

## Ontario Public Health Association's Public Health and Planning 101: An Education Module for Public Health and Planning Professionals in Ontario

### Survey for Public Health Professionals – Highlights

A survey was sent out to public health professionals in Ontario to inform the development of an education module for public health and planning professionals working on the built environment. A total of 304 public health professionals responded to the survey that was administered in January 2012. All 36 Ontario public health units were represented in the survey results. All survey respondents currently work as a public health professional in an Ontario public health unit (99.3%) or worked for an Ontario public health unit in 2011 (0.7%). Most respondents worked for a public health unit that was located in the Central East region (includes Toronto; 28.6%), in the South West (20.1%) region, and the North West/East (19.4%) region of Ontario.

Survey respondents primarily work in the areas of Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention (51.6%) and Environmental Health (27.6%), followed by Family Health (8.6%), Foundational Standards (6.9%), Infectious Diseases (4.9%), and Emergency Preparedness (0.3%) (Figure 1). Most public health professionals who responded to the survey have worked on the built environment for 1 to 5 years (47%).

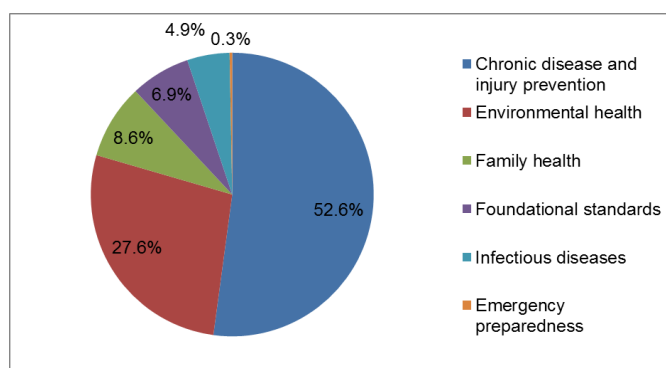
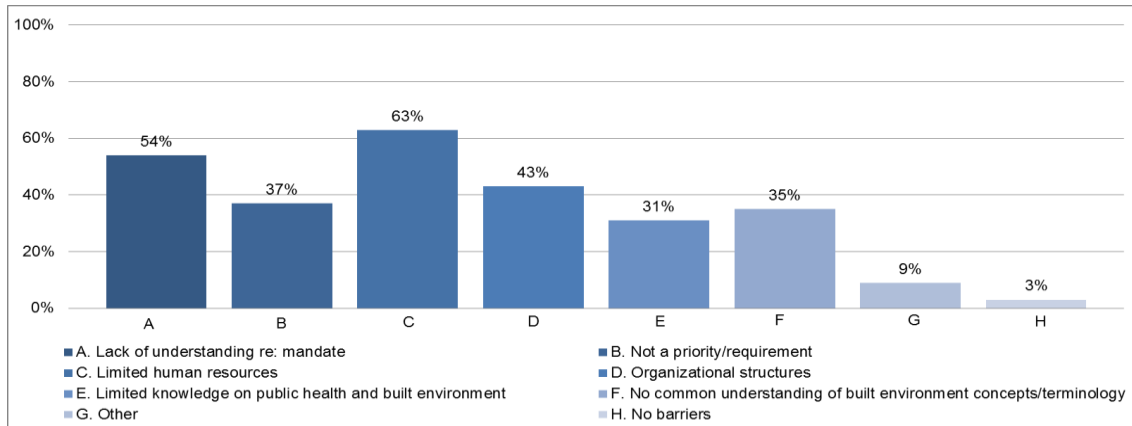


Figure 1. Primary program areas for respondents in public health (n=304).

The majority of public health professionals agreed (44.7%) or strongly agreed (28.6%) that the built environment is an active priority in their public health unit while 16.5% were neutral (neither agreed or disagreed). Respondents identified air quality, physical activity, and water quality as the top three public health factors that are impacted by the built environment in Ontario.

In addition, public health professionals identified several barriers that their public health unit faces in working with planners on the built environment (Figure 2). The most common barriers were limited human resources (62.8%) and lack of understanding regarding application of the public health mandate in planning practice (54.3%).

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**Figure 2. Barriers to working with planners on the built environment (n=304).**

Public health professionals were asked to identify what their ideal roles should be when working with planners on the built environment (Table 1). They also identified having worked with a variety of stakeholders on the built environment including: parks and recreation department (73.3%), community/citizens groups (71.3%), not for profit organizations (60.0%), school boards (50.8%), public works department (49.7%), other local government departments (46.2%), conservation authority (35.9%), academia (29.2%), provincial government (29.2%), private sector (23.6%), and other stakeholders (9.7%) (data not shown).

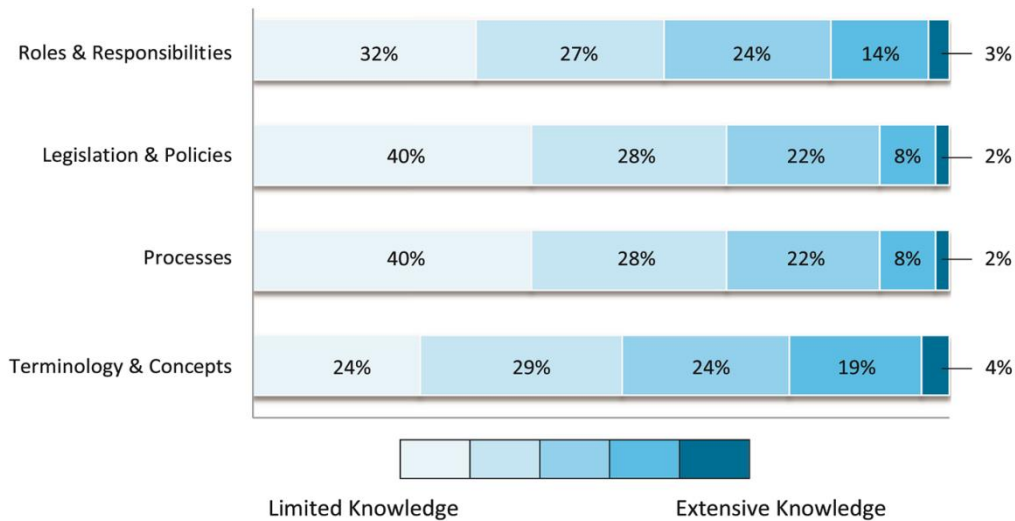
**Table 1. Ideal roles for public health professionals when working with planners on the built environment (n=304).**

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Provide consultation to planning	88.2%
Reviews/comments on planning initiatives	78.9%
Partners on specific projects	78.3%
Partners on specific committees	77.6%
Advocacy role	76.6%
Research/evaluation	68.8%
Other	4.9%

Public health professionals were asked to rate their knowledge of land use planning in relation to: (i) roles and responsibilities; (ii) legislation and policy; (iii) processes (steps); and (iv) built environment terminology/concepts (Figure 3). They indicated that they had limited knowledge of roles and responsibilities (32.3%), legislation and policy (40.3%),

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and processes (40.3%) related to land use planning.



**Figure 3. Knowledge of public health professionals on land use planning (n=303).**

Public health professionals indicated that webinars, workshops, and an online course were their top three preferred learning methods for a public health and planning educational resource. The majority of public health professionals (95.4%) agreed that planning and public health professionals should be working together on the built environment. Through this survey to public health professionals, it is clear that collaboration with planners is important to further the work on healthy built environments.