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As I reflect on another year in the life of local public health, I am overwhelmed with thoughts of respect and thankfulness. A career devoted to public service and the protection of our residents is filled with rewards, but it also brings many challenges, and 2021 certainly revealed both.

COVID-19 challenged our community and our organization in unimaginable ways. Through collective wisdom, and the shared values of integrity, health equity and excellence, both our community and organization can look back with pride, and look forward with hope. I have tremendous respect for the community partners who offered their knowledge and willingness to collaborate, including Ottawa County schools, businesses, healthcare organizations, human service agencies, faith-based organizations and members of the agricultural community. I am thankful to the advocates who stepped in to help us see areas of need, and provide us with perspective so that we could work to ensure equitable health access to all. We have learned a great deal that will inform our work on COVID-19 and every future health-related issue.

It is hard to express the depth of my admiration for the dedication and expertise shown by our public health team during the past year. Every staff member went above and beyond, and met each challenge with professionalism and dignity.

While communicable disease prevention and control are core public health functions, public health is so much more. I encourage you to explore this year’s annual report to learn about how we provide the other public health essential services that assure conditions that promote and protect the health of our community. In these pages, you will find examples such as how we “assess and monitor population health status to identify community needs and assets” as shown in the 2021 Migrant Health Survey; how our organization “assures equitable access to the care needed to be healthy” as in our Children’s Special Health Care Services, Maternal Infant Health and Ottawa Pathways to Better Health programs; where we work to “strengthen, support, and mobilize communities and partnerships to improve health” through Ottawa Food and the Blue Envelope Initiative; and how our team “utilizes legal and regulatory actions to improve and protect the public's health” through our Environmental Health programs like food safety and onsite well and septic inspections.

Finally, I would like to thank the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners for their governance, vision and balanced action that considers the needs of all residents, as well as for the unwavering support provided to their community members through this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

Lisa Stefanovsky, MEd
Administrative Health Officer

MISSION
Working together to assure conditions that promote and protect health.

VISION
Healthy People

VALUES
Equity | Integrity | Excellence
Dr. Unzicker joined OCDPH in August 2021. In cooperation with the Health Officer, Dr. Unzicker will oversee the development and evaluation of standards of medical care throughout the department, provide medical direction and clinical supervision to the department’s medical staff and advise the Health Officer in matters of medical response for any county public health needs. In addition, she will advise on medical policy to be sure it aligns with the Michigan Public Health Code. She is also OCDPH’s liaison to the Ottawa County medical community.

Dr. Unzicker joins OCDPH after 15 years practicing family medicine in West Michigan. She was a core faculty member at Grand Rapids Family Medicine Residency. In addition, she assisted the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) with its COVID-19 response and assisted with needs in KCHD’s Personal Health Services Clinic. She has spent time as a volunteer physician with Medical Teams International in Haiti, as a small group facilitator for medical students at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine and as a summer camp doctor at Camp Beechpoint in Allegan.

Dr. Unzicker is passionate about health literacy and making health information as accessible as possible to all people. Strengthening partnerships between public health and the healthcare system, and promoting health equity are some of the issues she hopes to address in her new role.

When asked what interested her in joining OCDPH, she says “as a family doctor, my focus is on the care of the whole patient as a person and a member of their family. In my new role at OCDPH, my focus can expand to helping people and families be healthy as part of an entire community, and I find that very exciting.”
While some staff were deployed to COVID-19 response efforts, we were able to maintain open appointments to assure access to women’s health services and sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment. These services were particularly important to maintain due to surveillance data indicating increasing cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea. High risk clients and those with known contacts and symptoms were prioritized, testing was provided using a combination of phone consultations and a self-specimen collection system and outreach in areas of the county with high case rates was restarted as soon as it was feasible.

“I’m really proud of our amazing, dedicated clinical team, from the front desk staff answering countless phone calls, to the nurse going out to the car to administer an immunization. We have stood together over this year, ready to serve the public’s health needs, knowing that for many, we are their only source of healthcare.”

Helen Tarleton, Clinical Services Manager
Communicable disease case investigation and monitoring allows us to alert the community to increased transmission and share information on preventive measures they can take to promote and protect health. OCDPH observed substantially higher than normal activity for three diseases in 2021.

Chlamydia and Gonorrhea
Chlamydia and Gonorrhea are common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which can both be present without symptoms. If left untreated, Chlamydia and Gonorrhea can have serious and long-term health consequences for men and women. Each disease can be successfully resolved with medication and treatment.

Similar increases of both diseases have been reported nationwide and could be attributed to several reasons, including reduced availability of STI testing in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and delays in sexual health services due to a diversion of staff to COVID-19 response.

Lyme Disease
Lyme Disease is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States. A vector-borne disease is a disease spread to humans or animals by an insect. Lyme disease is transmitted to humans through the bite of a blacklegged tick. Most infections can be successfully treated with antibiotics, if detected early.

Exact reasons for the increase in Lyme Disease incidence in more recent years is unclear, but could be partly due to the doubling of the geographic range over the past 20 years of some ticks responsible for transmission of the pathogen which causes Lyme Disease.

Chlamydia
1,004 New Cases
↑ 24% from 2020

Gonorrhea
257 New Cases
↑ 28% from 2020

Lyme Disease
28 New Cases
↑ 180% from 2020

“We continue to provide case investigation and monitoring of these important communicable diseases to inform the development of education and prevention campaigns to promote and protect the public’s health.”

Tamara Drake, Communicable Disease Supervisor
Over 400 individuals were served by Ottawa Pathways to Better Health. Our Community Health Workers establish relationships and develop trust with clients so they can better address their health needs. In some cases, these needs are not immediately apparent. As they walk alongside clients, Community Health Workers can connect needs with resources in the community, leading to improved outcomes and healthier lives. Last year, 293 pathways were completed. The top completed pathway was for social service referrals, which could include things like food or financial assistance, transportation, housing or connections to medical care.

Community Health Workers were an instrumental part of the COVID-19 response. Initially, the Pathways team developed and implemented a COVID-19 Education Pathway to help clients understand COVID-19 and its outcomes. They also provided case investigation and contact tracing, with a particular focus on providing bilingual service. Pathways staff assisted at testing and vaccination clinics, supported response measures among our migrant farmworkers, assisted with appointment registration for high risk individuals and families and even provided transportation, when necessary. Finally, they assisted at one of Ottawa County’s quarantine facilities, provided masks, food and supplies for isolated and quarantined individuals and responded to more than 500 requests for assistance on how to maintain isolation and quarantine.

OCDPH received a three-year Minority Health Community Capacity Building Initiative grant in 2021 to complete the county’s first Migrant Health Needs Assessment in 20 years. The assessment was conducted with 319 migrant farmworkers and identified current health status and health disparities of the respondents.

One accomplishment during the first year of the grant cycle was the creation of an Ottawa County Migrant Task Force, made up of 21 key partners who will be involved in using the survey’s findings to address the needs of the migrant community. In addition, members of the task force partnered with OCDPH to determine priorities and develop a strategic plan with the County’s Department of Strategic Impact.

"Funding for this project has allowed us to move forward with a long overdue project. We look forward to addressing needs within the migrant community and appreciate the many community partners who have come together to support this important initiative."

Amy Sheele, Health Educator
Families with children with special needs face challenges most families will never have to consider. Many of those challenges were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic as families tried to protect their children with chronic physical health issues.

In 2021, the Children’s Special Health Care Services (CSHCS) team provided assistance to more than 1,400 clients supported by the program. One of the areas the CSHCS nurses focused on throughout the pandemic was trying to provide accurate and up-to-date information and resources from the CDC, MDHHS and other trusted sources so families could make decisions about COVID-19.

A highlight for the program has been its private Facebook parent support page, with more than 1,000 members. This page is moderated by a CSHCS parent liaison and is a place where parents can share resources, recommendations and most importantly, connection with other families who are working through similar issues with their children with special needs.

CSHCS nurses also provided case management and support to 10 children with elevated blood lead levels. This case management involves education and support, as well as investigating the source of each child’s lead poisoning.

The number of hearing and vision screenings administered in 2021 was lower than in previous years due to COVID-19 pandemic school closures, remote learning and the additional impacts of the pandemic on schools. Although the screenings can be done by appointment at the health department, providing screenings in school removes some of the barriers families can experience in accessing these necessary and required services.

“A child's ability to see and hear are vital to learning. Screenings are an important tool to obtain information about hearing and vision loss, and can contribute to a child's overall health and well-being.”

Leslie VerDuin, BSN, RN
Hearing and Vision Services
Program Supervisor

In the four years prior to the pandemic, OCDPH performed an average of 30,000 vision and hearing screenings per year. On average, about 9% of vision screenings and 3% of hearing screenings result in a referral to a specialist for follow-up diagnosis and care. The inability to screen children in school during the pandemic is concerning as it may have resulted in as many as 1,300 children who did not receive the vision care they needed and 400 children who did not receive the hearing care they needed in 2021.
The Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP) is a statewide evidence-based home visiting program which promotes healthy pregnancies, positive birth outcomes and healthy infant growth and development to ensure that babies, families and communities in Michigan are healthy and thriving. MIHP support for Ottawa County families continued uninterrupted in 2021. Virtual and over-the-phone visits were utilized when in-person visits were not feasible due to COVID-19 case surges in the community, which allowed the team to increase the number of overall interactions with MIHP families. MIHP providers also assisted with at-home COVID-19 vaccination among pregnant woman and their families, who sometime face child care or transportation barriers. Longstanding relationships with community partners, as well as referral relationships with other OCDPH programs, created many opportunities to connect MIHP clients to COVID-19 resources.

The MIHP program also integrated with Ottawa Pathways to Better Health to provide a dedicated Community Health Worker to clients. This integration has allowed MIHP to leverage the skills and community knowledge of a Pathways Community Health Worker for client needs that are outside of pregnancy and infant care.

MIHP clients receive important assessment and education around risk factors such as infant feeding, shaken baby syndrome, intimate partner violence and mental health. In 2021, 76% of the MIHP clients who were assessed for depression and anxiety were identified as needing mental health education services. Of those, 65% required additional case management and assistance accessing mental health treatment and care.

Breastfeeding support continues to be a top priority for MIHP. In partnership with Michigan WIC, the Michigan Public Health Institute and the Breastfeeding Center of Ann Arbor, three MIHP staff members completed Lactation Counselor and Educator training, which helped expand evidence-based strategies to promote breastfeeding.

“The physical, mental, and socioeconomic benefits of breastfeeding are extensive for mom, babies, families and communities. The Maternal Infant Health Program staff are committed to helping women meet their breastfeeding goals, and we’re better equipped to do so now that we have additional team members trained in breastfeeding counseling.”

Sandra Lake, Community Health Manager
According to the 2019 Youth Assessment Survey, almost one in five teens in Ottawa County reported they “seriously thought about attempting suicide” in the twelve months prior to completing their assessment. To assist school staff in addressing this issue, the Ottawa County Suicide Prevention Coalition, the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District and Spectrum Health collaborated to provide employees at 29 schools with training in the Blue Envelope Initiative. The training, developed by Spectrum Health, equips school employees with tools so they know how to respond to a student who may express thoughts of suicide.

During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 415 Blue Envelope incidents in Ottawa County schools. Over 1,800 staff members who completed the training expressed increased confidence in addressing issues surrounding suicide, and over 22,000 students have been touched by the Blue Envelope Initiative.

**Blue Envelope Initiative**

According to Feeding America, approximately 9%, or 25,700 Ottawa County community members, were food insecure, including 4,400 children in 2019.* The 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) found that 43.6% of adults eat less than one fruit each day and 31.8% of adults eat less than one vegetable each day. Underserved and vulnerable Ottawa County residents identify access to free or low-cost nutrition/healthy eating as a top resource that is lacking in the community.

2021 accomplishments include:

- Senior Project Fresh bolstered healthy, local food access to seniors.
- Pick for Pantries and farmers’ markets produce donation and gleaning projects increased fruit and vegetable availability at food pantries.
- Meet Up Eat Up meal distribution site expansion for children ages 18 and younger; more than 497,000 meals were distributed last summer.
- Social media and Food Resource Guide distribution to link residents with food resources throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Connected food pantries with PPE resources so they could continue to operate safely.

*Source found on page 18.
Prime for Life & Vape Education

The 2019 Youth Assessment Survey showed that the use of electronic vapor products, alcohol and marijuana continues to be an issue among Ottawa County teens, with teens having limited perception of the risk of these behaviors. Prime for Life and Vape Education grant-funded programming aims to help teens identify the consequences of high-risk substance use behaviors. Program participants are referred via the juvenile court system, and beginning in 2021, from some area schools.

Last year, the Prime for Life program was expanded, and five Ottawa County school districts began offering participation in the program as an alternative to suspension from school for substance use offenses.

Collaboration between the court system, local electronic vapor retailers, the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District and the Ottawa County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition has been key to making this information available to teens across the county.

After completing the Vape Education class, 91% of students stated that they believe when an individual uses vapor products or electronic cigarettes, they are putting themselves at great risk. In addition, 80% of students said the class impacted their thoughts about vaping.

"Our classes equip students with the information they need to make informed choices and create opportunities to build bridges between students, parents and school staff."

Allison Selner, Health Educator

Oral Health Services

On average, 34 million school hours are lost each year because of unplanned, emergency dental care, and over $45 billion in United States productivity is lost each year due to untreated dental disease.* For more than 26 years, OCDPH's Miles of Smiles program has met critical oral health care needs by providing dental services to Medicaid insured and financially qualifying uninsured children, age birth to 20.

During the 2020-2021 school year, oral health visits were reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions. Services were adapted so that hundreds of children could receive preventive and restorative care at 15 sites around Ottawa County on the Miles of Smiles mobile dental unit. The SEAL! Michigan program also used the mobile dental unit to provide services to 2nd, 6th and 7th graders at 10 area schools, and provided oral health education to more than 900 students.
Environmental Health Services

Assuring conditions that promote and protect health through standards, guidelines and interventions.

Food Safety Program

It is estimated that 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from foodborne diseases each year in the United States.* The OCDPH Food Safety Program is dedicated to educating and regulating Ottawa County food service establishments to prevent foodborne diseases in the community and limit outbreaks that can cripple a business. Almost half of all money Americans spend on food is spent in restaurants, so restaurant inspections are a critical public health intervention for the prevention of foodborne disease.*

Ottawa County restaurants were impacted by labor shortages and supply chain issues in 2021. Understaffed and inexperienced restaurant crews resulted in longer inspection times, more follow-up inspections and increased education and outreach activities by the Food Safety Team. Even with these challenges, the Ottawa County restaurant industry is growing. Plan review applications for new food establishments have continued to grow, with 43 applications received in the past year. In 2021, more food licenses were issued than in any previous year.

Licensed 786 food establishments

Completed 43 plan review applications

Cited 1,805 violations

Investigated 55 complaints

Completed 1,403 inspections

Completed 38 enforcement actions

Investigated 130 cases of reported foodborne illness

*Sources found on page 18.
Of those mentioned above, site visit evaluations, test well permits and vacant land evaluations are closely tied to future building and development. The large increase in these services indicates an increase in new construction and applications for new well and septic permits will likely be seen in the next few years.

Nearly 15% of Americans rely on water provided by private drinking water systems, and more than 20% of households rely on septic systems to process their wastewater.* However, if these systems are not properly constructed or maintained, they can significantly impact the health of the community or the environment.

The Onsite Services Program is responsible for understanding how drinking water and wastewater systems work so that safe and effective systems are installed, and existing systems can be properly assessed. For each system installed, a construction permit and a final inspection are required prior to use. The Real Estate Evaluation Program requires all homes sold in Ottawa County with a private well or sewage disposal system be inspected and evaluated. This program evaluates existing systems at the time of sale to address risks to human health or the environment.

In 2021, Onsite Services grew:

- 19.4% more overall services completed in fiscal year 2021 (4,157 services) than in fiscal year 2020 (3,481 services).
- Over 50% increase in multiple services in fiscal year 2021:
  - Irrigation Well Permits (123.7% increase)
  - Site Visit Evaluations (62.1% increase)
  - Test Well Permits (216.7% increase)
  - Vacant Land Evaluations (147.6% increase)
  - Well Replacement Permits (60.9% increase)

Of those mentioned above, site visit evaluations, test well permits and vacant land evaluations are closely tied to future building and development. The large increase in these services indicates an increase in new construction and applications for new well and septic permits will likely be seen in the next few years.

Sustainable practices help to support a healthy environment, a healthy economy and a healthy community. The Sustainability Program examines how resources are used and works to develop programs that reduce negative environmental impacts to support a healthy community. Traditional programs include recycling to reuse materials where possible, as well as the collection of household hazardous waste to ensure proper and safe disposal.

However, the Sustainability Program is not only about recovering resources and solid waste, but also collecting valuable materials to be reused, recycled or be properly disposed. The recently implemented Scrap Tire Collection Program aligns with this broadened scope by repurposing old tires into new products. Last year, 540 tires were collected through the program, which helped to conserve landfill space and prevent improper disposal that can contaminate waterways and soil.

*Source found on page 18.
The COVID-19 pandemic response was a high priority for OCDPH staff in 2021. While this past year brought hopeful developments, like widespread availability of vaccine for all but our youngest residents, it also brought deadly COVID-19 variants that presented new challenges. OCDPH staff worked to provide the community with the most accurate information, and equitable access to vaccination and testing to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the Ottawa County community.

**Signs of Hope: COVID-19 Vaccine**

The availability of a safe and effective vaccine brought hope to many in Ottawa County. OCDPH staff administered Ottawa County's first vaccine to Jeff Potter, First Responder and City of Zeeland Firefighter, on December 18, 2020.

- 61,627 COVID-19 vaccines
- 326 vaccine clinics

Pictured from left: Robin Schurman and Jeff Potter

Ottawa County Road Commission Testing Site

Holland Civic Center Vaccine Clinic

Tulip Time Testing and Vaccine Clinic
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

Assuring conditions that promote and protect health through crisis planning and response.

Strategic Partnerships
OCDPH provided guidance and support to these vital sectors: businesses, local governments, faith-based and human service organizations, healthcare facilities and congregate care, agricultural and educational settings.

- Held weekly meetings to discuss local, state and federal guidance.
- Conducted outbreak and case investigation and contact tracing.
- Conducted case surveillance and data collection.
- Held vaccination and testing clinics.
- Provided infection mitigation education.
- Distributed PPE and testing supplies.
- Created and distributed infographics, signage, letters and support materials.

Strategic Communications
OCDPH engaged a variety of communications platforms, in multiple languages, to keep people informed in a rapidly changing situation.

- Assisted with the development of the regional Vaccinate West Michigan website.
- Utilized social media, including Twitter and Facebook.
- Participated in local media interviews and stories.
- Developed weekly/biweekly COVID-19 bulletins.
- Managed emergency operations center communications.
- Held community presentations, webinars and Facebook Live Q&A sessions.
- Managed COVID-19 call center.
- Developed television and radio advertising.
- Provided epidemiology updates and reports.
- Created COVID-19 response website and data dashboard.
- Sent targeted communications using electronic and phone messaging for COVID-19 cases and contacts.

Health Equity
Health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to attain their full health potential. Equitable access to information, vaccine and testing was a primary goal for OCDPH.

Those in our community who could not attend a mass vaccination clinic relied on OCDPH for more personalized outreach. Partnership with the entire community was necessary to make vaccination accessible to all geographic regions, ages and abilities. More than 20 partners assisted us in reaching people from all races, ethnicities and cultures, the elderly, individuals with special needs, people with language barriers, people experiencing homelessness, working families, migrant and other farmworkers and more. By October 2021, community partners had held 124 vaccine clinics and administered 16,650 vaccines in safe and trusted environments.

These partners also challenged OCDPH to consider the ways we could make the experience of getting a vaccine easier, more accessible and available in inclusive environments. Partners helped us increase vaccine confidence, create equitable support materials and videos for non-English speaking and underserved groups, advertise clinic availability and even schedule appointments.

COVID-19 PREVENTION & RESPONSE

OCDPH's COVID-19 Response website received more than 1,000,000 views
Britney Brown, Ottawa Pathways to Better Health Community Health Worker, was awarded Ottawa County’s **Customer Service Award** for her work with a refugee family from Iraq. Brown has been a Community Health Worker at OCDPH for five years and says her work with the refugees was some of the most rewarding she has done. Although the family was initially referred to Pathways for the father’s health issues, Brown soon identified that many of his health issues stemmed from the stress he felt after being injured and unable to work, and were also complicated by affordable housing needs and the many barriers they faced in navigating the social service system. Brown walked alongside the family for three years, and along the way, the father regained his health, which led to a fuller life for the entire family. Britney said, “I loved this family and I was not going to let them go by the wayside. There was no other agency that could address their needs in the same way Pathways could. Winning this award was affirmation that this is what I’m supposed to be doing.”

Spencer Ballard was awarded the **Samuel M. Stephenson Sanitarian of the Year** award from the Michigan Environmental Health Association (MEHA). The award recognizes outstanding service to MEHA and the Environmental Health Profession within the past three years. The awardee is selected based on contributions and outstanding service to the practice of environmental health, activities and service that support the profession of environmental health and highly beneficial contributions and commitment on behalf of MEHA. The Food Safety Team nominated Spencer for the award to recognize his hard work and commitment to environmental health and his team. Their nomination recognized that Spencer “has always been willing to contribute in whatever way necessary”, and that he “offers his time, skills and vision with steadfastness and integrity”. Spencer is dedicated to continually improving the ways he serves his team and the community to promote public health and is truly an asset to Ottawa County.

OCDPH was recognized with the **Hope College Meritorious Service Award**, in recognition of "outstanding service and long term involvement" with the College. This partnership was never more fully on display than during the COVID-19 pandemic as we worked with Hope's staff to keep their students and community safe and healthy.

**Congratulations and many thanks to OCDPH's 2021 retirees!**

- Charly Nienhuis, MIHP, 39 years
- Deb Bassett, Oral Health Services, 21 years
- Paul Heidel, MD, Medical Director, 19 years
- Maureen Eberly, Sexual Health Services, 15 years
- Michael Marlowe, Food Safety, 5 years
## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

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<th>FY17 Actual</th>
<th>FY18 Actual</th>
<th>FY19 Actual</th>
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<td>11,165,059</td>
<td>12,236,650</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*FY 21 Preliminary unaudited*
Under the Public Health Code Act 368 of 1978, a local health department shall continually and diligently endeavor to prevent disease, prolong life and promote the public health through organized programs including prevention and control of environmental health hazards; prevention and control of diseases; prevention and control of health problems of particularly vulnerable population groups; development of health care facilities and health services delivery systems; and regulation of health care facilities and health services delivery systems to the extent provided by law. The Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) is required by state mandate to perform a variety of specific services. Provision of these services is reviewed through a state accreditation process. In addition to, and ideally within the mandated services, OCDPH builds programs and services around community and customer/client needs. These needs are defined through community research. The OCDPH uses a variety of collected information to guide program development. This includes the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, Youth Assessment Survey, Community Health Needs Assessment and the ongoing collection of epidemiological surveillance data and information.

Sources

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