The pattern of local public health services administration for Ontario was established in 1833 when the Legislature of Upper Canada passed an Act allowing local municipalities “to establish Boards of Health to guard against the introduction of malignant, contagious and infectious disease in this province.” This delegation of public health responsibility to the local level has continued to the present day.

There are currently 36 health units in Ontario: 22 independent of local municipal government; seven regional health departments; and seven health units tied in to single-tier or other municipal administration.

Selected Key Milestones:

1849 The first local board of health in the region was established.
1873 The first Public Health Act was passed.
1983 The Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) was proclaimed, replacing the Public Health Act. The Act was amended in 1990 making slight changes to its contents.
2004 Following SARS, the government of Ontario announces Operation Health Protection: an Action Plan to Prevent Threats to our Health and to Promote a Healthy Ontario.
2005 The government of Ontario announces the creation of the new Ministry of Health Promotion, which will focus on programs dedicated to healthy lifestyles.
2006 The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is introduced, which bans smoking in all enclosed public places.
2006 The government of Ontario introduces the Health System Improvements Bill (#171) that will include enabling legislation for an Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Ontario’s “CDC of the North”.
2007 The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care increases its grant to boards of health to 75 per cent of the budgeted amount.
2007 The Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion is established in Toronto.
2008 The Ontario Public Health Standards are completed in collaboration with boards of health and Ontario public health professionals. They came into effect on January 1, 2009.
2009 The Initial Report on Public Health is released by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as the first step in developing an accountability framework for boards of health.