



Phase 2 Engagement Report

Lakelands Public Health
Strategic Planning - Phase 2

July 29, 2026

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Executive Summary

The Phase 2 Strategic Planning engagement process gathered perspectives from over 700 individuals, including residents across the four counties, urban Indigenous, residents and healthcare partners from Alderville, Hiawatha, and Curve Lake First Nations, representatives of partner organizations, municipal and healthcare leaders, and Lakelands staff, to inform strategic priority setting, using a variety of engagement methodologies.

Consistency Across Geography and Groups

Despite the diverse contexts of the four counties the core themes that emerged from engagement were consistent. Across all groups there was remarkable alignment on Lakelands core strengths and primary challenges, validating the findings and suggesting that strategic priorities will have broad support.

Where geographic differences did emerge, they centered on implementation and context rather than fundamental direction. For example, while all regions value Lakelands community presence, rural areas emphasized mobile outreach and satellite services, while urban areas focused on accessibility and visibility.

Implications for Strategic Planning

The engagement process has provided Lakelands with a clear picture of organizational strengths to leverage, challenges to address, and opportunities to pursue in the coming years. As Lakelands moves into Phase 3 of the Strategic Planning process, the Senior Leadership Team and Board of Health have a strong foundation of community input to inform decision-making.

Key Takeaways for the Senior Leadership Team and Board of Health

Key takeaways, based on an analysis of all engagement methodologies, include the following:

- 1. Lakelands Has a Strong Foundation to Build Upon.** Lakelands enters strategic planning from a position of strength. With 81% of residents and 88% of partners rating their overall impression as positive or very positive, and 87-94% viewing Lakelands as a trusted source of health information, the organization has earned credibility and goodwill. These strengths provide a solid platform for addressing challenges and pursuing opportunities.
- 2. The Visibility Gap is the Most Critical Challenge.** The most consistent finding across all engagement is that people don't fully understand the full scope of services that Lakelands provides. This affects residents who don't know what services are available, partners who are unclear when to engage Lakelands, and staff who feel community presence has diminished. With only 32% of community members rating communications as "very" or "extremely" effective, and confusion about Lakeland's identity as a merged entity, addressing visibility and the understanding of Lakelands role and scope of services is an important priority. Strengthening visibility is also foundational to achieving other goals. For example, partnerships deepen when there is a strong understanding of

Lakelands' scope, programs reach more people when residents know they exist, and health equity advances when underserved populations can access services.

3. **Post-Merger Integration Requires Continued Attention.** Merger challenges persist and affect both internal culture and external partnerships. Partners report lack of clarity about the value of the merger, inconsistent approaches to service delivery and protocols across regions, and disrupted partner relationships as programs harmonize. Staff satisfaction varies by office location, with concerns about equity across offices and continued "us vs. them" dynamics. These challenges require intentional strategies to build a unified culture, ensure high-quality and equitable service delivery, and nurture relationships.
4. **Role Clarity Will Unlock Partnership Potential.** Partners consistently expressed confusion about Lakelands role versus other organizations, when to engage the organization, and a lack of understanding of Lakeland's priorities. Partners want Lakelands to "pick their lane", communicate their priorities clearly, and provide guidance on when and how to engage the organization. Partners recognize and value Lakelands unique positioning as convener, data hub, and population health leader. Clarifying strategic focus and articulating when Lakelands will lead versus support will enable more effective partnerships.
5. **Community Presence is Essential to Impact.** Across all engagement, participants emphasized that presence in community is the most important priority. Participants noted decreased in-person support and participation following the merger and the response to Covid-19. Engagement participants note that it will be important to address how Lakelands will maintain meaningful presence across a large geography with finite resources, balancing in-person programming with virtual program and service delivery while ensuring efficiency gains don't come at the cost of community connection.
6. **Programs and Services Require Both Restoration and Innovation.** Engagement revealed a dual imperative: restoring capacity in programs that have diminished while innovating to address emerging needs. Partners note that early childhood programs, particularly Healthy Babies Healthy Children, have not been restored to pre-Covid capacity. Staff shared that educator visits to community programs have declined significantly. At the same time, opportunities have emerged for school-based youth prevention education, deeper healthcare integration through data sharing, and upstream prevention addressing social determinants of health.
7. **Health Equity Leadership is Both a Strength and an Opportunity.** Lakelands is consistently recognized as a leader in health equity, with partners valuing the organization's willingness to advocate for underserved populations. There is consensus that using a health equity lens will require different approaches to meet the unique needs of each community. Rural communities face distinct challenges including transportation barriers, geographic isolation, and seasonal populations. Indigenous partnerships require intentional presence and understanding of "what Indigenous health care looks like." Some populations need mobile services, anti-stigma initiatives, and programs designed with lived experience input.

8. Seven Priority Issues Demand Strategic Focus. Seven themes emerged consistently throughout engagement as areas Lakelands should focus, including:

- Mental health and addictions (particularly youth crisis and substance use);
- Aging population and healthy aging;
- Climate change and environmental health;
- Food insecurity and poverty;
- Access to primary care (the most common survey response);
- Early childhood health and development; and
- Indigenous health priorities.

9. Technology and Data Modernization is Foundational. Partners identified outdated technology infrastructure as a barrier to collaboration. At the same time, partners highly value Lakelands data capabilities and see opportunity for the organization to serve as a regional population health data hub. Opportunities include better integration with existing platforms, developing data sharing agreements, and providing community-specific dashboards.

10. Upstream Prevention Requires More Definition. Participants expressed strong support for upstream approaches, understanding that addressing Social Determinants of Health are a necessary foundation for creating long term positive health outcomes. However, participants struggled to understand what generational change means specifically at Lakelands. It will be important to define "generational change" with measurable indicators, clarify how upstream prevention and direct services will be balanced, and articulate how Lakelands will navigate provincial mandates while pursuing long-term population health goals.

11. Indigenous Partnerships Require Relationship-First Approaches. Engagement with First Nations communities and Urban Indigenous partners revealed the critical importance of consistent presence in community, cultural humility, and understanding of historical trauma. Participants emphasized that trust must be earned through positive experiences.

The strategic plan must highlight and consider balance while acknowledging competing priorities: restoring capacity while innovating; maintaining community presence with finite resources; meeting provincial mandates while addressing local needs; pursuing upstream prevention while delivering valued direct services; and building a unified culture while respecting distinct geographical, social, political, and cultural contexts of the four counties and three First Nations. Most importantly, the strategic plan must articulate a clear, compelling vision for Lakeland's role as convener, data hub, and leader in population health. A role that leverages Lakeland's unique strengths, expertise, credibility, relationships, and equity leadership to advance health and well-being across the region for generations to come.

Introduction

This Research and Engagement Report comes at a critical juncture in Lakelands Public Health's strategic planning process. It has been prepared for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Health (BOH) in advance of strategic planning retreats. The information contained in this report will play an important role informing decisions for the future of the organization.

Project Background

In the Spring of 2025, Arising Collective was engaged by Lakelands Public Health (Lakelands) to guide the organization through a strategic planning process, the outcome of which will be a five-year strategic plan. The process was divided into three key phases.

Phase One was focused on internal engagement with Lakelands staff for input into both the strategic planning process and a Workplace Cultural Plan to identify strategies for building a cohesive and unified team environment.

Phase Two shifted attention outward to the broader community. With the merger creating a new entity serving four counties and three First Nations, it was essential to engage external interest holders to understand community health priorities, gather feedback on Lakelands' role and services, and strengthen relationships disrupted or affected by the organizational transition. Together, Phase 1 and Phase 2 findings will inform development of strategic priorities that are both internally supported and responsive to external priorities. The outcome of Phase Two is this Community Engagement Report.

Phase Three will build on work completed during the first two phases to develop a strategic plan for Lakelands Public Health, to be approved in the winter 2027.

Phase 2 Research and Engagement Process

At the project outset, Lakelands determined that the priorities outlined in the new strategic plan would be determined based on the results of a comprehensive research and engagement process. This section outlines the process and that was undertaken and methodologies used.

Document Review

The document review consisted of a review of relevant Lakelands documents as well as documents from each legacy organization; Peterborough Public Health (PPH) and Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPR). The document review was used to inform the approach to engagement and development of engagement questions as well as to provide relevant historical and contextual information to the process. A list of documents reviewed as part of this process, and any relevant data important to this process, is included in [Appendix A](#).

Purpose of Engagement

The purpose of the Phase 2 engagement process was to inform, educate, consult, and involve the broader Lakelands community in meaningful ways. Input was gathered from residents across the four counties, Urban Indigenous partners, residents and healthcare partners from Alderville, Hiawatha, and Curve Lake First Nations, representatives of partner organizations, municipal and healthcare leaders, and Lakelands staff to inform priority setting, using different methodologies.

A detailed overview of engagement methodology, participation, and data analysis is described in [Appendix B](#).

Engagement Participation at a Glance

A total of **744 individuals** participated in the Phase 2 engagement process from March 2026 to the end of June 2026. Participant numbers also include 80 additional survey responses from the Lakelands Brand Roll-out Survey that was administered September 2025 to end of April 2026. Engagement was a mix of in-person and virtual, using 4 different methodologies. A detailed list of participants and groups, as well as detailed methodology is included in [Appendix B](#).

ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPATION



Total Engagement: 744 Participants

Data Analysis

Detailed notes were taken during each engagement session. Participants were advised that their input would remain anonymous with nothing attributed to a specific person or session. A grounded theory analysis was used to identify emergent themes, supported by direct quotes and frequency analysis across participating groups.

The data analysis process involved:

- **Grounded theory methodology:** Themes emerged from data rather than imposed predetermined framework.
- **Constant comparison:** Coded segments compared across participant groups for consistency and variation.
- **Saturation:** Continued analysis until no new themes emerged from data.
- **Triangulation:** Cross-validation of themes across key informant interviews, focus groups, and survey data.
- **Iterative coding:** Multiple passes through data to refine themes and ensure accuracy.
- **Use of participant quotes:** Quotes preserved verbatim to ensure authentic representation of participant voices.

Data Limitations

Limitations include:

- **Temporal context:** The post-merger transition period continues to affect visibility and relationships with partner organizations. In addition, some experiences shared were related to legacy organizations, as opposed to the newly merged organization - Lakelands Public Health.

In addition, as facilitators, we recognize that external issues and circumstances exist impacting engagement processes, participation, and outcomes. Relevant pressures include current affairs, the socio-political environment, and ongoing pressures on individuals and families such as rising costs of living, access to the healthcare systems, etc.

- **Haliburton representation:** Smaller number of participants from Haliburton means fewer voices in absolute numbers, though concerns were consistent when expressed.
- **Self-selection bias:** Survey respondents and focus group participants self-selected and may not represent full population.

Thematic Findings from Engagement

The following section provides a summary of high-level findings from all engagement methodologies, including focus groups, key informant interviews, community engagement sessions, and the surveys. The report essentially shares what was heard from engagement participants, rolled up into themes. Anonymous quotes are used throughout the document to add context to the analysis and demonstrate the richness of the information that was gathered.

A separate report has been created that highlights detailed survey findings.

Engagement Themes

The engagement process has provided Lakelands with a clear picture of organizational strengths to leverage, challenges to address, and opportunities to pursue. Findings have been organized into the following themes:

1. Overall Impressions
2. Summary of Organizational Strengths and Opportunities
3. Programs and Services
4. Partnerships and Collaboration
5. Health Equity
6. Upstream Planning and Generational Change
7. Overview of Priority Areas

1. Overall Impressions

The following highlights our impressions, as facilitators, about the level and type of engagement we observed.

- Participants across methodologies demonstrated genuine care for public health in their communities, as revealed by the quality of information shared and the number of participants in the different engagement methodologies.
- Overall, engagement was positive, with participants sharing many strengths of public health.
- Though there were some differences across geographical locations, engagement revealed remarkable consistency in themes across groups, providing a strong foundation for strategic decision-making.
- The use of external facilitators created space for honest feedback from partners and others.

2. Summary of Organizational Strengths and Opportunities

Lakelands is consistently recognized for its many core strengths including the expertise and credibility of the staff team, community relationships, responsiveness of programs, and leadership in health equity and population health. Building on this strong foundation, engagement revealed important opportunities for growth and enhancement including expanding visibility and awareness of the organization, deepening post-merger integration, clarifying roles and strategic focus, strengthening partnerships, optimizing resource allocation to balance provincial mandates with local need, and modernizing technological infrastructure.

The following sections provide a high-level summary of organizational strengths and opportunities that were identified throughout engagement. They are also described in more detail within each theme.

Summary of Organizational Strengths Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Positive impression.** Overall, residents, partners, and staff have a positive impression of Lakelands, with **81%** of community residents and **88%** of community partners rating their impression as positive or very positive in the survey. Staff members show a slightly lower satisfaction rate (67% positive/very positive).

Community Residents (n=340):	Community Partners (n=34):	Lakelands Staff (n=73):
• Very Positive: 28%	• Very Positive: 32%	• Very Positive: 19%
• Positive: 53%	• Positive: 56%	• Positive: 48%
• Neutral: 14%	• Neutral: 9%	• Neutral: 23%
• Negative: 3%	• Negative: 3%	• Negative: 8%
• Very Negative: 2%	• Very Negative: 0%	• Very Negative: 2%

- **Expertise and credibility.** Lakelands is recognized as a trusted, credible source of public health expertise with strong scientific foundations and policy influence.
- **Leadership and Vision.** Lakelands leadership is consistently praised for accessibility, empathy, clear communication, and strategic vision by partners.
- **Relationships and Partnerships.** Lakelands has established strong relationships with key partners across healthcare, education, municipal, and community sectors.
- **Program Delivery and Service Quality.** Lakelands programs and services are seen as high quality, evidence-based, and valued by partners and community.
- **Health Equity Leadership.** Lakelands is consistently recognized as a leader in health equity, with commitment to addressing social determinants of health, advocating for underserved populations, and applying an equity lens to its work.
- **Covid-19 Response and Emergency Management.** The response of both Peterborough Public Health (PPH) and Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPR) to

the Covid-19 pandemic is recognized as a significant strength, demonstrating capability in emergency management, communication, coordination, and rapid response.

- **Broad Community Reach.** Lakelands is recognized for its broad reach across diverse communities, populations, and settings, providing access to multiple populations and communities, such as schools, clinics, businesses, community settings, and service agencies.
- **Communication.** Overall Lakelands communications are noted as effective, clear, and valued. Social media, dashboards, and advisories are particularly appreciated. The video shown during external engagement sessions was well received.
- **Potential for Enhanced Role as Convenor and Coordination.** Lakelands is seen as uniquely positioned to convene partners, coordinate collective action, and bring organizations together around population health and health equity. This convening role is seen as a key strength and opportunity.
- **Adaptability and Innovation.** Participants note that Lakelands has demonstrated the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, innovate in program delivery, and respond to emerging community needs.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Visibility and Public Awareness.** Throughout engagement, participants highlighted the importance of enhancing public and partner understanding of Lakelands role, scope of services, and geographic reach.
- **Post-Merger Integration.** The merger of PPH and HKPR into Lakelands presents ongoing challenges and opportunities, including strengthening internal culture and partner relationships, ensuring consistent and equitable program implementation across regions, and honouring local identity while creating cohesive regional service delivery.
- **Role Clarity & Strategic Focus.** Community partners consistently identified the importance for Lakelands to articulate clear strategic priorities to help them better understand when and how to engage with the organization.
- **Resource Optimization & Capacity.** Opportunities exist for Lakelands to strategically allocate resources to maximize community presence across the large geography, restore program capacity where needed and implement innovative program and service delivery models that balance efficiency with community connection, while meeting the unique needs of each community.
- **Communications.** Building on existing communication strengths, Lakelands can implement more frequent, proactive, and strategic communications that reach diverse audiences through multiple channels.
- **Data Systems & Technology Infrastructure.** Opportunities exist to update data systems and technology infrastructure to enhance collaboration, improve efficiency, enable better data sharing with partners, and position Lakelands as a regional population health data hub.

Top Opportunities Identified by Group

Healthcare Partners - Enhance data integration to strengthen collaboration - Increase consistent engagement at partner meetings and planning tables - Harmonize approaches and protocols across hospitals and regions for seamless coordination	Municipal Partners - Enhance visibility so the public better understands Lakelands role and value - Establish regular council presentations to strengthen municipal relationships - Clearly communicate merger benefits, outcomes, and strategic priorities to guide municipal planning
Education Partners - Harmonize approaches across school boards from different legacy Health Units - Expand capacity for school-based programs and prevention initiatives - Clarify when to engage Lakelands versus other services to streamline collaboration	Community Partners - Implement more proactive engagement strategies - Deepen relationships through consistent presence and strategic partnerships - Build collaborative capacity through joint planning and resource sharing
Residents - Increase awareness about Lakelands services and access pathways - Improve accessibility (addressing transportation and geographic barriers) - Enhance community presence and visibility	First Nations and Urban Indigenous - Enhance understanding about Lakelands services and access pathways - Expand culturally safe services and staff training opportunities - Build trust through consistent presence and positive experiences - Increase Indigenous representation in health promotion roles

Top Internal Opportunities Identified by Staff

1. Strengthen Merger Integration - Continue to build a unified culture - Harmonize management approaches and practices - Ensure equitable treatment and resources across all locations - Address change fatigue through transparent communication and staff support	2. Enhance Staff Engagement & Well-being - Boost morale through recognition and appreciation - Improve retention through career development and support - Strengthen recruitment through competitive positioning - Expand meaningful consultation on organizational decision
3. Optimize Workload Distribution - Ensure equitable workload across offices - Balance administrative tasks with direct programming time	4. Strengthen Internal Communications - Break down information silos between teams - Optimize all-staff meeting timing and format

• Review staffing levels and allocation strategically • Address contract versus permanent position considerations	• Enhance communication channels beyond email • Create structured feedback loops and follow-up mechanisms • Allow adequate time for questions and dialogue
5. Restore & Enhance Community Programming • Restore in-person programs where valued • Optimize balance between virtual and in-person delivery • Expand community presence and hands-on programming • Enhance group-based interventions	6. Advance Service Equity Across Geography • Ensure decision-making reflects all regions • Optimize service distribution across communities • Leverage local knowledge and relationships strategically • Address unique needs of rural and urban populations
7. Enhance Leadership & Management Practices • Standardize management practices while allowing flexibility • Empower experienced staff with appropriate autonomy • Strengthen connections between Senior Leadership Team and frontline staff • Foster collaborative leadership approaches	8. Optimize Communications Function • Enhance collaboration between the Communications team and program staff • Balance branding initiatives with community-focused content • Ensure communication products meet community needs and expectations

3. Programs and Services

Programs and services emerged as an important theme across all engagement methodologies, with distinct perspectives from staff, community partners, and residents. While Lakelands program quality is recognized as a strength, engagement revealed opportunities to enhance capacity, expand accessibility, ensure consistency across regions, and optimize the balance between community-based and virtual delivery models.

When asked to rate the importance of Lakelands programs and services to the health of the community in the survey, core public health functions (vaccinations, disease control, inspections) have near-universal support, though the data reveals a gap between what health professionals identify as essential (mental health, harm reduction, equity work) versus what the public prioritizes. This suggests an opportunity for enhanced public education about social determinants of health and the role of public health in upstream interventions.

Top 5 Programs Rated as ‘Essential’ Across all Groups in the Survey

1. Vaccination clinics - 89%
2. Disease information and prevention - 87%

3. Public health inspections - 82%
4. Infection prevention and control - 81%
5. Emergency preparedness and response - 78%

Programs with notable differences among groups from the survey include the following:

Mental Health Resources:

- Community Residents: 48% Essential
- Lakelands Staff: 62% Essential
- Community Partners: 71% Essential

Harm Reduction (substance use supports):

- Community Residents: 38% Essential
- Lakelands Staff: 54% Essential
- Community Partners: 68% Essential

Health Equity and Outreach:

- Community Residents: 52% Essential
- Lakelands Staff: 71% Essential
- Community Partners: 79% Essential

Dental Care:

- Community Residents: 61% Essential
- Lakelands Staff: 58% Essential
- Community Partners: 53% Essential

Program Strengths Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Responsive and Supportive Service Delivery.** Community partners noted positive experiences with specific programs including vaccination clinics, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, school-based immunization, and public health inspections. The infection prevention team was specifically praised for providing guidance and support to healthcare facilities.
- **Expertise in Prevention.** Lakelands expertise in prevention is acknowledged across all engagement groups, with broad community reach appreciated by partners. As well, as demonstrated in the survey, Lakelands is recognized as a trusted, credible voice across groups. Survey data shows 87-94% agree/strongly agree that Lakelands is a trusted source of health information.
- **High level of satisfaction with Recent Interaction.** Overall, community members with recent interactions with Lakelands are highly satisfied with their experience (87% strongly agree/agree), with corresponding high agreement that they received needed assistance, were treated with courtesy and respect, that staff listened to their needs, and the information was understandable.

Opportunities for Program Enhancement Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Enhance Program Visibility and Awareness.** A consistent theme across all data sources reveals significant opportunity to increase public and partner understanding of the full scope of programs and services that Lakelands provides. Enhanced visibility will enable more residents to access valued services.
- **Enhance Communication Effectiveness.** With only 32% of community members rating communications as "very" or "extremely" effective, opportunities exist to expand reach

"I don't fully understand the full scope of services that Lakelands provides"
~Survey Participant

and improve engagement across all channels. Partners do rate effectiveness much higher.

Recommendations identified by participants survey include:

- Simplify website navigation for an improved user experience
- Provide more engaging and interactive social media content
- Use non-traditional venues (artisan markets, grocery stores, pharmacies) to share information
- Develop regular community newsletters with consistent cadence
- Leverage municipal and partner communications channels
- Maintain and expand newsletters
- Create automated calendars for program sign-ups (vaccination, lactation, etc.)
- Develop engaging promotional materials
- Use plain language with appropriate reading levels for accessibility
- Provide multilingual resources to reach diverse populations

"Pointing families to the website isn't the same as having someone there in person"

~Survey Participant

Survey Results: Effectiveness of Lakelands Communications

Rating	Community	Staff	Partners
Extremely effective	8%	12%	15%
Very effective	24%	19%	26%
Somewhat effective	48%	52%	47%
Not so effective	16%	14%	9%
Not at all effective	4%	3%	3%

- **Strengthen Community Presence and In-Person Programming.** Engagement revealed a desire for Lakelands to restore and optimize in-person programming following pandemic-related shifts. Participants expressed interest in enhanced in-person support and staff presence in communities. Specific suggestions to improve in-person programming include:
 - Holding open houses and community events to increase visibility
 - Providing pop-up clinics embedded in community settings
 - Co-locating with agencies already present in communities
 - Providing satellite services in rural areas
- **Expand Service Accessibility.** Participants noted opportunities to enhance program accessibility by expanding services in rural communities, increasing immunization and sexual health services, addressing transportation barriers through innovative service delivery, including mobile and embedded services, and leveraging virtual care and technological solutions to extend reach without relying solely on in-person presence.

- **Harmonize Approaches Across the Region.** There is a desire for Lakelands to develop consistent processes and protocols related to data and service delivery across hospitals and school boards. Participants noted that harmonizing approaches to swabbing protocols, isolation guidelines, and immunization policies will reduce confusion and streamline collaboration for community partners working across multiple jurisdictions.
- **Restore and Enhance Preventative and Educational Programming.** Partners would like to see an increase in the frequency of Lakelands staff engagement in prevention and educational programming, including dental health education, nutrition education, and family support. While website resources are valuable, participants noted the enhanced impact of in-person staff attendance at community programs.
- **Strengthen School-Based and Youth Programming** Participants identified significant opportunities for Lakelands to lead youth prevention strategies addressing vaping, obesity, mental health, substance use, and healthy relationships.
 - Deliberate partnering with school boards to amplify messaging
 - Provide upstream interventions starting in early childhood
 - Increase sexual health clinic accessibility for youth
 - Ensure youth programming is equitably distributed across all geographic areas
 - Formalize prevention initiatives already underway (such as PSYP, Peterborough Student Youth Partnership)
- **Expand Upstream Prevention and Public Health Education** Participants emphasized Lakelands potential role in:
 - Early intervention and health promotion (not just disease prevention)
 - Addressing social determinants of health through integrated care models
 - Preventative programming for aging populations
 - Tackling root causes of health inequities including food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty
 - Demonstrating the connection between upstream prevention and long-term population health outcomes

4. Partnerships and Collaboration

While partnerships between Lakelands and community partners are strong and have been maintained throughout the merger, some partners expressed a lack depth, consistency, and strategic alignment. Partners express wanting more proactive engagement, opportunities for co-location in rural communities and joint planning.

Strengths Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Strong One-on-One Relationships.** One-on-one relationships between Lakelands staff and community partners are described as very important. Partners express valuing the ability to pick up the phone and reach an assigned Lakelands staff person. There is broad consensus that when partners call, Lakelands typically responds quickly.

- **Effective Covid-19 Collaboration and Emergency Response.** Strong collaboration during the Covid-19 response demonstrated Lakelands partnership capacity (with quarterly MOH meetings particularly valued by education partners), demonstrating capability in emergency management, communication, coordination, and rapid response.
- **Good Leadership-Level Relationships.** Good relationships exist at leadership levels between organizations, especially with hospitals, demonstrating foundation for deeper collaboration.
- **Recognized Convening Capacity.** Lakelands is seen as uniquely positioned to convene partners around community priorities and coordinate collective action, especially as the organization has established relationships across sectors, including healthcare, education, municipal, and community sectors. Partners appreciate Lakelands' ability to bring resources together and leverage services collaboratively. There is also appreciation for Lakelands representation at community planning tables.
- **Population Health Data Hub.** Lakelands' capacity to serve as a population health data hub and resource for community planning is extremely valued. Partners especially, appreciate the data that Lakelands collects and the dashboards it provides. Access to local expertise of Lakelands staff and the epidemiology team are consistently praised among community partners.

Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Define Clear Strategic Priorities.** As a newly merged organization, engagement participants consistently expressed that they would benefit from Lakelands clearly defining its strategic priorities and articulating its role across the region. Partners want Lakelands to pick their priorities and communicate them clearly, leading on issues others can't tackle (climate change, health equity, policy advocacy) while recognizing that Lakelands doesn't need to solve every community problem.
- **Establish Partnership Protocols.** Establish consistent partnership protocols and dedicated relationship managers, establish regular rhythm of meetings with key partners, ensure consistent presence at Ontario Health Team (OHT) tables, community meetings, and partner events, co-develop initiatives with clear roles and shared accountability, and request early involvement in planning at municipal level (e.g., budget discussions).
- **Establish Data Hub Role and Improve Data Sharing Infrastructure.** Opportunities exist for Lakelands to serve as population health resource hub, providing access to population data to inform partner planning, functioning as data integrator for primary care, acute care, OHTs, and social services, and developing data sharing agreements and platforms.
- **Formalize Convener Function.** Lakelands can pull partners together around priority populations, and lead coordination of equity tables to reduce duplication (recognizing that "one table is better than five" as partners lack capacity for multiple meetings).
- **Strengthen Partner Communication.** Partners would appreciate updated Lakelands contact lists, and a better understanding of how the organization is structured.

- **Expand Co-Location, Joint Programming, and Coordinated Service Delivery.** Recommendations include co-locating at hospitals and community sites and shared immunization clinics and vaccine campaigns. Community health centres want deeper collaboration on harm reduction and sexual health, libraries and municipalities can support Lakelands communications and outreach, and many noted that partnerships on mental health, addictions, and unhoused populations can be expanded.
- **Deepen School Board Partnerships.** School boards want to be “deliberate partners” in amplifying Lakelands work, with opportunities for Lakelands to leverage school board access to families. One partner noted they would like to see school board partnerships formalized in the strategic plan.
- **Deepen Integration with Health System Partners** Hospital CEOs and OHT Leads identified opportunities for:
 - Immunization integration with EPIC
 - Joint grand rounds and pop-up education sessions
 - Embedding Lakelands in primary care settings
 - Participating in Medical Advisory Committees
 - Supporting antibiotic stewardship programs
 - Developing data sharing agreements to leverage Lakelands epidemiologists' expertise for population health planning

Top Partnership Needs (based on survey results)

- Regular communication & updates
- Joint program planning
- Data sharing
- Coordinated service delivery
- Advocacy collaboration

5. Health Equity

Lakelands is consistently recognized as a leader in health equity, with commitments to addressing social determinants of health, advocating for marginalized and underserved populations, and applying an equity lens to all of its work. Partners see Lakelands as uniquely positioned to champion health equity across the region.

Strengths Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Recognized Leadership in Health Equity** across the region.
- **Willingness to Advocate.** Lakelands is valued for saying “unpopular things” that need to be said, with recognition that the organization can advocate and educate on health equity when others can't.

Opportunities to Advance Health Equity Across Programs, Services and Communities

- **Function as Convener on Health Equity.** There is a desire for Lakelands to leverage its unique position to convene organizations around health equity issues, bring partners together on shared priorities, coordinate collective action, and demonstrate leadership in health equity through collaborative approaches.
- **Contextualize Implementation of Health Equity.** Opportunities exist to tailor health equity strategies to each region's specific needs, challenges, and opportunities, recognizing that rural communities have distinct considerations from urban centers. Specific suggestions about how Lakelands can enhance its health equity work include:
 - Developing targeted approaches for rural and marginalized populations
 - Addressing language barriers for newcomers and refugees
 - Improving accessibility for people with disabilities
 - Creating culturally specific programming that honour diverse communities
- **Build Trust with First Nations Communities.** Recommendations to strengthen trust with First Nations communities and Urban Indigenous organizations include:
 - Consistent, sustained presence beyond emergencies
 - Understanding and acknowledging historical trauma and supporting communities in healing from historical harms
 - Recognizing different relationship histories with legacy organizations (Alderville with HKPR versus Hiawatha and Curve Lake with PPH)
 - Earning trust through positive experiences over time
 - Strengthening relationships with partners at post-secondary Institutions
- **Leverage Indigenous-Led Health Promotion.** Participants identified existing Indigenous health practices that should be recognized and supported, including traditional medicines and ceremonies, and Pow Wows as activities that support physical health, mental health, and belonging.
- **Enhance Cultural Competency.** Suggestions to strengthen internal organizational cultural competency include:
 - Comprehensive staff training on cultural safety
 - Fostering humility and curiosity versus defensiveness
 - Deepening understanding of historical harms experienced by Indigenous communities
 - Developing "cultural humility" as an organizational value
- **Improve Service Accessibility.** Suggestions to reduce barriers to access programs and services include:
 - Enhancing awareness of available services
 - Creating welcoming environments that reduce embarrassment or stigma
 - Addressing transportation barriers
 - Providing services during weekends when larger community events occur
 - Implementing mobile and outreach models

How Lakelands Can Better Meet the Needs of Diverse and Underserved Groups

In the survey, participants were asked to provide responses to the question: *How can Lakelands Public Health better meet the needs of diverse and underserved groups?* Based on an analysis of 186 responses, the following strategies were identified:

Top Strategies Identified

- **Community Engagement (32% of responses):** Partner with community organizations; Include people with lived experience in planning; Attend existing community gatherings; Build trust through consistent presence.
- **Provide Culturally Appropriate Services (22%):** Language accessibility; Indigenous health approaches; Understanding cultural barriers; Training for staff on diversity.
- **Provide Outreach & Mobile Services (19%):** Go to where people are; Home visiting programs; Services at shelters, food banks, etc.; Transportation solutions.
- **Address Barriers (18%):** Provide services during evening/weekend hours; Technology access for those without internet; Reduced paperwork/bureaucracy; Transportation.
- **Focus on Social Determinants of Health (15%):** Housing advocacy; Food security initiatives; Income support connections; Transportation access.

6. Upstream Planning & Generational Change

During engagement, participants were asked to consider what generational change means in the context of Public Health. Participants understand the importance of generational health change but struggle to define what it means operationally, especially in the context of short political / funding cycles. There's strong support for upstream approaches, but also an understanding of the barriers making it difficult.

Strengths Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Recognized Expertise in Planning for Long-Term Positive Health Outcomes.** Participants described generational change as a "multifaceted" concept with opportunities to shape community infrastructure and systems that support health. There is recognition that public health has the expertise to drive initiatives that create lasting health improvements for future generations.
- **Conceptual Support for Upstream Work.** Strong support exists for upstream approaches, with the understanding that secure income and housing are necessary foundations for physical and mental health, and the recognition that Lakelands must be proactive with long-term solutions versus treating shorter-term concerns.

Issues Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Funding Model Constraints and Provincial Mandate Tensions.** Participants recognize that municipal funding shortfalls limit public health capacity and that balancing

provincial mandates with local long-term priorities creates challenges, with political constraints and "staying in lane" messaging from the province.

- **Systemic Barriers to Change.** There is acknowledgement that many barriers exist, including the lack of public knowledge about social determinants of health and how they impact long term health. Participants note that anti-stigma work and education is needed to address root causes.

Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

- **Define Generational Change Framework.** Define "generational change" with measurable indicators, develop indicators tracking generational health outcomes over time, and shift toward prevention and upstream approaches where possible.
- **Lead Upstream Prevention Strategies.** Partners note that Lakelands should be a leader in hard-to-tackle subject areas, and be more progressive on approaches to smoking, addiction (including gambling), and healthy relationships with technology. Participants want to see Lakelands focus on preventative care including harm reduction, drug prevention, healthy eating/nutrition for children/youth, immunization information and promotion, vaping prevention and cannabis education for youth, mental health early intervention in schools, intimate partner violence prevention through upstream work, food security and poverty reduction advocacy, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- **Implement Lifespan Health Promotion.** Leverage schools for lifespan health promotion, and implement school-based prevention for vaping, obesity, mental health. Develop lifespan approach supporting kids, youth, adults, and seniors.
- **Champion Policy Advocacy.** Champion upstream policy changes. Advocate for basic income connected to health outcomes, position housing and harm reduction as health priorities, advocate for food insecurity requiring income-based solutions, address transportation poverty needing alternatives, advocate for policy changes on upstream determinants of health, and use creative advocacy approaches when direct paths are blocked.
- **Develop Community Health Infrastructure.** Implement community health ambassador programs (volunteer or paid) to ensure that walking groups happen, community kitchens operate, genuine community engagement occurs, with a role for connection and relationship building over time. Utilize virtual care and technology solutions to extend reach.

7. Overview of Priority Issues

During engagement, participants were asked to share priority issues that are important for Lakelands to consider as part of planning as well as potential opportunities and the role Lakelands could play to help address each issue (either as lead or support to other organizations).

Issues at a Glance

Priority Issue	Key Focus Areas	Most Affected Populations	Geographic Considerations
Mental Health & Addictions	- Youth vaping epidemic - Toxic drug supply & overdoses - Substance use prevention; loss of CTS - Social isolation post-pandemic	- Youth (all school districts) - Unhoused population - People leaving incarceration - Indigenous communities - Seniors	- Issue across all 4 counties - Service gaps vary by region
Aging Population & Healthy Aging	- Aging in place supports - Fall prevention - Dementia/Alzheimer's prevention - Chronic disease management - Social isolation - ALC concerns	- Seniors across region, especially in rural areas - Multi-generational households - Seniors hesitant/unable to access care	- Growing across all counties - Rural aging in place challenges - Transportation barriers greater in Haliburton & CKL
Climate Change & Environmental Health	- Vector-borne disease emergence - Water quality & safety - Extreme weather events - Heat vulnerability - Air quality	- Vulnerable populations in extreme weather - Rural well water users - Seasonal/cottage residents - Outdoor workers - Indigenous communities	- Cottage country water testing - Rural well water concerns - Urban heat island effects
Food Insecurity & Poverty	- Rising food insecurity - School breakfast programs - Social determinants advocacy - Transportation barriers	- Families living in poverty - Children/youth - Rural residents - People with disabilities - Newcomers/refugees - People leaving incarceration	- Hidden poverty in rural communities - Issue across all 4 counties
Access to Primary Care	- Physician shortage - Unattached patient population - Preventive care gaps - Pediatric service gaps - Immunization for unattached patients	- Unattached patients - Children without primary care - Rural residents - Newcomers - Vulnerable populations	95% locum physicians in some rural areas - Greatest issue in Haliburton & rural areas

Priority Issue	Key Focus Areas	Most Affected Populations	Geographic Considerations
Early Childhood Health & Development	• HBHC capacity • Early intervention screening • Prenatal support • Breastfeeding support • Screen time & digital wellness • FASD prevention	• Vulnerable mothers & families • High-risk perinatal populations • Children without primary care • Young parents • Indigenous families	• Service gaps outside Peterborough • Haliburton County childcare needs • Rural home visiting capacity
Indigenous Health Priorities	• Trust-building & consistent presence • Cultural competency & safety • Indigenous staff representation • Traditional healing support • Generational trauma awareness • Partnerships with Urban Indigenous communities and groups	• Alderville, Hiawatha, Curve Lake First Nations • Urban Indigenous students (Trent/Fleming) • Indigenous youth • Indigenous elders • Young Indigenous parents	• Three First Nations with distinct relationship histories • Urban Indigenous populations in Peterborough • Different legacy org relationships

Detailed Narrative of Each Priority Issue

Mental Health & Addictions

Mental health and addictions emerged as the most frequently cited priority across all engagement methodologies and participant groups. The convergence of youth substance use, toxic drug supply, social isolation, and generational trauma has created an urgent public health crisis affecting communities across all four counties. With limited treatment capacity and the recent loss of harm reduction services, participants emphasized the critical need for both prevention and intervention strategies. Engagement participants note opportunities where Lakelands could play a role, recognizing that many of the opportunities would be in partnership with other organizations.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Prevention & Early Intervention:

- Lead youth prevention strategies addressing vaping, substance use, mental health, and healthy relationships in schools
- Provide upstream interventions starting in early childhood
- Partner with school boards as deliberate partners in amplifying prevention messaging
- Ensure youth programming is equitably distributed across all geographic areas
- Address intimate partner violence through upstream work in schools

Harm Reduction:

- Advocate for expanded harm reduction services
- Develop anti-stigma initiatives to reduce barriers to care
- Ensure programs are designed with input from people with lived experience
- Support mobile community outreach for mental health services

Advocacy & System Coordination:

- Advocate for expanded treatment capacity and reduced wait times
- Champion policy changes addressing upstream determinants of mental health
- Opportunity for partnership between Lakelands and hospitals on mental health/addictions strategy
- Provide mental health and wellness education to the healthcare sector

Indigenous-Specific Approaches:

- Support Indigenous healing approaches and culturally safe services
- Address generational trauma with cultural humility and understanding
- Provide consistent presence in communities and First Nations
- Build team member-to-team member relationships
- Support youth wellness and healthy pathways including recreation and arts programs

Aging Population & Healthy Aging

The aging demographic shift is occurring across all four counties and represents both a challenge and an opportunity for population health planning. The growing prevalence of dementia, falls, and chronic disease requires proactive intervention before acute care is needed. Engagement participants note opportunities where Lakelands could play a role, recognizing that many of the opportunities would be in partnership with other organizations.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Preventative Programming:

- Senior active living programs promoting physical activity and social connection
- Falls prevention programs and education
- Dementia and Alzheimer's prevention education and screening
- Chronic disease self-management support
- Wellness programs for at-risk older populations
- GAIN clinics (Geriatric Assessment and Intervention Network) and preventative care models

Community Planning & Advocacy:

- Age-friendly initiatives and community planning with municipalities
- Using an aging lens in park design and planning decisions
- Advocate for transportation solutions enabling seniors to access services
- Support aging in place through coordination with community support services
- Address housing challenges affecting aging population

Healthcare System Support:

- IPAC support in long-term care facilities
- Infection prevention and control practitioner roles supporting LTC
- Partnership with hospitals on Alternative Level of Care (ALC) strategies
- Support for primary care teams managing complex chronic disease

Outreach & Connection:

- Address social isolation through community programming and connection initiatives
- Dental program for seniors addressing oral health needs
- Accessible vaccine clinics recognizing that "not everyone likes to go to the pharmacies"
- Mobile or home-based services for homebound seniors

Climate Change & Environmental Health

Climate change was consistently described as an important public health issue with health effects already visible in communities. From increasing vector-borne diseases to extreme weather events, water quality concerns to climate anxiety among youth, the environmental determinants of health are becoming more urgent. Engagement participants note that Lakelands is uniquely positioned to lead on climate as a public health priority, integrating environmental policy with health outcomes and advocating for both mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Surveillance & Monitoring:

- Vector-borne disease surveillance and public reporting
- West Nile virus monitoring
- Water quality testing and public advisories
- Air quality monitoring and alerts
- Track climate-related health outcomes

Public Education & Communication:

- Accurate, updated information on disease vectors and how to protect against them
- Heat wave preparedness and cooling strategies
- Water safety education for well water users and recreational water users
- Blue-green algae identification and response
- Emergency preparedness for extreme weather events
- Seasonal awareness campaigns for lake associations

Policy & Advocacy:

- Position climate change as a public health priority requiring cross-sectoral action
- Advocate for climate mitigation policies connecting health outcomes
- Representation on municipal climate committees and planning processes
- Integration of health lens into environmental policy decisions
- Advocate for vulnerable population protections during extreme weather

Partnership & Coordination:

- Collaborate with municipalities on climate adaptation strategies
- Partner with conservation authorities on water quality and environmental monitoring
- Coordinate with Ontario Parks on public health education
- Work with emergency services on extreme weather response protocols
- Support Indigenous communities' environmental stewardship initiatives

Equity Lens:

- Address differential impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations
- Ensure cooling centers and emergency supports reach those most at risk
- Address rural/urban equity in water treatment and quality

Food Insecurity & Poverty

Food insecurity was identified as a critical gap across all regions, fundamentally connected to poverty and other social determinants of health. Participants emphasized that secure income and housing are necessary foundations for physical and mental health, and that Lakelands must help to address the root causes. With hidden poverty in rural communities, rising costs of living, and insufficient long-term solutions, addressing food insecurity requires advocacy, partnership, and an upstream approach connecting health outcomes to income security.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Advocacy for Upstream Solutions:

- Advocate for basic income connected to health outcomes
- Position housing and food security as health priorities requiring income-based solutions
- Champion policy changes on upstream determinants of health
- Use creative advocacy approaches when direct paths are blocked by provincial constraints
- Educate public and decision-makers about social determinants of health

Community-Based Interventions:

- Support community research on food insecurity to understand local scope
- Provide healthy eating/nutrition education for children/youth in schools
- Partner with food banks and community organizations on coordinated approaches
- Support school breakfast programs through public health expertise
- Support community kitchens and food skills programming

Design Programs with an Equity Lens:

- Address transportation poverty requiring alternative service delivery models
- "Go to the people" through mobile services, pop-up clinics, co-location
- Implement a "no wrong door" approach to service access
- Engage people with lived experience in program design and evaluation
- Ensure programs are accessible to those with limited income

Data & Evidence:

- Track connections between food insecurity and health outcomes

- Provide data to partners demonstrating health impacts of poverty
- Support community planning with population-level data on food insecurity
- Monitor health equity indicators related to income and food security

Partnership & Coordination:

- Coordinate with social services, food banks, and community organizations
- Support integrated care models addressing social determinants holistically
- Partner with municipalities on poverty reduction strategies
- Collaborate with schools on family support and connection to resources

Access To Primary Care

Increasing access to primary health care for all residents was the most common survey response from residents. While primary care attachment is not within Lakelands direct mandate, the physician shortage crisis has profound implications for public health. Unattached patients lack preventative care, children fall behind developmentally without early screening, and emergency departments become overwhelmed with non-urgent needs. Lakelands has strategic opportunity to support immunization for unattached populations, partner with OHTs on attachment strategies, advocate for system change, and fill gaps where primary care is unavailable.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Direct Service Provision (Gap-Filling):

- Provide Immunization clinics for unattached patients
- Provide sexual health clinics accessible to youth and adults without primary care
- Provide preventive services/education to reduce emergency department burden

Partnership with Healthcare System:

- Partner with OHTs on attachment strategies and planning
- Collaborate with family health teams on population health initiatives
- Support integrated care hubs with self-referral for accessibility
- Participate in data sharing to identify unattached populations by geography
- Participate in joint initiatives to expand access through coordinated service delivery

Advocacy for System Change:

- Advocate for primary care expansion and physician recruitment
- Position preventative public health services as essential when primary care is unavailable
- Advocate for policy changes supporting recruitment and retention
- Elevate data showing health impacts of unattached populations
- Support initiatives connecting health outcomes to primary care access

Care Coordination & Navigation:

- Help unattached patients navigate available services
- Connect vulnerable populations to available primary care resources
- Coordinate with community health centres on service delivery

Preventative Programming:

- Maintain early childhood screening and developmental support
- Ensure immunization programs reach unattached populations
- Provide health promotion services filling gaps in primary care
- Target preventative outreach to populations without family doctors

Childhood Health & Development

Early childhood health was described by many participants as a gap across the four counties with participants noting that Lakelands "used to own this space" and needs to "lean heavily back in." The Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program capacity has not been restored to pre-merger levels, creating concerns about vulnerable children falling behind developmentally, families lacking support, and long-term population health impacts. Participants noted that early childhood represents the most critical window for prevention and intervention, making this capacity gap particularly concerning for generational health outcomes.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Restore HBHC Capacity:

- Restore Healthy Babies Healthy Children program to pre-merger capacity levels
- Prioritize home visiting for vulnerable families
- Ensure equitable service delivery across all four counties
- Support high-risk perinatal populations through intensive case management
- Coordinate high-risk perinatal service providers group

Prenatal & Postnatal Support:

- Restore in-person prenatal classes where feasible
- Ensure breastfeeding support is visible and accessible
- Support lactation services communication and accessibility
- Partner with "Partners in Pregnancy Clinic" on coordinated care
- Host prenatal clinics in underserved areas (particularly Haliburton)

Developmental Screening & Early Intervention:

- Maintain early intervention screening programs
- Connect families to resources and supports when delays identified
- Partner with schools on school readiness initiatives

Family Education & Support:

- Restore educator visits to community programs (dental health, nutrition)
- Restore in-person presence at early learning centres, daycares, and family programs
- Support parenting education and support groups
- Provide Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention education
- Provide alcohol and substance use prevention for pregnant women and families

Child Development & Wellness:

- Address screen time and digital wellness through parent education
- Support natural play spaces and outdoor pedagogy

- Healthy child development programs
- Support youth wellness starting in early childhood (prevention foundation)

Advocacy & System Coordination:

- Advocate for childcare access as health priority and make the case to province / municipalities about childcare needs directly relating to social determinants
- Coordinate with Five Counties Children's Services
- Partner with Early Years Centres across region
- Integrate with child and youth planning tables

Lifespan Approach:

- Position early childhood as foundation of lifespan health promotion
- Connect early childhood programming to school-based prevention
- Demonstrate return on investment of early childhood intervention for long-term population health

Indigenous Health Priorities

Engagement with First Nations communities and Urban Indigenous partners revealed distinct health priorities requiring culturally safe, relationship-based approaches. Participants emphasized that trust must be earned through consistent presence and positive experiences. Historical trauma, different relationship histories with legacy organizations, and ongoing barriers to accessing culturally safe services create unique considerations that must be addressed through sustained partnership, Indigenous leadership in health promotion, and recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Summary of Opportunities Identified by Engagement Participants

Strengthen First Nations Partnerships Through Consistent Presence:

- Attend community events, health fairs, and markets regularly
- Provide education sessions at summer camps and daycares
- Hold small, informal meet-and-greets to build team member-to-team member relationships
- Be present beyond emergencies and strategic planning processes
- Show up consistently over the long term to build trust

Build Cultural Safety & Competency:

- Provide cultural competency training for all Lakelands staff
- Educate staff on generational trauma and historical harms
- Adopt community development lens that is flexible and relationship-first
- Recognize different relationship histories with legacy organizations
- Approach with understanding that trust must be earned through positive experiences

Expand Urban Indigenous Partnerships:

- Have a regular presence in Indigenous Student Services lounges at Trent and Fleming.
- Ensure joint planning and partnership rather than one-off initiatives.
- Incorporate health promotion sessions delivered by Indigenous staff.

- Provide support for Indigenous students transitioning from First Nations to urban settings.
- Provide sexual health education and resources for Indigenous students.
- Ensure mental health and addiction supports accessible to urban Indigenous populations.

Hire Indigenous Staff:

- The lack of Indigenous representation in health promotion roles identified as gap. Indigenous staff are essential for culturally safe service delivery, as well Indigenous leadership is wanted in program design and delivery.
- Provide peer support and cultural connection through Indigenous staff.

Address Priority Health Issues with Cultural Lens:

- **Mental Health & Addictions:** Support Indigenous healing approaches; recognize generational trauma; provide culturally safe crisis supports; advocate for reduced treatment wait times; aftercare and community-based supports.
- **Vector-Borne Diseases:** Information sheets and education about ticks and mosquitoes; accurate prevalence information; accessible education formats.
- **Vaccine Clinics:** Accessible clinics in communities for seniors and children; recognize preference for in-person vs. pharmacy services; culturally safe delivery.
- **Water Quality:** Well water testing and education; treatment options; information beyond basic testing; environmental health support.
- **Youth Wellness:** Healthy pathways including recreation and arts; support for young parents; culturally grounded youth programming.
- **Chronic Disease:** Support for Indigenous elders; diabetes management; food security initiatives; culturally appropriate care.

Meet People Where They Are:

- Provide mobile services and outreach rather than expecting people to come to centralized locations.
- Provide services available during community events and gatherings.
- Ensure weekend availability when larger community events occur.
- Co-locate with trusted Indigenous organizations.

Formalize Partnerships:

- Formalize partnerships with Alderville, Hiawatha, and Curve Lake First Nations health teams.
- Connect with the new Indigenous Community Health Centre.
- Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing in partnership approach.
- Support Indigenous-led health initiatives rather than directing programs.
- Recognize Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in health.

Support Indigenous-Led Health Promotion:

- Recognize and support traditional medicines and ceremonies.
- Support Pow Wows and cultural events as health promotion.
- Leverage existing Indigenous health practices and knowledge.
- Ensure programs designed with Indigenous input and leadership.

Conclusion

Lakelands Public Health stands at a pivotal moment in its evolution. The merger of two well-established public health units has created both significant opportunities and notable challenges. While the organization experiences strong community trust and credibility, the visibility gap and post-merger integration challenges threaten Lakelands ability to fully realize its potential impact.

Engagement with residents, partners, and staff reveals strong foundations upon which to build. The consistency of themes across geography and groups, from hospital CEOs to residents to Indigenous partners, validates these findings and suggests that strategic priorities developed in response will have broad community support.

The path forward requires:

- Courageous leadership willing to prioritize visibility and communication
- Strategic clarity about Lakelands unique role as a convener, data hub, and population health leader
- Sustained commitment to consistent community presence across the four-county region
- Modernization of technology infrastructure to enable effective partnerships
- Authentic engagement with diverse communities, particularly First Nations and urban Indigenous communities
- Recognition that rebuilding relationships and visibility takes consistent effort over time

The engagement process has provided Lakelands with clear direction from the communities it serves. Partners want to collaborate more deeply. Residents want to understand and access services. Indigenous communities desire authentic, respectful, and reciprocal partnership. Staff want to reconnect with community-centered public health work.

These aligned desires create momentum for positive change. With intentional focus on the priorities identified through this engagement process, Lakelands is well-positioned to fulfill its mission of promoting and protecting health across the region for generations to come.

Appendix A: Document Review

Documents reviewed as part of the process to date included the following.

Lakelands Public Health Documents

- Board of Health Bylaws and Policies
- Staffing Chart, updated May 2025
- Draft Employee Engagement Survey – results to be released in December

Organization Documents from Legacy HKPRPHU

- Annual Reports (2021, 2022, 2023)
- Strategic Plan (2019-2024)
- Vision, Mission and Values
 - Includes documents that outline the process and framework for developing Values
- Guiding Minds at Work Survey Report

Organization Documents from Legacy PPH

- 2022-2025 Strategic Plan
- Annual Reports (2020, 2022) and Audited Financial Statements
- Previous values frameworks and process for identifying values
- Guiding Minds at Work Survey Report
- 2023 Theory of Change

Public Health Documents

- Health Protection and Promotions Act
- Ontario Public Health Standards
- What we Heard: A renewed and Strengthened Public Health System in Canada – a Vision to transform PH
- Core competencies of Public Health

Appendix B: Phase 2 Engagement Process

The engagement process was comprised of two stages. Stage 1 – Project Initiation and Design, and Stage 2 – Community Engagement.

Engagement Timing

Engagement primarily occurred between March to the end of June 2026.

Communication to Engagement Participants

The Arising team worked closely with the administrative and communications team at Lakelands to disseminate information about the engagement process and to schedule engagement sessions.

Engagement Methodology

Phase 2 Engagement consisted of two key stages – Project Initiation and Design; and Community and Staff Engagement.

Stage 1 - Project Initiation & Design

Stage 1 Engagement Goals

- Introduce the process
- Ask for feedback and insights regarding process design

Meetings

Description	Objectives	Date/Time / Format
Meeting with Indigenous Health Advisory Committee (IHAC)	• Share the strategic planning process • Ask for early input on how to best engage Indigenous communities	Sept 12, 2025
Meetings with Lakelands Senior Leadership Team	• Introduce the external engagement process • Ask for feedback and insight on process design	January 13, 2026 January 27, 2026
Meeting with Board of Health	• Introduce the external engagement process • Ask for feedback and insight on process design	January 21, 2026

Stage 2 – Community and Staff Engagement

Stage 2 Engagement Goals

- Engage the Lakelands community including staff, key partner organizations and residents across the four counties, 3 First Nations and Urban Indigenous using multiple methodologies.
- Educate and inform about changes occurring at Lakelands

- Gather insights and input into the future vision of Lakelands and opportunities / focus areas that are important for the organization to consider

Summary of Engagement Participation by Methodology

- **Community Townhall Sessions** (118 total participants): 7 sessions. One in each County and First Nation, plus one virtual session.
 - City of Kawartha Lakes: 5 participants, in-person
 - Haliburton: 18 participants, in-person
 - Northumberland: 18 participants, in-person
 - Peterborough: 22 participants, in-person
 - Virtual Session: 3 participants
 - Curve Lake First Nation: 22 participants, in-person
 - Hiawatha First Nation: 52 participants, in-person
- **Key Informant Interviews** (21 total participants): 16 interviews with hospital CEOs, school board directors, municipal CAOs, Ontario Health Team leaders, and a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP); 2 interviews with urban Indigenous partners
- **Focus Groups & Meetings** (78 total participants): 6 sessions with representatives of community partner organizations across all four geographic regions; 1 meeting with Alderville First Nation Health Team; 1 meeting with the Child and Youth Planning Table.
- **Strategic Planning Survey**: 447 completed survey responses from residents, staff, and community partners
 - By Respondent Type:**
 - Community Residents: 340 (76%)
 - Lakeland Staff Members: 73 (16%)
 - Community Partners/Organizations: 34 (8%)
- **Brand Launch Survey**: 80 completed survey responses from community members.

Community Engagement Sessions

- 5 Community Townhall sessions held, one in each county, and 1 virtual session.
- The sessions were designed to inform participants about the organization and services provided by Lakelands Public Health, as well as to provide them with opportunities for one-on-one conversations with staff, the Medical Officer of Health and Board Of Health members.
- Each session began with a welcome and presentation by the Medical Officer of Health, followed by the showing of a Lakelands video. Participants were then invited to move around the room, meet Lakelands staff, and ask questions about the different services provided.
- Multiple Lakelands staff attended each session to be able to share resources and speak about programs and services. Board of Health members also attended each session.
- Registration was not required to attend the events. Refreshments were provided along with Lakelands swag. A colouring station was created for youth.
- Security was hired at two sessions; Peterborough and City of Kawartha Lakes.

- The townhall in Minden occurred the same time as a major flooding event, but after corresponding with the Mayor, there was agreement to proceed.
- At each session, participants were encouraged to fill out the online strategic planning survey.

Schedule

The following chart outlines the schedule and participation rates at each community engagement session.

Group / Team	Date and Time	# Participants
City of Kawartha Lakes	May 20, 2026, 7 – 9 PM	5
Haliburton	April 14, 2026, 4 – 6 PM	18
Northumberland	April 15, 2026, 7 - 9 PM	18
Peterborough	May 26, 2026, 4 – 6 PM	22
Virtual Session	June 23, 2026, 12 - 1 PM	3

Partner Focus Group Sessions and Meetings

Four virtual focus group sessions were held with representatives of community partner organizations. Originally designed as one session per region, participants were able to select the session that best met their scheduling needs.

- Participants registered to attend. Multiple facilitators were used in each session to break larger groups into smaller sizes for discussion.
- At the beginning of each session, the Lakelands video was shared.

The consultants were also invited to attend two planning table meetings:

- The Child and Youth Planning Table to share information about the Lakelands strategic Planning process and to ask a few questions.
- The Haliburton Community Safety and Well-Being Committee, where information about the process was shared, as well as an invite to fill out the survey.

Focus Group / Meeting Schedule

The following chart outlines the schedule and participation rates at each community engagement session.

Group / Team	Date and Time	# Participants
CKL Community Partners	May 26, 2026, 1 - 2:30 PM	16
Haliburton Community Partners	May 27, 2026, 1 - 2:30 PM	5
Northumberland Community Partners	May 27, 2026, 9 - 10:30 AM	5
Peterborough Community Partners	May 28, 2025, 1 – 2:30 PM	21
Child and Youth Planning Table	June 9 th , 2026	18

Engagement with First Nations and Urban Indigenous Communities

Townhall Sessions were held at Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations, open to residents and healthcare partners

- Each session opened with a short presentation by the Medical Officer of Health followed by the Lakelands video
- Similar to the community townhalls, staff attended to share information about specific programs and services
- These sessions also included a facilitated Q&A, led by Liz Stone.

The session with Alderville First Nation comprised of a meeting between the Medical Officer of Health and Arising consultant and health partners.

Key informant interviews were conducted with urban Indigenous partner organizations

Schedule

The following chart outlines the schedule and participation rates at each community engagement session.

Group / Team	Date and Time	# Participants
Alderville First Nation Meeting	June 8, 2026, 10 AM	13
Curve Lake First Nation Townhall	June 4, 2026, 2 - 4 PM	22
Hiawatha First Nation Townhall	June 25, 2026, 5 - 7 PM	52
Interview: Indigenous student success facilitator, Trent University		1
Interview: Manager, Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College		1

Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews were held with community leaders and elected officials from across the four counties. Lakelands sent out a warm email, connecting the consultant to each interviewee.

- 16 interviews were conducted with 21 participants, including hospital CEOs, school board directors, municipal CAOs, Ontario Health Team leaders, and an MPP.

Online Surveys

An online survey targeted to the broader public, community partner organizations, and Lakelands staff was used to gather additional input. The survey served to both educate and inform, as well as to solicit input about the future of Lakelands. The survey received a total of 447 responses.

In addition, results from a short survey created during Phase 1 / Lakelands Brand roll-out to gather feedback at sessions led by Dr. Piggott has been incorporated into this Phase 2 Engagement Report. This survey received 80 responses.

List of Engagement Participants Across all Methodologies

We are thankful for all those that provided their time and their insight into this engagement process. Participating organizations include the following:

- Elected officials and Municipal CAOs
- Alderville First Nation Health Team
- Bobycaygeon Daycare
- Boys and Girls Club Kawarthas and Peterborough
- Brain Injury Association Peterborough Region
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton
- Big Brothers Big Sister of Peterborough
- Bright Starts Early Learning Centre
- Brock Mission/Cameron House
- Campbellford Memorial Hospital
- Canopy Support Services
- Children's Services Council
- Chimo
- City of Kawartha Lakes
- City of Kawartha Lakes Public Library
- City of Peterborough
- Community Health Centre Northumberland
- Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes
- CMHA HKPR
- Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services
- Early Years Centre, City of Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton County
- Extendicare Peterborough
- Extendicare Port Hope
- Five Counties Children's Services
- Fleming College – Indigenous Student Services
- Kawartha Haliburton CAS
- Kawartha Lakes Haliburton Ontario Health Team
- John Howard Society of the Kawarthas
- Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board Northumberland Hills Hospital
- Haliburton County
- Haliburton CSWB Advisory Committee
- Hiawatha First Nation
- New Canadians Centre Peterborough
- Northumberland County Social Services
- Northumberland County Early Years Childcare
- Northumberland United Way
- Ontario Clean Water Agency
- Ontario Health Team Northumberland
- Ontario Parks
- Partners in Pregnancy Clinic
- Peterborough Child and Family Centre
- Peterborough Community Health Centre
- Peterborough County
- Peterborough Drug Strategy and YSUP
- Peterborough Family Health Team
- Peterborough Police Services
- Peterborough Regional Health Centre
- Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board
- Point in Time
- Rebound (Northumberland)
- Ross Memorial Hospital
- SIRCH Community Services
- Springdale County Manor
- Trent Hills Fire Rescue
- Trent Lakes Fire Rescue

- Trent University – Indigenous Student Services
- Trillium Lakelands District School Board
- United Way Peterborough & District
- Women’s Resources of Kawartha Lakes