

Persevering Through Partnerships to Promote and Protect Health

Public Health at Work in Algoma
2021 Report to the Community

Our Vision

Together, we create and sustain healthy communities.

Our Mission

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

Our Values

Excellence - Respect - Accountability & Transparency - Collaboration



Algoma
PUBLIC HEALTH
Santé publique Algoma

What is Public Health?

“Public health is the outbreak that did not happen, the traumatic injury that did not occur, and the overdose that was avoided. Public health protects our healthcare system by reducing the need for medical treatments, and helping people stay healthy and well.”

Dr. Theresa Tam,

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer

When we prioritize public health, through **health promotion**, **health protection**, and **disease and injury prevention**, people stay healthy and well, the healthcare system remains available to those who need it most, and the economy grows.

Everyone benefits from public health.

Resource:

Government of Canada. (2021). [Annual report: The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's 2021 report on the state of public health in Canada: A Vision to Transform Canada's Public Health System.](#)

Welcome to Algoma.
Please put on your face mask and come on in.

Overdose does not discriminate.

STEP 2
PERSONAL CARE SERVICES
Open at 25% capacity with physical distancing. Services that require the removal of a face mask are not permitted.

Prenatal education

COVID-19 Vaccine Pop-up Clinic
No appointment needed!
The clinic is on Wednesday, September 1st, from 11:00am to 2:00pm
Visit us at the Royal Canadian Legion in **White River** (108 Winnipeg St.)
This clinic is offering first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine
This clinic is available to anyone 12+ (Pfizer)

Contact Tracing: How does it Work?
Learn more about what it is, how it works and what goes into this important process.

National Breastfeeding Week 2021
October 1 - 7

A Message from the Board of Health Chair

Throughout 2021, Algoma Public Health (APH), along with community partners and Algoma residents, continued to come together to minimize serious illness and death, and minimize societal disruption, related to COVID-19.

We also led the largest vaccine roll-out in Algoma's history, administering COVID-19 vaccines to all eligible groups to protect our community, one dose at a time.

This did not stop the important, prioritized work done for health promotion and protection, giving us a boost of optimism to start looking towards COVID-19 recovery.

The role of public health has become more visible during the pandemic – in the news, on social media, and through actions and conversation in our workplaces, schools, and homes. However, outside of COVID-19, the work of public health is largely behind the scenes to help all people achieve optimal health and wellbeing, and our communities become safer, healthier, and more inclusive places work live, work and play.

This report to the community gives you some of the many highlights of 2021.

Sally Hagman

Chair, Board of Health

Dr. Jennifer Loo

Medical Officer of Health/CEO

2021 Board of Health

Member	Appointed By
Sally Hagman (Chair)	Township of Blind River, Township of Spanish, Township of North Shore
Ed Pearce (1st Vice Chair)	City of Elliot Lake
Deborah Graystone (2nd Vice-Chair)	Province of Ontario
Louise Caicco Tett	City of Sault Ste. Marie
Micheline Hatfield	The Municipality of Wawa, Township of White River, Township of Dubreuilville
Lee Mason	Town of Bruce Mines, Village of Hilton Beach & Townships of Hilton, Jocelyn, Johnson, Laird, MacDonald, Meredith & Aberdeen Additional, Plummer Additional, Prince, St. Joseph, Tarbutt Township
Musa Onyuna	City of Sault Ste. Marie
Brent Rankin	Town of Thessalon, Municipality of Huron Shores
Matthew Scott	City of Sault Ste. Marie



Health Protection

Strengthening our COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Algoma Public Health's intense response to COVID-19, through increased public health measures and infection prevention and control practice education, implementation and enforcement, risk communication, testing, case and contact management, outbreak management, and health promotion, has benefitted community health and safety.

In partnership with municipalities, health sector partners, community organizations, and Algoma residents, pandemic response goals continued to be met. The Healthy Workplace Team and Public Health Inspectors supported facilities through the Roadmap to Reopening Ontario, and vaccine mandates were implemented as another strategy to minimize risk of transmission and illness.

COVID-19 brought some new challenges in 2021, requiring us all to step up our public health measures to protect our communities:

- When local COVID-19 activity surged and led to increased risk in Algoma, the Medical Officer of Health issued additional local measures to protect communities. This included a two-week delay in the resumption of in-person learning in high schools in January, and during the Delta wave of the fall, extending proof of vaccination requirements for organized sports, requiring isolation for cases and contacts, and strengthening capacity limits, and masking requirements.
- Delta and Omicron variants of concern were detected in Ontario, and circulated in Algoma, resulting in higher rates of community transmission and illness near the end of 2021.
- Algoma experienced its biggest wave of COVID-19, dominated by the Delta variant and pushed even higher at the end of the year by the Omicron variant. During the last 8 weeks of 2021 (November 7th-December 31st) we averaged 210 new cases of COVID-19 per week, ranging from 130-478 new cases per week. At one point, we became the health unit with the highest incidence rate in Ontario (week ending December 4th).
- Province-wide changes to case and contact management in December 2021 shifted our focus from containment of COVID-19 to mitigation in highest risk settings.

Because of our strong, collective efforts:

- Serious illness and death remained limited in Algoma, despite a surge in late 2021.
- Community action to keep transmission low helped to minimize societal disruption.

COVID-19 by the numbers:

- **2,148** cases of COVID-19 among Algoma residents and non-Algoma residents temporarily in Algoma were provided case management in 2021.
- **71** Algoma outbreaks were managed by APH.
- General COVID-19 phone line responded to over **2500 calls per month**.



To learn more about the COVID-19 response throughout 2021, read our [Budget Report](#) that explains the work, the impact, and the cost of COVID-19 for public health and our community.

Health Protection

Becoming a Hub for Infection Prevention and Control

Infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices are one of the best things we can all do to keep ourselves and others safe and healthy.

IPAC practices, such as hand washing, screening, getting vaccinated, isolating when sick, and using our masks, can reduce the risk of transmission of microorganisms that can make us sick.

IPAC practices have been intertwined with public health and community partners long before COVID-19. This has included outbreak management (e.g., chickenpox in schools), inspections (e.g. long-term care), and case and contact management (e.g., influenza).

In fall 2020, APH became the designated Algoma hub for provincial IPAC funding intended to build IPAC capacity across high risk settings to protect those most vulnerable. In these settings, education, inspections and using evidence-informed practice can break the chain of transmission of germs to reduce illness.

Algoma Public Health has collaborated with high-risk settings such as long-term care homes, retirement homes, hospitals, hospices, correctional institutions, First Nations elder lodges, schools and daycares, and congregate living facilities (e.g., group homes, shelters, etc.) to curb the spread of COVID-19. To ensure IPAC support, APH aligned a liaison to each facility across the district.



LEARN MORE



[Program highlights](#)

[Infection Prevention & Control](#)

Health Protection

Coming Together to Chat about Climate Change

The climate crisis is a public health emergency.

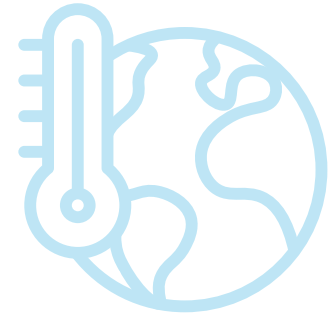
Algoma Public Health works to reduce exposure to health hazards and promote the development of healthy built and natural environments that support health and mitigate existing and emerging risks, including the impacts of a changing climate.

To address risk factors, we need to understand the impacts of climate change on health in Algoma, who is at greatest risk from these impacts, and how we can work with partners to address the impacts of climate change on our health.

With 7 northern public health units, APH continued as an active partner within the Northern Climate Change and Health Collaborative [Health ADAPT](#) project by working towards the development of a Vulnerability & Adaptation Assessment for Algoma.

In 2021, Algoma Public Health:

- Hosted 19 virtual climate chats to learn about local perceptions on the impacts of climate change on health.
- Wrote a [blog for the Clean North](#) celebrating Earth Day, by talking about climate change and health.
- Delivered a guest [webinar for Sault Climate Hub](#).
- Advocated for greater action to address [climate change](#).
- Worked on a local Vulnerability & Adaptation Assessment for Algoma and a climate science and health report.



[Impacts of Climate Change on Algoma](#)

Health Protection

Activating Emergency Response during Wildfires

The climate crisis is a public health emergency.

In summer 2021, northern Ontario communities experienced wildfires, requiring the evacuation of 100 individuals from North Spirit Lake First Nations to Sault Ste. Marie.

APH, as part of Sault Ste. Marie's Emergency Operations Centre, mobilized with partners to ensure the health and safety of evacuees, while continuing the COVID-19 response.

APH deployed two public health inspectors to work on-site at the host facility daily, to ensure appropriate infection prevention and control measures were in place, assess risk, provide education, and deliver harm reduction and public health supplies (e.g., toothbrushes, personal protective equipment, sanitizer, condoms, and naloxone).

Communications on air quality were also amplified to alert Algoma communities of the risks to health from wildfire smoke exposure, especially among vulnerable populations (i.e., young children, seniors, and those with respiratory conditions), and to provide strategies for risk mitigation.

ALERT

Special Air Quality Statement:

- Sault Ste. Marie - St. Joseph Island
- Elliot Lake - Ranger Lake
- Blind River - Thessalon
- White River - Dubreuilville
- Wawa - Pukaskwa Park
- Agawa - Lake Superior Park
- Searchmont - Montreal River Harbour

Health Promotion

Rolling up our Sleeves for COVID-19 Vaccines

Health Canada began authorizing safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines for use in Canada in December 2020.

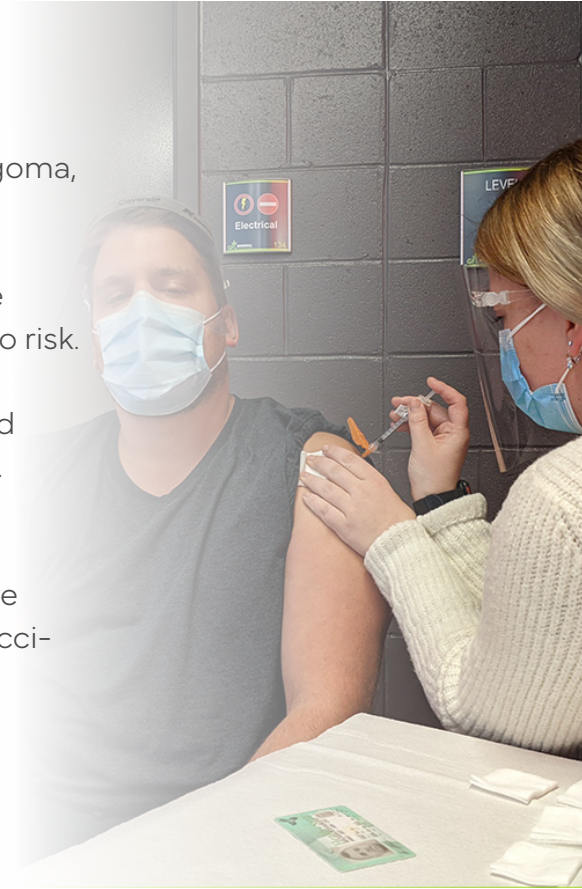
Following the Government of Ontario's priority groups and timeline for distribution of vaccine, in Algoma, the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine was administered on January 27th, 2021 in long-term care.

The goals of our COVID-19 immunization campaign included achieving protective vaccine coverage across Algoma in a safe, efficient, effective and equitable manner, by prioritizing access according to risk.

Throughout 2021, COVID-19 vaccine doses (first, second, and third dose boosters) were administered across the district, by public health, primary care, pharmacy, Indigenous-led, and community clinics.

Through pop-ups and mobile clinics, APH and partners reached those most at-risk from COVID-19, including those in long-term care, congregate living settings, and shelters, as well as those who were homebound. Sensory-friendly clinics also provided a quiet, low stimulus environment for getting vaccinated.

Community partners, such as the Algoma Vaccine Support Council, also stepped up to provide free transportation to clinics, share credible vaccine information, and deliver hot meals for workers.



Young defenders aged 5-11, youth 12-17, and adults 18+ quickly rolled up their sleeves, resulting in:

- **220,726** doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered in 2021 across all channels in Algoma.
- **84.7%** of eligible individuals aged 5+ received at least 1 dose of COVID-19 vaccine in 2021.
- **79.2%** of eligible individuals aged 5+ received at least 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine in 2021.
- **36.1%** of eligible individuals aged 18+ received at least 3 doses of COVID-19 vaccine in 2021.



Health Promotion

Boosting Vaccine Confidence

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 with two doses, or three dose if eligible, provides the best protection against severe illness and death from COVID-19. The decision to #getvaccinated meant having an understanding of the benefits and risks to vaccination.

To support Algoma residents, vaccine champions across the district, along with APH and community partners, shared evidence-informed vaccine information and resources to boost confidence and understanding of the importance of getting vaccinated.

- Hosted virtual town halls with healthcare professionals to answer questions
- Maintained a COVID-19 phone line to answer vaccine-related questions
- Developed webpages and social media materials to answer FAQs about the COVID-19 vaccines and getting vaccinated
- Launched our Be There for This campaign
- Participated in a Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League campaign encouraging vaccination
- Hosted family-friendly vaccine clinics for children aged 5-11, giving them the powerful protection needed to be YOUNG DEFENDERS against COVID-19

To support workplaces and organizations with COVID-19 vaccine policies, APH created a COVID-19 Vaccine Policy Toolkit with essential information and tips, and circulated information on how to access a vaccine receipt and where to use it in Algoma.

CALLING ALL YOUNG DEFENDERS



Be A Hero, get Vaccinated.

Vaccinations are available for **5 to 11 year old children**.
Ask your healthcare provider or visit our website today for a
local community clinic or participating pharmacy near you.

Health Promotion

Recommitting to Reconciliation

Algoma Public Health staff consulted with First Nations and Métis partners to create an Algoma district-wide Land Acknowledgement that recognized the diverse lands on which we live, work, and play, as well as the interconnectedness of communities across the Algoma district.

The Land Acknowledgement is read at all APH-led meetings to build awareness of Indigenous history, presence, and rights.

It serves as a re-commitment to public health action, in partnership with Indigenous communities, towards the shared goal of Reconciliation.

Public health action starts with building meaningful relationships with Indigenous partners founded in principles of trust, respect, commitment, and self-determination.

COVID-19 has provided many opportunities to collaborate and strengthen relationships with local Indigenous partners.



We acknowledge the land on which we are gathered is in the traditional territories of the Anishnaabeg (*aw-nish-naw-bek*).

Algoma Public Health delivers services and programs within some of the Robinson-Huron Treaty, Robinson-Superior Treaty, and Treaty 9 territories, specifically within the traditional territories of the Michipicoten, Missanabie-Cree, Batchewana, Garden River, Thessalon, Mississauga, Serpent River, and Sagamok First Nations.

Algoma Public Health also delivers services and programs within the traditional territory of the Huron-Superior Regional Métis Community, represented by the Historic Sault Ste. Marie Métis Council and the North Channel Métis Council as part of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

We say miigwech to thank Indigenous Peoples for taking care of this land from time immemorial. We are all called to treat this sacred land, its plants, animals, stories and its Peoples with honour and respect.

We commit to the shared goal of Reconciliation.

TRUST - RESPECT - COMMITMENT - SELF-DETERMINATION

Health Promotion

Raising Awareness of the Opioid Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed and simultaneously worsened the opioid crisis in northern Ontario.

Algoma Public Health works with first responders and community partners to reduce the health burden of substance use in Algoma. In 2021, public health action with partners focused on prevention and harm reduction.

In 2021, this work included:

- Promoting healthy coping strategies to increase resilience and awareness of harms associated with substance use
- Advocating for increased treatment services in Algoma
- Conducting opioid surveillance and distributing opioids surveillance bulletins to partners
- Releasing alerts when opioid poisonings or emergency visits were above threshold (e.g., media releases)
- Facilitating harm reduction programming, such as Needle Exchange Programming and naloxone distribution and training
- Providing education to reduce stigma and discrimination faced by those who use substances



- Provided harm reduction supplies to 6 agencies/programs to increase access to safer drug use supplies.
- **10** opioid surveillance bulletins circulated.
- **6906** naloxone kits distributed across the district.
- **5885** visits to the needle exchange program for harm reduction supplies and support services.
- **6** sharps disposal kiosks in Sault Ste. Marie, 1 in Blind River, and 1 in Elliot Lake.
- Worked with **16 agencies/programs** to improve access to naloxone in Algoma.



[Substance Use and Harm Reduction](#)

Health Promotion

Clearing the Air with Algoma University

As of September 1st, 2021, Algoma University's Campus in Sault Ste. Marie is 100% Smoke Free. Those visiting the Sault Ste. Marie campus are no longer allowed to smoke or vape, or use tobacco or cannabis products, on-site.

APH supported Algoma University in their journey to a Smoke Free campus by providing public health consultation and evidence informed resources.

A comprehensive Smoke Free policy supports a healthier learning environment for everyone including students, faculty, staff and visitors.

Congratulations, Algoma University!



Looking to quit?

Algoma Public Health offers Tobacco Cessation Clinics which provide personalized support as you begin your journey towards becoming and remaining smoke-free. Options for Nicotine Replacement Therapy are also available.



LEARN MORE



[Resources and supports
for smoking cessation](#)

Health Promotion

Smiling for Ontario's Seniors Dental Care Program

Oral health is an important part of overall health. Dental care is part of health promotion and protection for healthy aging. The Ontario Senior Dental Care Program (OSDCP) provides free, routine dental services for low-income seniors aged 65+. It is intended to prevent chronic disease, increase quality of life and reduce unnecessary trips to the hospital.

Algoma's population is ageing, and many older adults cannot afford basic dental care. In general, northern Ontario communities experience poorer health outcomes and greater health inequities compared to the rest of the province.

In Algoma, an estimated 3,792 people are eligible for the program.

APH has been offering the OSDCP since its official launch in November of 2019, with only a brief pause during early 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. The program includes coverage for various types of preventative, restorative, and prosthodontic care for eligible seniors.



In 2021, APH:

- Offered hygiene clinics 2 days per week.
- Offered treatment clinics 1 day per week.
- Installed a panoramic x-ray machine, which will enhance diagnostic imaging for clients.



LEARN MORE



[The Ontario Senior Dental Care Program \(OSDCP\)](#)

[Board update on the Ontario Senior Dental Care Program \(OSDCP\)](#)

Students and Learners Join our Teams

During the summer of 2021, 23 students stepped up to support public health during the pandemic. These post-secondary students worked throughout the agency to support COVID-19 response and core public health programs.

APH also continued to facilitate academic student placements for over 20 learners during the pandemic, with some creativity in delivering quality experiences through hybrid or virtual models.

Undergraduate students, graduate students and medical residents from academic institutions within Ontario and beyond joined our health promotion, health protection, corporate, and foundations teams.

Across the agency, students and learners contributed over 15,000 hours to public health!

What a time to be working and learning in public health!

We are grateful to all our learners for joining our teams to learn and support the work of public health. We look forward to welcoming more learners from northern Ontario in 2022.

Share the Road

- The Share the Road program **promotes active transportation** through community awareness, safety signs, and practical reconstruction of roadways to allow for active transportation utilization.
- Enhances **access** for bicyclists on the roads and trails.
- **Educates** citizens on the value and importance of **safe bicycling** for healthy lifestyles and communities.

1 METRE (3 FEET) is a safe passing distance

SHARE THE ROAD

Participants: Li Bressan - APH SSM, MacKenna, Eschel, Ashley Miron

Virtual knowledge sharing session by Sault College BScN placement students.

Public Health in All of Us

Public Health is more than individual behaviours. It is the organized efforts of society to keep our communities healthy and safe.

Throughout 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued challenged individuals, businesses, and communities across Algoma. We worked together during these times of great change and uncertainty to protect the health of our community and support one another. Public health was championed in our communities every day, in big and small ways.

Our Public Health Champion awards honoured Algoma residents who demonstrated exemplary kindness, compassion, and community spirit while helping others overcome the challenges of COVID-19.

Our 2021 Public Health Champions included:

General

PUC Services Inc.

Supported the Algoma Vaccine Support Council, and chaired the transportation committee.

Took the lead to buy lunches for every volunteer working at GFL Memorial Gardens Vaccine Clinics.

Provided free transportation to COVID-19 Vaccine clinics in Sault Ste. Marie, removing barriers to vaccine access for first, second, and third dose boosters for all eligible groups.

Lisa Vezeau-Allen

Enhanced food access by those in need of support through Grocer4Good, which operates on a 'pay what you can' philosophy.

Impacted the lives of young adults with Autism and intellectual disabilities by providing opportunities to obtain viable skills to become employable.

Integrating a kitchen in Grocer4Good to help folks develop skills to prepare nutritious meals.

Youth (under 30)

Beau Neveau

Assisted Batchewana First Nation (BFN) Centre staff and the community in providing assistance in all things related to COVID-19.

Supported booking, eligibility confirmation, and administration details for COVID-19 vaccine clinics, with careful attention to the unique barriers experienced by BFN communities.

2021 Funding of Local Public Health

Municipal Levies <i>District of Algoma</i>	\$ 3,808,000
Public Health Funding <i>Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care</i>	\$ 16,938,000
Community Health Funding <i>Ministry of Children & Social Services, North East Local Health Integration Network, Algoma Family Services</i>	\$ 3,568,000
Fees, Other Grants & Recoveries	\$ 682,000
Total for 2021	\$ 24,996,000

Financial fact! Did you know...

Local public health is funded by provincial and municipal taxpayer dollars. These dollars come from the same taxpayers.

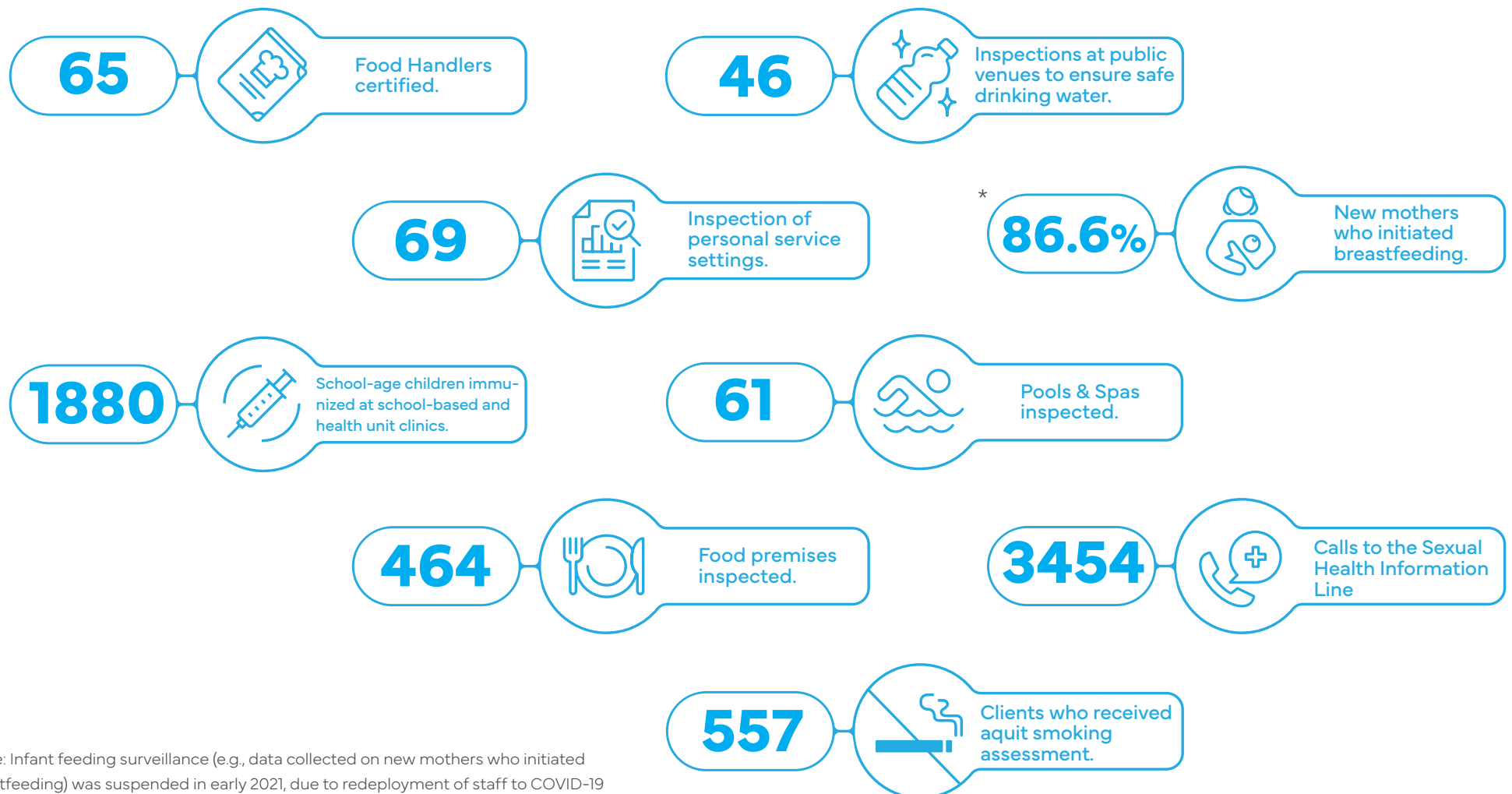
In 2021, public health programs and services cost Algoma residents **\$213/person for the year**, or **58 cents/person/day**, based on a 2021 census population estimate of 117,178 for the District of Algoma Health Unit.

That's quite an exceptional deal to keep us safe and healthy, especially during a pandemic!

2021 Public Health by the Numbers

Algoma Public Health works in our communities every day with individuals, families and community partners to promote and protect health and prevent disease and injury.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic response to keep our communities safe changed or suspended some public health programs and services, lots of prioritized public health action continued. This is a quick snapshot of what we accomplished in 2021!



*Note: Infant feeding surveillance (e.g., data collected on new mothers who initiated breastfeeding) was suspended in early 2021, due to redeployment of staff to COVID-19 response work. Therefore, the data provided represents only the first few months of the year.

Connect with Public Health

Join the Conversation



@algomahealth

Phone

Blind River: (705) 356-2551 or 888-356-2551

Elliot Lake: (705) 848-2314 or 877-748-2314

Sault Ste. Marie: (705) 942-4646 or 866-892-0172

Wawa: (705) 856-7208 or 888-211-8074

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