

# The SARS Commission

## INTERIM REPORT

### *SARS and Public Health in Ontario*

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## 1. A Broken System

SARS showed that Ontario's public health system is broken and needs to be fixed. Despite the extraordinary efforts of many dedicated individuals and the strength of many local public health units<sup>2</sup>, the overall system proved woefully inadequate. SARS showed Ontario's central public health system to be unprepared, fragmented, poorly led, uncoordinated, inadequately resourced, professionally impoverished, and generally incapable of discharging its mandate.

The SARS crisis exposed deep fault lines in the structure and capacity of Ontario's public health system. Having regard to these problems, Ontario was fortunate that SARS was ultimately contained without widespread community transmission or further hospital spread, sickness and death. SARS was contained only by the heroic efforts of dedicated front line health care and public health workers and the assistance of extraordinary managers and medical advisors. They did so with little assistance from the central provincial public health system that should have been there to help them.

These problems need urgently to be fixed.

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2. Ontario has 37 local Public Health Units. Twenty-seven of them are county-district health units. Nine are regional health departments and one covers a single municipality, the City of Toronto.