# Fostering workforce capacity to maximize opportunities for the digital transformation of public health in Canada

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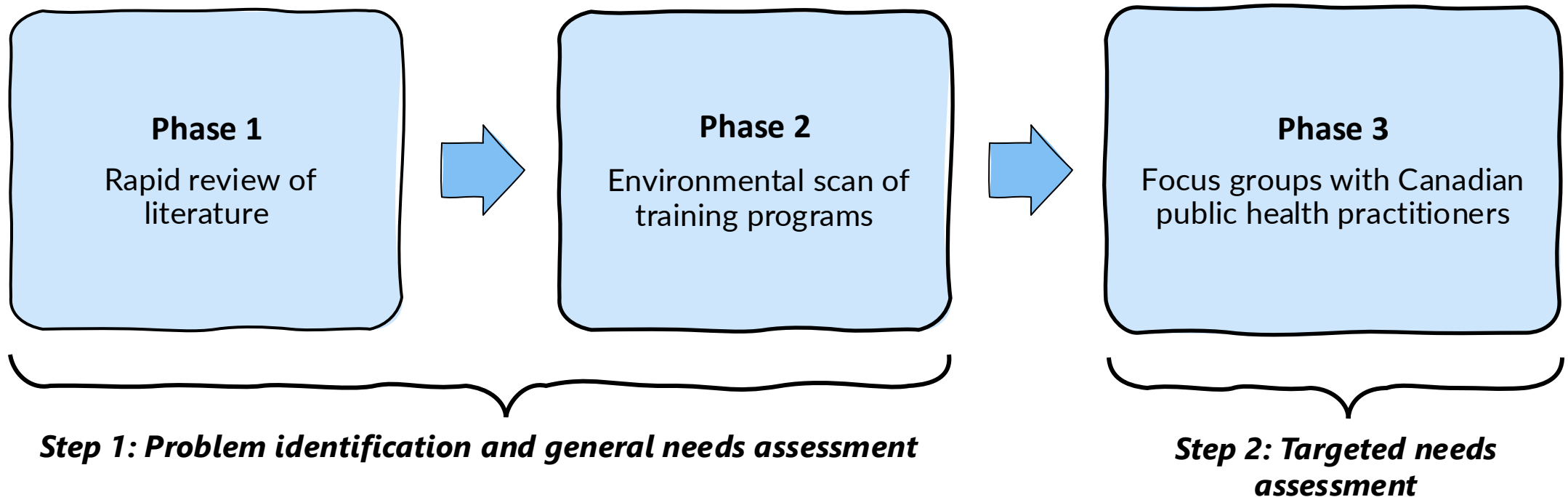
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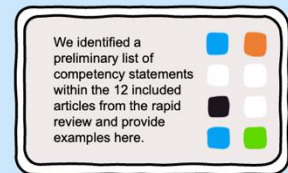
# Study issue and approach

- The public health workforce needs new digital competencies to effectively respond to contemporary public health challenges resulting from the digital transformation of society and public health services.

- Gaps in these competencies were made more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **We aimed** to identify recommendations for digital competency and training updates for public health practitioners in Canada.

**Phase 1**

Rapid review of literature

**Phase 2**

Environmental scan of training programs

**Phase 3**

Focus groups with Canadian public health practitioners

*Step 1: Problem identification and general needs assessment*

*Step 2: Targeted needs assessment*

# Findings and implications

## Phase 1

We identified a preliminary list of competency statements within the 12 included articles from the rapid review and provide examples here.

**45 unique competency statements**

- Competency statements cut across all existing PHAC core competency categories for public health in Canada
- New potential competency category – *Data, data systems and governance*

## Phase 2

**58 Programs**

**29** Public health data Science (including AI and ML data analytics)

**16** Public health informatics/ Information management

**13** Digital health, public health communication: a mixed bag

Transdisciplinary program goals for "T-shaped" professionals.

## Phase 3

**3 Themes**

- Public health systems must evolve to support new digital competencies
- Strengthen the basics before extending towards digital competencies
- Focus on building general digital competencies with options for specialization where necessary

**Implications:**
- We must consider digital competencies across competency categories in PHAC's current updates to the competency framework, including a tiered system where appropriate
- Need for careful re-examination of the public health curricula to identify opportunities to integrate digital competencies, beginning with the basics (i.e., basic digital literacy and a public health first-lens to digital competencies).

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