuals, families and the community. Algoma Public Health staff provide needle exchange services to individuals and families in Wawa.

People who are involved with drug use often are living in situations that increase their health risks and reduce their access to health care. Harm reduction programs such as needle ex-



changes allow health services to reach out to individuals and encourage them to be as safe and well as possible in their current circumstances.

The Needle Exchange Program provides information and supportive non-judgmental counseling. Individuals can be linked to services to help them make informed decisions about their health including how to reduce their risks of acquiring and transmitting blood-borne viruses as well as maintain and improve their overall health.

Needle exchange programs have been shown to be an effective way to link some hard-to-reach injection drug users (IDUs) with important public health services. Additionally, having a safe and confidential place to return used syringes decreases the risk of these items being disposed of in unsafe ways that can put the community and environment at risk. In 2013 the needle exchange had over 64,000 syringes safely returned.

Flu shot!



Vaccine Preventable Diseases

The Universal Influenza Immunization Program was again a success for the 2012/2013 flu season.

Over **18,000** doses of free flu vaccine were given to eligible persons living, working or attending school in Algoma.

Clinics were offered in several communities throughout the district as well as Sault Ste. Marie.

Accessibility to the influenza vaccine continued to grow this year with many pharmacies providing vaccinations as well to individuals 5 years and older. Increasing access to free services enhances our overall community wellness which is an important piece of health equity.



Health Promotion

Do you remember a time when we didn't wear seatbelts? When we could buy cigarettes in vending machines? Or when schools served an abundance of junk food in cafeterias? Because of ongoing health promotion efforts, fewer people are injured or lose their lives in motor vehicle accidents. Rates of smoking and smoking-related disease are dropping, and the number of schools providing nutritious cafeteria menus continues to increase. By looking at the needs of our neighbourhoods and by working together, we can advocate for changes that improve health at an individual and a community level.

Public health has a unique leadership role in promoting the health of communities. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion outlines five strategies for doing this work:

- building healthy public policy
- creating supportive environments
- strengthening community action
- developing personal skills
- and reorienting health services⁹

We work closely with community partners to look at local data, to identify issues of concern and to develop solutions that make a difference. *Instead of trying to **fix** a problem, we attempt to understand what is **causing** the problem and to figure out how to **prevent** the problem from happening in the first place.*

Health promotion efforts extend far beyond just preventing illness. These efforts must consider things like income, culture, and other social determinants of health that make some people more vulnerable to poorer health than others. When we have the education and skills to make healthier choices, when our environments support those choices, and when barriers that prevent access to those choices are removed, the end result is a healthier community!



Exploring Sacred Use of Tobacco

Algoma Public Health partnered with the North Shore Tribal Council to create youth engagement photovoice opportunities with Anishinaabe youth and supportive adults in the Algoma district.

This partnership impacted 2 social determinants of health: culture and social support networks.

The photovoice projects used the art of photography to assist with the identification of youth priorities linked to tobacco misuse and to generate dialogue. Young people connected with community leaders to strategize ways for building healthier communities to live, learn, work and play in while strengthening social support networks in the process.

From an Anishinaabe cultural perspective, the goal was to honour the sacred use of tobacco as a medicine while preventing the commercial misuse that results in devastating, but preventable death and disease.



Tobacco. Keep it Sacred.

Did you know... the truth about tobacco?

TRADITIONAL TOBACCO IS A GIFT FROM MOTHER EARTH TO BE RESPECTED AND USED PROPERLY. JUST LIKE SWEET GRASS, SAGE AND CEDAR, TOBACCO IS A MEDICINE.

MANUFACTURED TOBACCO CAN MAKE YOU SICK. THEY TRICK YOU INTO THINKING IT'S HARMLESS, BUT IT CAUSES SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS SUCH AS CANCER.

JERRY, YOUTH LEADER
INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRE, SAULT STE. MARIE

Indian Friendship Centre Photovoice Project

Youth leaders at the Indian Friendship Centre used photography to contrast the sacred use of tobacco with the commercial misuse. In partnership with Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig, youth learned about the harvesting of traditional tobacco as a medicine and myths were dispelled. Traditional teachings were shared as well as health information about commercial tobacco. Youth created a display that has been used with follow up youth presentations and workshops to generate further discussion. Youth photos and perspectives were also incorporated into a North East regional tobacco prevention campaign.

Thessalon First Nation

Youth leaders in Thessalon First Nation took photos that contrasted the traditional use of tobacco with commercial use focusing on outdoor spaces. They made their own frames for the photos, and presented the final product to their community at National Addictions Awareness Week event, in which they received tremendous support for their work and ideas. This project will be followed up as youth leaders will be hosting a health promotion gathering designed to celebrate Anishinaabe culture and traditions that support physical, mental, spiritual and emotional balance and wellbeing and reduce serious health inequities.



Shared-Use Trails Committee

Everyone knows about the importance of physical activity and proper nutrition for good health. But do you know that the physical layout of a community largely determines whether or not its citizens choose healthy lifestyle options? Cities with safe, accessible parks, walking trails, and bike paths make it easier to be physically active. Places that have a variety of markets and grocery stores where people can buy nutritious foods are more likely to be healthier. An excellent example of a community initiative that promotes healthy living is The Shared Use Trail Committee in Elliot Lake.

Algoma Public Health is an active member of the Shared Use Trail Committee, which includes the city of Elliot Lake and various trail clubs (Snowmobile Club, Cross Country Skiing Club, Coureurs de Bois Club, Penokean Hills Field Naturalists and ATV Clubs). The group plays an important role in the design, maintenance and promotion of area trails, ensuring that they are safe and affordable for everyone. Members provide presentations and resources around a variety of healthy lifestyle topics, as well as providing tips for safe hiking. Committee members also organize year-round free events, like the Winterfest Family Snowshoe Walk, that encourage people of all ages to participate in fun physical activities.





LEAPing Forward in Elliot Lake

People are more likely to practice healthy lifestyle behaviours when they have the skills to cope with life's challenges, to solve problems, and to know where to go for help. In particular, parents who feel well supported by their community are better able to deal with parenting challenges and to nurture their child's optimal growth and development.

In October 2013, the Algoma District Services Administration Board (ADSAB) gathered family service agencies together for the LEAPing Forward (Learning, Earning and Parenting) community event. It provided parents, children, and the general public with a fun way to discover children's services and activities available in the area. Representatives from ADSAB, the Adult Education Centre, Algoma Family Services, Algoma Public Health, Ariel—the Art Gallery, Best Start Hub, Children's Rehabilitation Centre, City of Elliot Lake, daycare providers, North Channel Literacy and Fatima School Club manned information booths and provided children's craft activities and music. This community event was an excellent example of community partnership and a means for increasing awareness of services and opportunities for all families with young children.

I really enjoyed the day—the lunch provided for everyone was really nice and all the children were allowed to -choose a book. It helped me find out things that I didn't know were available for my child in the community. They had lots of really good door prizes and I was so pleased to win a grocery voucher. (Parent Participant)





Thessalon Healthy Living Club:
School Garden Project



Good nutrition is the foundation for overall health, especially for growing children.

It is a fact that many families in Algoma do not have enough money to buy healthy food.

The Thessalon School Garden Project teaches kids about planting, cultivating, and harvesting their own food in a community garden, which builds important skills for improving food security in the long-term.

Students learn how to grow fresh produce and to create snacks and meals with their harvest. They also make soups and pies with residents at Algoma Manor, and donate extra vegetables to the local food bank. The goal is to create a generation of kids who know how to grow and prepare healthy food while having fun doing it!

In October 2013, the club received the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) Healthy Living Club of the Year Award!

This acknowledgement is given to a school or community organization that has demonstrated leadership and excellence in successfully bringing together members of the community. The Thessalon Healthy Living Club successfully

plans and implements activities like the community garden thanks to an enthusiastic group of students of all abilities, their principal, teachers, and volunteers, as well as the generous support of local businesses, the municipality, and local agricultural and horticultural groups.





Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program

Algoma Public Health completed its sixth year of implementation of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) in 2012-2013, providing three servings of vegetables and fruit per week (from April to June) to over 10,000 elementary students across the district of Algoma.

There are numerous additional benefits to the program, such as:

- opportunities for student involvement in program delivery
- increased opportunities for student leadership
- ability to practice numeracy and literacy outside of the traditional classroom setting
- helping to create healthy school nutrition environments, where schools not only teach healthy eating in the classroom but students are able to practice healthy eating habits within their school environment
- no cost to schools
- all students within participating schools are able to participate



“Over the past three years since the program has come to [our school], staff have seen an increase in the number of children who are willing to try new fruits and vegetables. This is a really positive thing to note. The children really look forward to the days when we serve the fruits and vegetables. We also have many students who help with the running of the program (delivery, clean up). We have 2 loyal parents who prepare the fruits and veggies each week. We love the program and hope that it will be back next year.” (Participating School)

“We absolutely love the program & our students are so very excited to have a healthy snack provided! We appreciate it!” (Participating School)

The Northern Fruits and Vegetable Program helps to provide children essential personal health and coping skills that will enhance their health now, and in the future. It aims to educate children on the importance of vegetables and fruit by providing all children the opportunity to try new foods amidst the comfort of peers, and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in children. This program can also provide opportunities to learn and practice important life skills, such as food safety and food preparation.

This program is funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and its success is dependent on our valuable partnerships with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Massey Wholesale, Algoma District School Board, Huron Superior Catholic District School Board, Conseil Scolaire Catholique du Nouvel-Ontario, Conseil Scolaire Public du Grand-Nord de L’Ontario and Porcupine Health Unit.



Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)

Many expectant women in Algoma do not have enough food to last from cheque to cheque. Poor nutrition during pregnancy increases the mother's risk for gaining too little or too much weight and for developing health problems such as gestational diabetes, anemia, and high blood pressure. The baby is also at risk for being born with a low or high birth weight, which can affect birth outcome.

CPNP provides free milk or food vouchers and prenatal vitamins to vulnerable pregnant women in Algoma. Program staff work with participants to identify their needs, provide health education or home visiting support, and link them to helpful programs and services in their community. CPNP is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, while local businesses provide milk, food, and prenatal vitamins at cost for the program.

In 2013, 213 women in Sault Ste. Marie and 99 women in Algoma received support from CPNP.



Creating Safer Homes

Falls are the leading cause of unintentional injury for children resulting in emergency room visits and hospitalizations in both Ontario and Algoma.¹⁰

Young children, especially infants and toddlers, are vulnerable to serious injuries from falls because their heads are larger than their bodies, causing their heads to often contact the ground first.

Creating Safer Homes provides free home safety devices for families with limited financial resources who are involved in APH home visiting programs, such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children or the Infant Child Development Program. The home visitor is able to complete an in-home assessment



In 2013 a total of 40 families participated in the program. Thirty-one safety gates were provided with two families requiring the help of a contractor.

with parents and provide safety education and devices (i.e. safety gates, window stops for bedroom windows, door latches). A contractor is available to help families install these devices correctly if required.

Providing support to families who have limited resources has been identified as a best practice to reduce childhood injuries and foster optimal growth and development.



Nutritious Food Basket

Individuals and families living on low incomes such as social assistance or working minimum wage jobs continue to find it challenging to afford to eat healthy. Being food insecure can lead to poor nutrition which can increase risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer as well as poor growth and development in children. Each year, Algoma Public Health partners with 7 area grocery stores to conduct the annual Nutritious Food Basket survey. The cost of 67 food items is determined to establish the lowest available price to have an eating pattern that meets Canada's Food Guide recommendations. The assumption is that people have the time, skill and equipment needed to cook low-cost foods. The survey does not include prepared convenience



foods or non-food household items.

The weekly cost of feeding a family of four in Algoma was \$194.12 which is an 11.4% increase in just 3 years.⁶

Many area families cannot afford to eat well as most of their income goes to pay hous-

ing, utilities, transportation, child care etc. and often they are forced to cut into their food budget to pay for these other living expenses. They skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk and fill up on non-nutritious foods because they are cheap. **The average Ontario family with a monthly income of \$6,852 must spend 12% of their income to eat well while a family on Ontario Works with an income of \$2,130 (includes other income such as Child Tax Benefit, HST credit and Ontario Trillium Benefit) would have to spend 39% of their income.⁶**

Measuring the cost of nutritious food is one step in drawing attention to the need for our community to advocate for people to have adequate incomes and affordable housing and child care so that they are able to buy healthy food for themselves and their families.



ICDP Christmas Party

Life can be challenging for families with children with special needs and feelings of being alone or disconnected are common. Connecting to a community of families with similar issues increases a sense of belonging, social inclusion and understanding.

One of the ways Algoma Public Health's Infant and Child Development and Healthy Babies Healthy Children's programs promote this is through the annual client Christmas party.

The party is supported by many individuals and community partners including Ladies of the Royal Purple, Algoma District School Board, Huron Superior Catholic District School Board, community volunteers, local grocery stores and more.

Children and their families come together for Christmas festivities and experience the caring and acceptance of this supportive community.

I feel good in this environment because there are other children with special needs here and my child does not stand out...it doesn't make me feel so alone.
(Father at party)





Supportive Housing

Housing is a fundamental human right, a basic need that is strongly tied to people's quality of life as well as their physical, social, emotional and mental health.

Lack of stable housing impacts mental health issues, which are made worse by lack of access to supports and services. Homelessness increases the risks for developing many acute and chronic diseases.

Providing a housing program with rent supplements and supports is a more cost effective way to assist persons living with mental health and addictions issues compared to the cost involved with frequent visits to emergency rooms, psychiatric hospital, shelters and prisons.

The provision of housing can contribute to reducing psychiatric symptoms and decrease the need for unnecessary emergency department visits and extended hospitalization stays.

In 2008 the financial cost of supportive housing is \$13,000- \$18,000 annually/per individual compared to the cost of providing care in psychiatric hospitals at \$66,000 - \$120,000.

11

Most notably however, is the fact that recovery from mental illness and addictions cannot happen if people do not have adequate housing.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Community Mental Health delivers a rent supplement program across the Algoma District to persons living with a serious and persistent mental illness. In addition through partnership with the community, the tenants may receive their support from Algoma Public Health's Community Mental Health case management program, Sault Area Hospital's PACT program, the Sault Area hospital STEP program (First Episode psychosis) and Community Living Algoma. With cooperation from the Ontario Disability Support Program

and Ontario Works offices we are able to deliver a rent subsidy cheque monthly to our community landlords. The main goal of the rent supplement program is to assist our clients with obtaining and maintaining safe, affordable housing and still manage to have finances available for basic needs such as a nutritious diet. Together with support and financial assistance the clients have had many successes with stability both physically and emotionally allowing them to succeed in ways they may not have thought possible.

Our Community Mental Health program manages a rent subsidy budget of \$240,000 delivering a rent subsidy to 135 persons across the Algoma district.



"Now for the first time I have a home. I feel safe which is something new to me. Nobody is breaking into my apartment to steal my medications. I can take care of my health now that I have a safe place to live."

(Program Client)



Northeastern Ontario Postpartum Mood Disorder Strategy

Postpartum Mood Disorders are real... 1 in 5 mothers will have a Postpartum Mood Disorder.

Within the province of Ontario, there is no coordinated comprehensive strategy for families suffering with postpartum mood disorders (PPMD). Families are experiencing a postal code lottery where their place of residence determines their access to services. There are currently too many gaps for families experiencing PPMD in Algoma.

The Northeastern Ontario Postpartum Mood Disorder project combined the voices of professionals, community members and women with lived experience from four communities. A photovoice project and exhibit brought this strategy to life!

Twelve women across Northeastern Ontario who experienced PPMD emerged in response to this photovoice opportunity. The sense of control gained from this experience resulted in improved social networks, and enhanced personal health practices and coping skills of these women. The women came forward and spoke about their personal experiences, providing awareness, education, and peer support for the larger community - prior to this project

these women were mostly silent.

The photo exhibit and personal stories were highlighted at two conferences in Sault Ste. Marie engaging 500 community professionals working throughout Algoma. The professionals shared supportive insights after hearing the personal stories of local women.

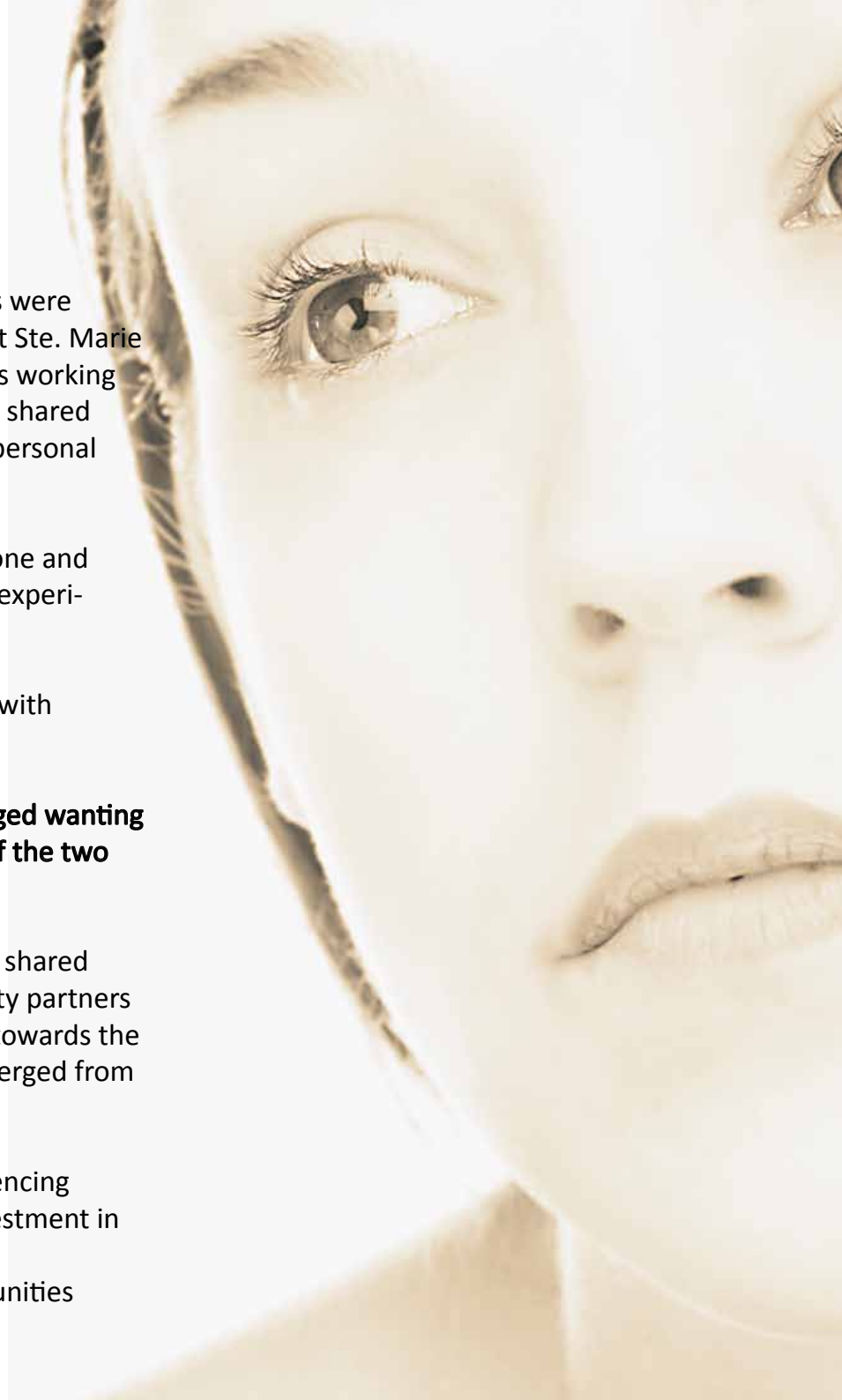
“Women need to know they’re not alone and there is nothing shameful about their experiences.” “

This has helped me understand those with PPMD”.

Seven new community partners emerged wanting to be part of this strategy as a result of the two conferences.

Algoma Public Health is proud to have shared this experience with several community partners and looks forward to continued work towards the three recommendations that have emerged from this strategy:

- 1) End the suffering of families experiencing PPMD in Northeastern Ontario by investment in families
- 2) Competency building within communities
- 3) Education campaigns





Aboriginal Liaison

Culture is a well documented social determinant of health and has been shown to have both negative and positive impacts in relation to health.

In Algoma 11.5% of the population self-identifies as being Aboriginal.³

Algoma Public Health recognizes that improving health equity includes supporting and working with aboriginal partners.

In 2013, a Public Health Nurse (PHN) worked with the Baawaating Family Health Team (FHT) in Batchewana.

Family Health Team's are health care organizations that include a team of family physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, social workers, dietitians, and other professionals who work together to provide health care for their community. They focus on chronic disease management, disease prevention and health promotion, and work with other health care organizations, such as Public Health and Community Care Access Centres.

Additionally, public health nurses have been providing and continue to offer prenatal, post-natal and breastfeeding services at the Garden River Wellness Centre.

In November 2013, a Public Health Nurse started as the Aboriginal Liaison for Algoma Public Health.

The goal of this role is to:

- Better understand the needs of First Nations Communities with respect to the types of services we currently provide in Algoma
- Enhanced two-way communication
- Participate on key provincial and federal committees mandated to examine the future of public health delivery
- To better inform public health and First Nations communities regarding future direction

The Aboriginal Liaison PHN has been working closely with staff and directors at APH and meeting with the Health Directors at the North Shore Tribal Council, within the First Nations Communities, and the Indian Friendship Centre. We look forward to building on this new role and expanding on our existing relationships.



Supportive Community Group



The Community Alcohol and Drug Assessment Program (CADAP) provides educational and recovery-focused groups for individuals living with addictions.

Strong internal and external partnerships often allow counsellors to co-facilitate with community partners bringing varied expertise to the groups.

Groups provide a supportive environment that, for many, offers a vehicle for growth, increased knowledge and coping skills assistive of recovery. These groups promote social inclusiveness and connectedness in a safe environment for individuals who often feel stigmatized. This social support network increases resiliency and enhances healthy choices and overall wellness.

In 2013, counsellors facilitated 59 group sessions.

Individuals may self-refer or be referred by social services or health care providers.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown cardigan, is smiling warmly while holding a newborn baby wrapped in a white blanket. The background is a textured stone wall. The word "Prevention" is written in large white letters on a dark grey semi-transparent banner at the bottom left of the image.

Prevention

As a public health nurse, I have a unique and privileged opportunity to prevent tragic events in people's lives.

How many cases of sudden infant death syndrome do my colleagues prevent each year through education about safe sleep environments? How many moms with postpartum depression are screened by public health staff and referred to skilled professionals, preventing a potentially catastrophic infant or maternal death? How many babies are not born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder because of time spent talking to moms about the damaging effects of alcohol and pregnancy? I meet many moms who are not aware of that particular risk.

I recently interacted with a pregnant teen, who shared with me that she was using drugs. She is a beautiful, mature, well-spoken young woman who said "I never thought this would be me." In an effort to prevent a negative outcome for this mom and baby, this mother was referred on the spot to our Community Alcohol Drug Assessment Program. A skilled staff member spoke to this mom about her options including our methadone program. Methadone use during pregnancy is much safer than other opiates and improves outcomes for moms and babies. This is a harm reduction approach, allowing people to reduce or eliminate the harmful consequences of their addiction. This teen was referred to the methadone program that very same day. By being proactive, this pregnant mother may have prevented exposure to HIV or Hepatitis C Infection. She recently gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby girl.

Sometimes prevention is hard to see, but in my opinion the power of prevention is immeasurable.



Summer School Readiness Program



Young children need certain skills in order to be “ready” for school. Some of these skills include communicating well, following rules, getting along with others, and fine and gross motor skills. Children who start school not ready to learn are at a disadvantage, and often never catch up.

Education contributes to health and prosperity by increasing knowledge and problem-solving skills, which lead to increased opportunities for job and income security, and job satisfaction (later in life).

Working in partnership with the Algoma District School Board and the Huron Superior Catholic District School Board, Summer School Readiness programs were run at three area schools. The camps focused on helping children with identified speech, language, or developmental needs meet the demands of school. The program included free play, circle and story time, healthy snacks, physical activities and crafts. Sixty-six children attended the camps. Free bus transportation was provided to ensure that children in all social circumstances could attend.

Results indicated that 74% of these children made significant gains in communication, participation and performance skills based on pre and post evaluations.



Oral Health Services

Dental decay and pain in young children can lead to poor nutritional intake, lack of sleep, behavioural problems and affect the growth of their adult teeth. In school-age children dental caries can lead to decreased self-esteem and socialization which can affect school performance, ability to learn, and their overall potential to succeed.

The oral health program monitors the rate of dental decay in children through screening programs. **In Algoma the percentage of children who were screened in junior and senior kindergarten that presented with cavities or a history of cavities in 2012-13 was 42%.**

Families who struggle to provide basic needs such as housing and food often find themselves unable to afford important preventative care such as dental visits. Additionally, some families have no or limited access to a dental home.



Algoma Public Health (APH) works with families and individuals in the community to offer preventative health services according to the publicly funded programs.

In addition, a partnership between contracted dentists in Sault Ste. Marie and APH has been developed to help to bridge the gap for access to urgent treatment.

A weekly treatment clinic is offered to CINOT (Children in Need of Treatment) eligible children. CINOT is a provincially mandated program provided to ease the burden on families, where access to oral health services is a barrier. Also, APH works with the local dental community to promote positive oral health messaging.

The data and the prevalence of families in need reinforce the importance of enhancing health promotion practices, including education, preventive services, and engagement of community partners to improve the oral health of children in Algoma.





Did you know that Blind River, Elliot Lake, and Wawa have fluoridated water? Water fluoridation is effective in reducing the risk of tooth decay, and is the most cost-effective way of providing the benefits of fluoride to all residents in a community regardless of age, socioeconomic status, education, employment or dental insurance status.¹²

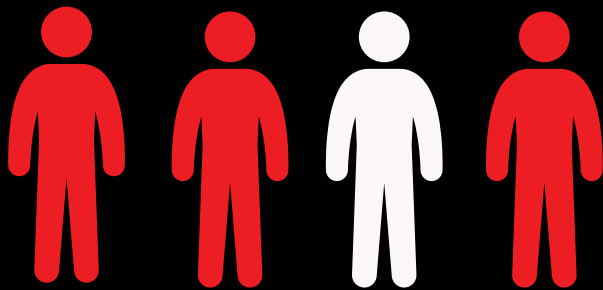


Sexual Health

The number of people living in Ontario with HIV/AIDS has risen significantly from 22,535 people in 2005 to 27,420 in 2009.

One in four people who have HIV don't know

1 in 4
people who have
HIV don't know it



HIV
It's real
It's here
Get tested NOW

they have it and this is a contributing factor to increasing infection rates.

In 2013 the Algoma Public Health (APH) sexual health program in partnership with the Group Health Centre HIV/AIDS Resource Program (HARP) promoted a 1 in 4 media awareness campaign aimed at encouraging people who are at a higher risk of HIV infection to get tested.

Access and cost of testing is often an issue for high risk individuals and APH offers free testing including a rapid test (POC-point of care) that can give results in less than an hour. This service is only one of many free or affordable sexual health services offered at APH.



Central Algoma Sexual Health Services

Clients who live in rural areas face unique challenges to maintaining optimal health.

Health services in these areas are fewer and there are limited options in terms of accessing healthful foods and healthy recreational activity at reasonable costs. Also, there are longer distances to travel between their home and city centres where



their required services may exist. There are often fewer places for employment that offer drug benefits, and a number of individuals work for low income.

Services for women to access sexual health in Thessalon and Central Algoma were limited. Clients desiring birth control or emergency contraceptives (ECP) had one pharmacy option at which to purchase. The only other option would require travel to Sault Ste Marie or Blind River to access more affordable birth control through Algoma Public Health's existing sexual health services program, thereby adding travel costs and inconvenience for those with limited access to means of travel.

In the summer of 2013, work began in the Blind River office to initiate a sexual health services outreach program for Central Algoma. Services would include affordable birth control sales, contraceptive counselling, ECP sales, pregnancy tests and counselling, free condom distribution, and links to other community services and supports.

This plan came to fruition at the beginning of 2014 and has since evolved into an active partnership with the North Channel Nurse Practitioner-Led clinic (NCNPLC) in Thessalon. With a location within the NCNPLC, APH clinics are now offered twice a month and run concurrently with the NCNPLC's women's health clinic allowing for easy referrals between the agencies as necessary to complement one another's services.



Genetic Counselling Services

The Genetic Clinic helps individuals and families in the Algoma district to understand genetic factors in diseases, disabilities and birth defects. Our team consists of two visiting geneticists, a genetic counsellor and three public health nurses, who meet with clients to investigate genetic disorders and to recommend treatment options. We also coordinate access to genetic testing, which has opened the door to confirmation of diagnoses that were not possible a decade ago.

The knowledge provided at the clinic helps clients to make informed decisions about their plan of care. When that client is a child, early diagnosis and timely access to services are especially important for achieving optimal growth and development outcomes.

For those who live in rural or remote areas or those who cannot afford transportation to Sault Ste. Marie, the clinic provides videoconferencing services via the Ontario Telemedicine Network. We assist clients with completing the Ontario Travel Grant applications when travel to medical services elsewhere in Ontario is needed.

In 2013, the genetic clinic accepted 365 new referrals. This included 207 cancer referrals, 135 general (medical) referral, 5 preconception and 18 prenatal referrals. This is a 24% increase in the number of referrals over those received in 2012.



Supporting people living with mental illness to quit smoking



People who live with chronic mental illness are twice as likely to smoke as the general population. Furthermore, those with multiple lifetime psychiatric diagnoses are usually heavier smokers, making quitting even more challenging due to stronger nicotine addiction.

Although many individuals experiencing mental illness might not be at a point of readiness to make a quit attempt, there are many that are motivated to try to make a positive change to their smoking behaviour. While smoking is perceived by many as way to help cope with stress, others have reported feeling better and experiencing a significant sense of accomplishment after having quit smoking.

During the tobacco reduction or cessation journey, it is very important for health care providers to monitor people using medications for their mental

illness closely for any signs of medication toxicity and possible side effects. These medication dosages often need to be adjusted along the way.

People who struggle with serious chronic mental illness are more likely to be stigmatized and socially isolated and less likely to access health services. To address inequities around access to resources and supports, Community Mental Health staff regularly home visit clients who are affected by chronic mental illness. Our staff has been trained to provide smoking behaviour change support as well as intensive, one-to-one smoking cessation counselling to interested clients during these home visits. They help clients to practice new coping strategies and to create realistic, success-driven individualized behavior change plans. To help manage nicotine withdrawal symptoms, discounted Nicotine Replacement Treatment (NRT) vouchers are also provided in partnership with local pharmacies.

One client stated **“Without the help with the cost of my NRT lozenges, I would not have been able to quit.”**

Successful tobacco use harm reduction or cessation is possible for those living with serious, chronic mental illness. The key is to meet clients ‘where they are at’ and then offer the right supports when they are ready to make tobacco use behaviour changes.

Spotlight on Health Services: Wawa

Nurses from the Algoma Public Health Office in Wawa identified a gap in specific health services in the rural community of White River, located 90 km north of Wawa. During their 2013 flu clinics in White River, APH nurses distributed surveys to community members that asked what sort of public health services they would like to see in their community. Tobacco cessation, vaccination, sexual health, and parent/child programming were identified by many as services they felt were lacking. It was very evident that community members would appreciate more outreach from the Algoma Public Health office to fill some health inequities.

As a result and thanks to a strong partnership with the White River Medical Clinic, APH services are now much more accessible to the residents of White River. Monthly clinics began in January 2014 and are particularly busy when it comes to giving vaccines, and assisting families with infants and children through our child health services such as the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition and Healthy Babies Healthy Children Programs. Posters advertising the dates the nurses will be in white River to offer the clinics are posted at many local businesses in the community well in advance of the clinic dates. Word of mouth has also been a great way of promoting this service. So far this form of outreach has been hugely successful.



Sault Rising Stars



The Sault Rising Stars seniors Acting Troupe are peer mentors, educators, ambassadors and role models. The troupe travels throughout the District of Algoma and through the innovative use of theatre shares knowledge and skills designed to promote healthy and safe lifestyles. Their delivery of light hearted vignettes are raising awareness about seniors' issues, de-stigmatizing aging and promoting personal health practices and coping skills. Audiences respond enthusiastically to the light hearted skits and the troupe has created a social support network among themselves and their audiences.

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION:



MISSION:

Together with our communities, Algoma Public Health is a leader in promoting and protecting health and well-being.

VISION:

Together, we create and sustain healthy communities.