

Check Before You Choose – Improving Community Connection.

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) re-launched the *Check Before You Choose* (CBYC) disclosure website as part of enhanced community engagement and transparency. This has improved responsiveness to public inquiries and complaints, enabling more efficient public health practice.
- The *Ontario Public Health Standards* (OPHS) require the disclosure of inspection reports to allow the public to make informed decisions before visiting inspected facilities.
- More people interact with WDGPH through mobile devices. Embracing a digital-first approach, the organization effectively broadens its reach while upholding traditional communication channels such as walk-ins and telephone interactions.

- A significant increase in requests and complaints to WDGPH over recent years. From 2019 to 2023, close to 1,000 additional requests for service have been made annually. Taking a client-centered approach streamlines online CBYC requests on mobile devices.

Background

Public disclosure of inspection and investigation reports serves as a cornerstone in promoting transparency and accountability to the community. WDGPH makes summary reports of all inspections and investigations available and certain enforcement activity across an array of routinely inspected establishments, including restaurants, personal service settings, and recreational water facilities on the CBYC landing page. Launched in 2018 to meet the requirements of the OPHS, the CBYC website was updated to be mobile-friendly. One key improvement has been adding on-line forms to improve how the community can engage with inspection teams at WDGPH.

Inspection reports by Public Health Inspectors and Tobacco Enforcement form the heart of this process. These reports provide an account of observations made during inspections, details of identified violations, re-inspections, and subsequent recommendations. A summary of each inspection and investigation report is made available to empower the public with pertinent information regarding regulatory compliance of local establishments. CBYC enhances accessibility and allows for the efficient retrieval and review of inspection histories of establishments inspected by WDGPH. CBYC serves as an educational conduit, fostering awareness about public health standards within the region. It emphasizes the pivotal role of compliance for businesses and consumers in creating healthier communities.

Discussion

Under the OPHS, effective public health practices encompass rigorous adherence to quality and transparency criteria. The foundational standard for effective public health practice mandates the disclosure of summarized inspection reports and key enforcement activities for protocols are outlined in Table 1.

Protocols with Disclosure Requirements
<i>Food Safety Protocol</i>
<i>Consumption and Treatment Services Compliance and Enforcement Protocol</i>
<i>Health Hazard Response Protocol</i>
<i>Infection Prevention and Control Complaint Protocol</i>
<i>Infection Prevention and Control Disclosure Protocol</i>
<i>Infection Prevention and Control Protocol</i>
<i>Recreational Water Protocol</i>
<i>Safe Drinking Water and Fluoride Monitoring Protocol</i>
<i>Tanning Beds Protocol</i>
<i>Tobacco, Vapour, and Smoke Protocol</i>

Table 1 Provincial Protocols with Disclosure Requirements

As of 2023, WDGPH discloses approximately 2600 routinely inspected facilities on the CBYC platform, as illustrated in Figure 1. Nearly 15,000 inspection and investigation summary reports are available to the public under distinct categories: namely *Food Safety*, *Safe Water*, *Personal Services and Childcare*, *Recreational Camps*, and *Consumption and Treatment Services*. Each category encompasses associated facility types, providing members of the public with the opportunity for ongoing review. Summary reports detailing instances of non-compliance observed during inspections and investigations are promptly synchronized with CBYC daily.

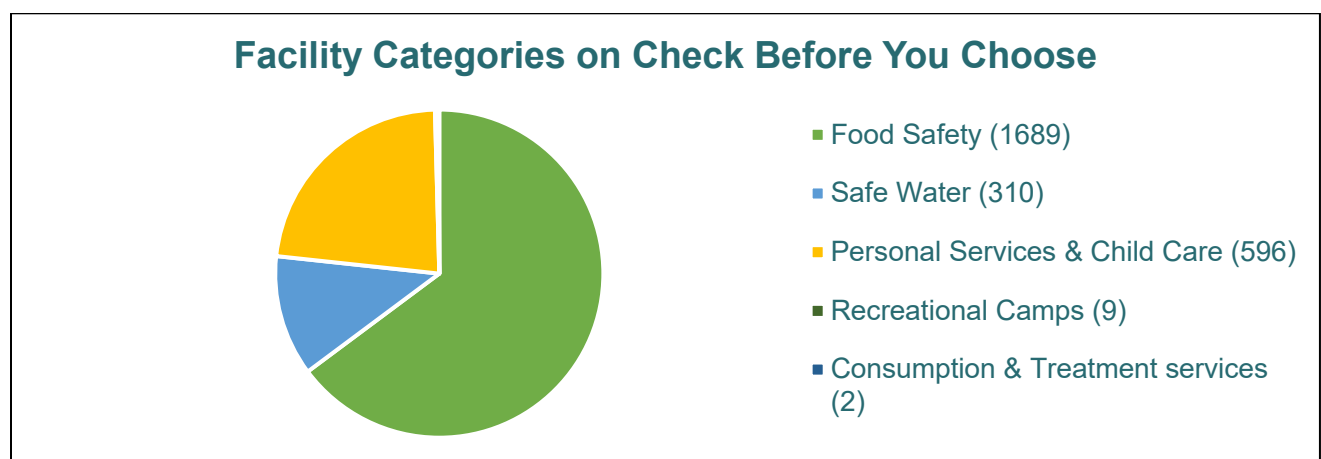


Figure 1 Number of Facilities by Category on Check Before You Choose

Key Platform Enhancements

As of 2023, a noteworthy aspect of the WDGPH website is that approximately 60% of its users access the content via mobile phones. Recognizing the evolving digital landscape and the increasing prevalence of mobile devices as primary platforms for accessing information, WDGPH undertook a significant initiative in 2023 to enhance the CBYC user experience, particularly for mobile users. This re-launch not only improved the overall accessibility of summary reports but also rendered the entire website fully mobile-friendly. To enhance the overall user experience and facilitate seamless access to information, WDGPH undertook extensive internal recategorization of facility types, data cleaning, and improved data collection processes for all complaints and requests. This strategic restructuring aimed to enhance the searchability of reports, ensuring that users can easily navigate through the information available on the platform.

In addition to improved accessibility, the website has been transformed into a hub for inspection and enforcement information. It directs members of the public to key resources such as infection control and prevention and outbreak support offered by the organization. Legal activity conducted under various acts and regulations enforced by both Public Health Inspectors and Tobacco Enforcement Officers is also available. This addition broadens the scope of information accessible to the public, offering insights into the legal landscape related to public health and furthering the organization's commitment to transparency and accountability. To date, 32 legal actions are disclosed on CBYC under various acts and regulations including the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*, *Ontario Regulation 493/17* for Food Premises, and *Ontario Regulation 136/18* for Personal Service Settings.

Expedited Access

In response to the evolving needs of the public and business owners, CBYC has strategically integrated expedited access points, allowing direct engagement with inspectors and enforcement officers through online forms. This enhancement facilitates a seamless process for submitting complaints and inspection requests, now conveniently accessible via mobile devices.

The significant rise in requests and complaints directed to the inspection and enforcement teams in recent years underscores the essential nature of a direct communication feature. This feature has aided inspectors in promptly obtaining accurate information, allowing inspection teams to initiate investigations more effectively.

Figure 2 shows the number of requests and complaints received annually by the inspection team at WDGPH, illustrating an annual increase of approximately 1000 requests and complaints since 2019.

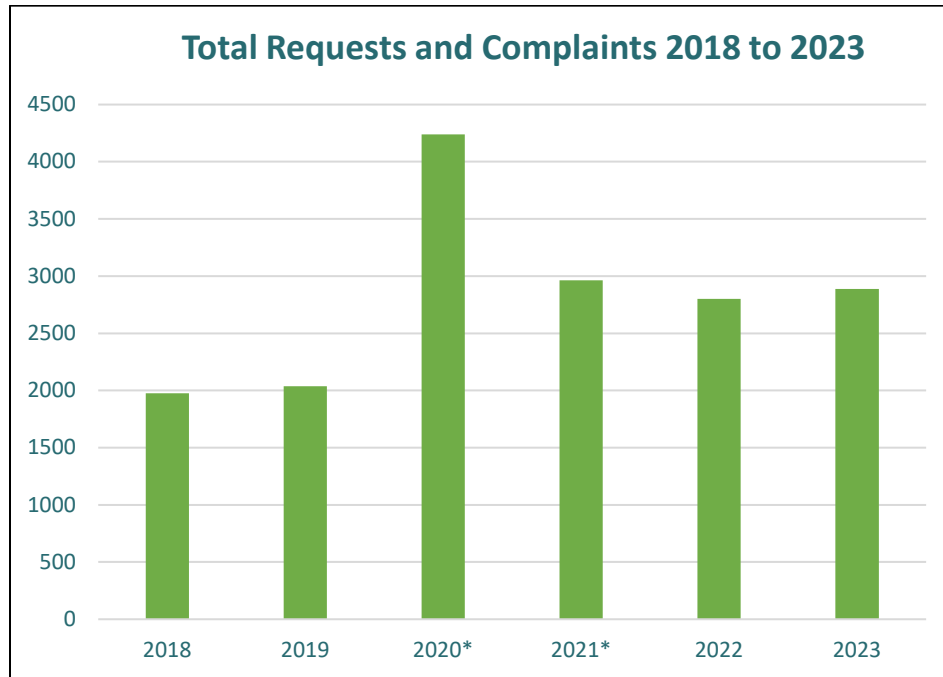


Figure 2 Total Requests and Complaints 2018-2023 * 2020-2021 data includes COVID-19 pandemic-related complaints and calls received by inspectors, which is outside of the norm of routine inspections.

Next Steps

The CBYC platform is committed to ongoing updates, ensuring that business owners and the public have access to the most relevant resources. This commitment is grounded in an evidence-based approach that involves a thorough review of inspection and investigation data, instances of non-compliance, and various website metrics. By leveraging this approach, resources will be targeted to address specific areas within public health programs, thereby enhancing the platform's effectiveness in meeting the evolving needs of its users.

WDGPH's inspection team will use CBYC as a central hub for local businesses, providing them with a comprehensive repository of information on inspections and regulations. As part of an ongoing effort, new resources will be consistently added to each relevant category, enriching the platform's content and utility over time. This initiative is in line with the broader organizational objective of supporting local businesses and community members as well as

adhering to the quality, transparency, and accountability requirements stipulated in the *Ontario Public Health Standards*. CBYC works seamlessly with the WDGPH website, www.wdgppublichealth.ca. This collaboration aims to create a cohesive digital ecosystem that fosters a user-friendly experience for both local businesses and community members. A communication campaign is scheduled for the first quarter of 2024 to re-launch CBYC with an updated disclosure signage requirement with a quick response (QR) code to be displayed in all inspected facilities, allowing easy access to inspection information.

Health Equity Implications

Public health inspection disclosure serves as a driver of health equity, fostering transparency, accountability, and access to inspection information. Access to inspection reports enables active decision-making of consumers. CBYC allows for a feedback mechanism for community members to express concerns or commendations of inspected premises. A digital-first strategy is apparent in the re-launch of CBYC while maintaining traditional communication channels with the inspectors. Figure 3 presents a comparative analysis of various communication modes utilized by the public and businesses when interacting with inspectors. When comparing pre- and post-pandemic data, there has been a noteworthy increase in online communication over recent years. Notably, fax referrals continue to play a prominent role, especially in specific investigations involving healthcare providers, and telephone calls remain the primary mode for public complaints and requests – all of which are still available to our community.

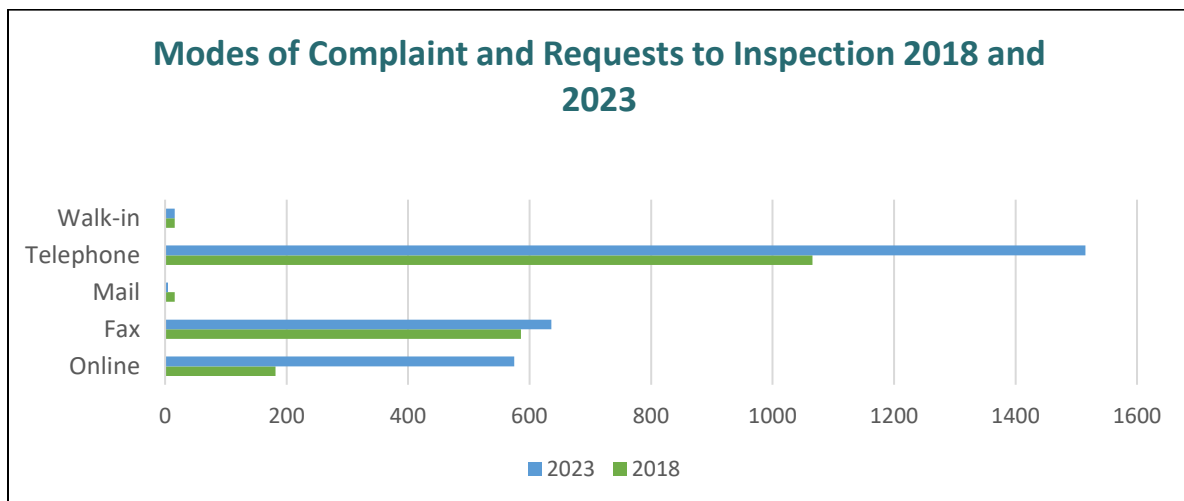


Figure 3 Modes of communication for complaint and requests to inspection and enforcement teams with WDGPH 2018 compared with 2023. Online includes email, web forms, and social media. Requests received by inspectors during the inspections were not included in this data set.

Conclusion

The CBYC evolution shows the dynamic landscape of public health, digital progress, and the community's evolving needs. With mobile-friendly upgrades, WDGPH is directly addressing the changing expectations of the community. WDGPH's commitment to continuous improvement and evidence-based approach ensures that CBYC stays a dynamic and relevant platform.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- Improve health outcomes
- Focus on children's health
- Build strong partnerships
- Innovate our programs and services
- Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health System