

Municipal Medical Officer of Health Scoping Report

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Community Development Committee recommends that Council direct Administration to pursue continued collaboration with external medical health experts to inform public health-related policy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In response to Council's direction to explore the potential for creating a Municipal Officer of Health role, Administration has found that this direction would be best addressed by continued collaboration with medical experts.
- **What does this mean to Calgarians?** Calgarians can be assured that Council and Administration have access to advice from medical experts in several fields through partnerships such as those with the University of Calgary and local Medical Officers of Health with Alberta Health Services.
- **Why does it matter?** When making decisions that have the potential to affect the health of Calgarians, Council and Administration already draw on the advice of medical experts from the provincial Calgary Zone Medical Officers of Health and across disciplines to ensure that decisions are evidence-based and informed by the most relevant scientific advice.
- The 2021 September 3 Emergency Management Committee meeting directed Administration to undertake a scoping report on the creation of the role of a Municipal Medical Officer of Health who would report directly to Council on matters related to the public health of our citizens.
- There is no legislative backing for the creation of a Municipal Medical Officer of Health in Alberta. A Municipal Medical Officer of Health would not share any of the authorities that are granted to provincial Medical Officers of Health under provincial legislation such as issuing public health orders.
- Without legislative backing, a Municipal Medical Officer of Health would only be able to act in advisory capacity.
- Administration and Council already have well-established connections with health experts in a variety of disciplines including experts from Alberta Health Services who have access to provincial health data and networks of peers.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city of safe and inspiring neighbourhoods

DISCUSSION

What is a Medical Officer of Health?

At the provincial level, the role of a Medical Officer of Health is to:

Create environments focused on the health of the population. Report the health status of the population, control and manage infectious and communicable diseases, give direction to Environmental Health service programs, and chronic disease and injury prevention.

Medical Officers of Health are established under Alberta's Public Health Act by appointment of the Minister of Health and have specific powers and authorities under this legislation including the ability to enact policies and issue orders related to public health.

Municipal Medical Officer of Health Scoping Report

What authority do municipalities have?

Although the Municipal Government Act grants authority to municipalities to pass bylaws related to “safety, health and welfare of people and protection of people and property” (Section 7(a)), there is no clause that would provide legislative backing for the establishment of a municipal Medical Officer of Health. Alberta’s centralized health care approach is distinct from Ontario’s, where municipalities are active partners in that province’s medical system with responsibility for delivering services.

Sources of medical advice to a municipality

A Municipal Medical Officer of Health would therefore only be able to act in an advisory capacity and without any of the authorities granted to a provincial medical officer of health. There are several medical experts with whom Administration and Council already consult to inform local decisions.

Calgary Zone Medical Officers of Health – these are specialty-trained Alberta Health Services physicians with powers and duties under the Public Health Act who advise and lead teams of public health professionals. They are required to implement policy directions set by Alberta Health and have the most direct and authoritative insight on the medical aspects of public health emergencies in Calgary with subject matter expertise in public health, epidemiology, vaccinology, and outbreak management. They are regular participants in the Calgary Emergency Management Agency’s bi-weekly meetings and offer guidance and advice when requested. While these current meetings are COVID-specific, the Calgary Zone Medical Officers of Health have committed to continued engagement for future health-related municipal policy decisions.

The University of Calgary COVID Advisory Panel – this is an interdisciplinary team of academic experts, coordinated by the Director of the O’Brien Institute of Public Health in the Cumming School of Medicine. On an as-requested basis, this group has provided advice and guidance throughout the pandemic. The team is non-partisan and offers a wide and balanced perspective on an array of specialties. Several members are practitioners as well as academics and offer real-world experience.

Other Alberta Health Services partners – Alberta Health Services representatives are agency members with Calgary Emergency Management Agency and provide access to a number of their operational arms, including the Zone Emergency Operations Centre (coordination of health services), Environment and Public Health (enforcement), and Emergency Medical Services.

Alberta Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health – this position is a member of the Alberta Health executive team that provides public health expertise to support health surveillance, population health and disease control initiatives on issues of public health importance. Although often limited to receiving “pushes” of information, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency does have the ability to contact the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Alberta Health Emergency Operations Centre when urgent issues arise - such as seeking an exemption for an order, clarification of orders, or clarification of processes.

Conclusion

With no legislated powers, a Municipal Medical Officer of Health would only be able to operate in an advisory capacity. However, Administration is already able to solicit expert advice from an existing medical advisory network consisting of experts in multiple fields. Therefore, rather than the creation of a Municipal Medical Officer of Health, Administration recommends continued

Municipal Medical Officer of Health Scoping Report

collaboration and engagement with medical experts to help inform future health-related policy in Calgary.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- ☐ Public Engagement was undertaken
- ☒ Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- ☐ Public/Stakeholders were informed
- ☐ Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

IMPLICATIONS

Social

Many decisions faced by Council include important health and social considerations, as has been exemplified over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that Council and Administration have access to expert medical advice when making recommendations and decisions, as it does through The City's established network of medical professionals with a broader range of expertise than a single person could have.

Environmental

Not Applicable

Economic

The creation of a Municipal Medical Officer of Health would result in financial costs to The City. Though an exact figure is not known, according to publicly available data from the Government of Alberta, the Provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health had an annual salary of approximately \$360,000 in 2020. There is no cost to The City associated with the advice provided by medical experts from Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services nor the University of Calgary.

Service and Financial Implications

There are no financial impacts associated with the recommendation in this report.

RISK

The primary risk of relying on Provincial Medical Officers of Health is the limitation in responding to local context resulting from their requirement to follow policy direction set by Alberta Health. This risk can be mitigated by further strengthening ties with non-government, non-partisan medical experts such as those from the University of Calgary.

A Municipal Medical Officer of Health would not have access to provincial health data, a network of peers, nor influence over public health policy except as authorized by the City of Calgary.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Public Submissions

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Jill Floen	Law	Consult