NCCHPP NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

A Collection to Support Collaborations Between Municipalities and Public Health: Context and Methodology

MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN CANADA 2026

FOREWORD

This publication introduces the context and methodology that guided the development of a collection of fact sheets on municipal governance in Canada. This collection is intended for public health organization staff who wish to better understand how municipalities operate in order to position themselves strategically, collaborate effectively with the municipal sector, and exercise influence for health-promoting municipal decisions. This collaboration is important, as municipalities have a direct influence on living environments and therefore on key determinants of population health.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Municipalities have a major influence on the determinants of health. As a result, many public health organizations express a need to better understand how municipalities operate in order to engage with this sector more strategically and effectively.
- The NCCHPP has developed a collection of fact sheets to address needs identified by public health staff, including: better understanding municipal decision-making processes, identifying the right points of contact, spotting windows of opportunity, and tailoring their approaches to the municipal context.
- The content of these fact sheets is based on a combination of methods: a comparative analysis of municipal frameworks across the ten provinces and three territories, a pan-Canadian consultation with public health professionals, and a review of scientific and governmental documents.
- The consultation helped validate the themes to be addressed, identify priority needs, and ensure that the fact sheets reflect the diverse realities of urban, rural, and various regional contexts across Canada.
- This collection of fact sheets aims to support public health organizations in engaging in more effective collaborations with the municipal sector.

Centre de collaboration nationale sur les politiques publiques et la santé
National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy

Québec

1 WHY SEEK TO UNDERSTAND MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE?

Municipal governments play a key role in shaping the communities in which we live, work, study, and play, thus directly influencing population health and wellbeing (Lévesque et al., 2024; Morestin, 2020). Thus, it is municipalities that hold the levers needed to achieve many public health objectives.

This capacity for action makes municipalities relevant—and even essential—partners for public health. Many public health organizations seek to engage with municipalities for better coordinated actions, to develop collaborative projects, or to exercise influence for health-promoting municipal decisions (Morestin, 2020). However, this collaboration remains challenging to build. Municipalities do not always clearly perceive the potential contribution of public health, while public health organizations do not always know how to position themselves in relation to municipalities.

The staff in public health organizations have identified the following needs:[1]

- To understand municipalities' areas of action;
- To be able to identify the right contacts (for example, to know when to approach municipal elected officials rather than municipal staff);
- To understand municipal decision-making processes and the available levers of influence;
- To identify windows of opportunity for intervening before decisions are made; and
- To develop a common language between public health and the municipal sector.

Once public health organizations and their staff are equipped with a better understanding of how local government works, they can position themselves strategically, build relationships with the right municipal representatives, adapt their approaches to municipal realities, align public health objectives with municipal priorities, set realistic expectations, and engage effectively in municipal processes.

This collection of fact sheets has been compiled to meet this need. The sheets are intended for individuals working in public health organizations who would like to develop a better understanding of how local governments work in Canada so that they can collaborate more effectively with the municipal sector.

The sheets cover the following topics:

- Fact Sheet 1: The role of the municipal council and elected officials
- Fact Sheet 2: The role of municipal staff
- Fact Sheet 3: Municipal decision making
- Fact Sheet 4: The municipal budget
- Fact Sheet 5: Public participation in municipal affairs

[1] Needs expressed during consultations with Canadian public health professionals – see the Methodology section.

- Fact Sheet 6: Promising approaches to facilitating collaboration with municipalities
- Fact Sheet 7: Multi-tiered municipal systems
- Fact Sheet 8: Relations between municipalities and neighbouring Indigenous governments

This collection complements the practical guide *How to Collaborate With Municipalities* (Morestin, 2020), also produced by the NCCHPP. While that guide focuses primarily on concrete collaboration strategies, the present collection aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the inner workings of municipal institutions, underpinned by a solid foundation of evidence from scientific and government sources as well as practice-informed evidence. Together, these two tools help deepen understanding of municipal realities and support the development of sustainable collaborations adapted to local contexts.

2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

2.1 Methodology

The material presented in the fact sheets was developed in three phases.[2]

Phase 1: A systematic review was conducted of guides developed for newly-elected municipal officials, as found on the official websites of Canada's ten provinces and three territories (Table 1). These guides describe the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and municipal administrations, as well as the basic structures of municipal governance. Aspects of particular interest to public health organizations were extracted from the guides. A comparative analysis of these data was then carried out to identify characteristics common to municipalities across Canada, as well as features specific to certain provinces and territories. This first phase was carried out in collaboration with Université du Québec à Montréal and Université de Sherbrooke.

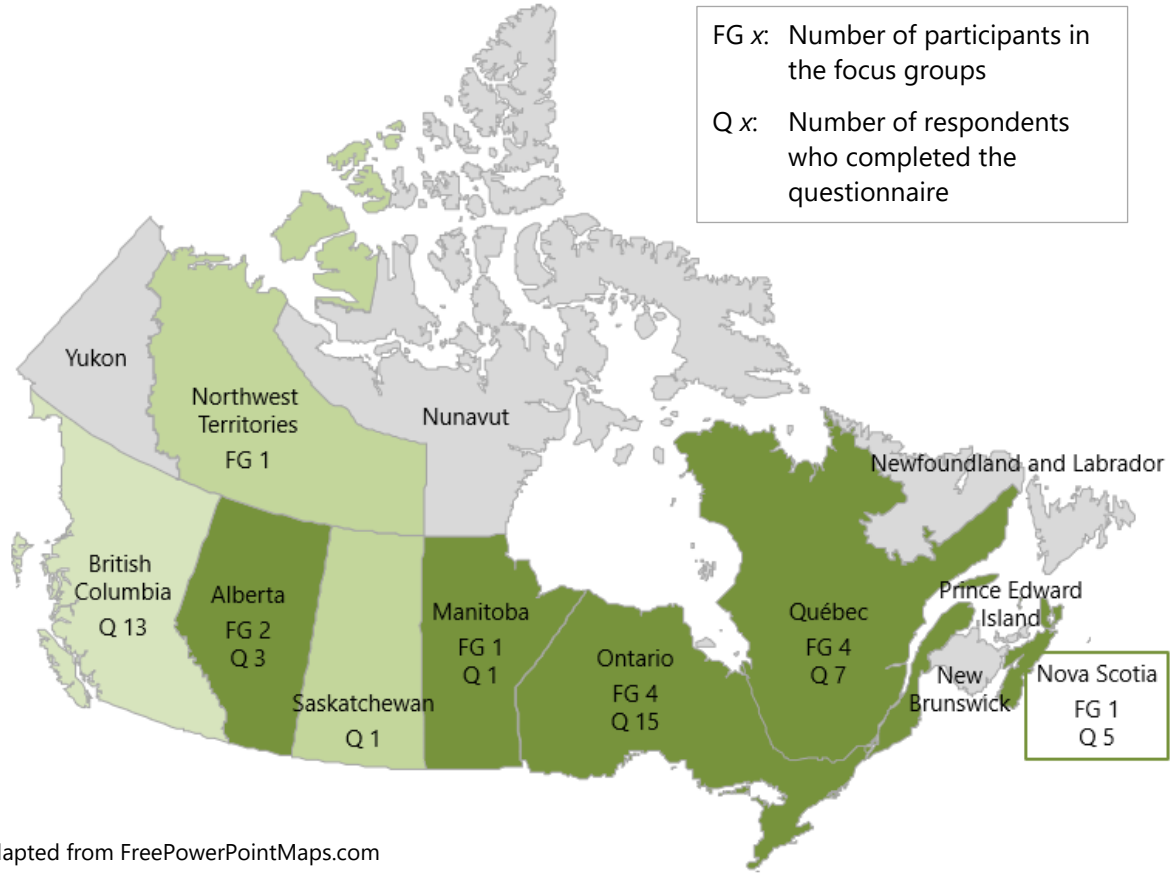
Phase 2: Professionals from governmental public health organizations were then consulted through:

- Three focus groups involving a total of 13 people; and
- A questionnaire completed by 45 people.

This made it possible to gather data on the knowledge needs and expectations of people working in a variety of settings—both urban and rural—in various regions across Canada (Figure 1). This helped validate the themes to be addressed in the fact sheets, identify which aspects of certain topics needed to be developed further, and gather suggestions on how to adapt the content in the fact sheets to on-the-ground realities.

[2] Fact Sheet 8, which deals with relations between municipalities and neighbouring Indigenous governments, will be developed using a different methodology, in collaboration with Indigenous research partners.

Figure 1 Breakdown of the participants in the consultations



Map adapted from FreePowerPointMaps.com

Phase 3: The fact sheets were drafted using the evidence collected during Phases 1 and 2, supplemented by other documentary sources to fill certain gaps and enrich the content, specifically:

- A selective review of the scientific literature from the fields of public administration and political science; and
- A selective review of institutional documents (legislative texts, reports).

Finally, the fact sheets underwent two types of peer review: a scientific review and a review by a group of public health professionals with extensive experience in collaborating with the municipal sector.

Table 1 Guides and resources consulted on municipal governance in Canada

BC	Union of BC Municipalities. (2022). *Local government fact sheets. A reference guide to local government planning & operations*. Ministry of Municipal Affairs, British Columbia & Local Government Management Association of British Columbia. (2022). *Procedure bylaw guide: For B.C.'s local governments*. Ministry of Municipal Affairs, British Columbia. (2022). *Candidate's guide to local elections in B.C.*
AB	Municipal Affairs, Government of Alberta. (2025). *What every councillor needs to know. A council member's handbook*.
SK	Ministry of Government Relations, Government of Saskatchewan. (2023). *Municipal administration reference guide.* Government of Saskatchewan. (2024). *Council member's handbook: For Saskatchewan municipalities.*
MB	Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Manitoba Municipal Administrators & Municipal Relations, Government of Manitoba. (2022). *Council member's guide: Once elected, what's expected?*
ON	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Government of Ontario. (2018). *The Ontario municipal councillor's guide*.
QC	Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation, Gouvernement du Québec. (2025). *Guide d'accueil et de référence pour les élues et les élus municipaux* (in French only).
NB	New Brunswick Department of Environment and Local Government. (2018). *A guide to the Local Governance Act*.
NS	Municipal Affairs and Housing, Nova Scotia. (2024). *Guide for new municipal councillors*.
PE	Government of Prince Edward Island. (2022). *Local government resource handbook. Guide to the Municipal Government Act*.
NL	Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, Newfoundland and Labrador. (2021). *Municipal council handbook*.
YT	The guide has not been updated, so the law as amended in 2024 was consulted: Government of Yukon. *Municipal Act*, RSY 2002, c. 154.
NT	NWT Association of Communities & Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Government of the Northwest Territories. (2009). *Community councillor handbook*.
NU	Nunavut Municipal Training Organization. (2021). *Nunavut councillors handbook*.

Note 1: The sources listed in this table are not cited again in the other fact sheets in this collection.

Note 2: The NCCHPP website also provides a more comprehensive list of resources on the governance of Canadian municipalities by province and territory.

2.2 Limitations

Although the consultations with staff members at public health organizations are representative of various settings across Canada, they do not cover all the provinces and territories.

The guides for newly-elected municipal officials provide general information applicable to all the municipalities within a given province or territory, so they do not take into account differences between small and large municipalities. Furthermore, these guides do not always identify practices that, while not required by law, may nevertheless be implemented by municipalities, since municipalities are afforded some discretion in how they organize their governance.

This is why additional documentary sources were consulted in Phase 3 to ensure that the fact sheets better reflect specificities that may exist. This supplementary review of the literature was selective and conducted on an ad hoc basis, given the breadth and diversity of the topics addressed. Conducting a systematic literature review for all the themes covered was beyond the resources and time available for this project. This being said, a diverse range and number of sources were consulted, and they were drawn from reputable sources.

The realities of Indigenous governments and their relationships with municipalities are addressed only in a limited way in Fact Sheets 1-7 of this collection. In contrast, Fact Sheet 8 is specifically dedicated to this topic.

Finally, this collection reflects the information available at the time of writing and may not cover certain recent developments.

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Lévesque, J., Gervais, M.-J., Robitaille, É., & Couture-Ménard, M.-È. (2024). *Municipal action to create environments conducive to health and quality of life: A systemic analysis framework*. Institut national de santé publique du Québec. https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/3262-quality-life-municipal-action.pdf

Morestin, F. (2020). *How to collaborate with municipalities: A practical guide for public health actors.* National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy. https://ccnpps-ncchpp.ca/how-to-collaborate-with-municipalities-a-practical-guide-for-public-health-actors/

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