



## MEDIA RELEASE

### *TBDSSAB Response to Concerns with Emergency Shelter System*

**February 11, 2021** – The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) would like to respond to the recent concerns surrounding the local Emergency Shelter system, including isolation and overflow shelter.

TBDSSAB is the service system manager for the emergency shelter system, and there has been some confusion around what that means and who is responsible for ensuring the system has the capacity for increased isolation beds.

**First of all, we assure you that there are enough isolation shelter spaces to meet the demand.** So far, there have been more isolation rooms available to us than what has been needed. We currently have 56 rooms available, and an average of between 35-44 have been filled the last few nights. TBDSSAB has arrangements in place to expand the number of rooms if needed, but the need for isolation rooms has been met so far.

During this pandemic, the role of TBDSSAB as the service manager for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) takes on an even greater responsibility to lead and coordinate the homelessness system in our area. In 2020, TBDSSAB provided more than \$1.2 million from the regular CHPI allocation to support the operation of emergency shelters (\$771,645 to Shelter House and \$385,555 to the Salvation Army) and an additional \$550,000 from the Social Services Relief Fund toward isolation and overflow sheltering. In addition, TBDSSAB provided \$100,000 to Shelter House in 2020 for operation of the SOS Van. Monthly reports to the Board about the stats in shelter stays are available on the TBDSSAB website, [www.tbdssab.ca/board/reports/](http://www.tbdssab.ca/board/reports/)

To access emergency shelter, an individual must present at one of the emergency shelters or be referred by a community organization. Where the emergency shelters in Thunder Bay are at capacity, and where need arises in other District communities, processes are in place to refer individuals to overflow shelter spaces. These processes have been in place for many years and funding for overflow shelter rooms is funded under CHPI. Information about the



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overflow process is available on our COVID-19 response page, here: [www.tbdssab.ca/covid-19-response](http://www.tbdssab.ca/covid-19-response)

**Second, we want to clarify what our role as service system manager entails.** TBDSSAB is not a direct emergency shelter provider, but we do fund some of the shelters and work with most of them regularly to address needs and ensure adherence and compliance with processes and regulations.

As service manager for provincial CHPI funding, the two designated emergency shelters funded by TBDSSAB are The Shelter House and Salvation Army. Both shelters also have other funding sources, including donations. Because one of the funding sources for The Shelter House is the City of Thunder Bay, there has been some confusion around the city's role in the shelter system. There is also Federal funding through Reaching Home, though for the city of Thunder Bay this funding is administered by other local organizations, not TBDSSAB. TBDSSAB has advocated for a stronger, more unified shelter system by having the Reaching Home dollars flow through Ontario's CHPI service managers. More information about this advocacy is available on the TBDSSAB website, in our [briefings package for the 2020 Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference re: Reaching Home](#) (PDF).

TBDSSAB is monitoring the emergency shelter system for the entire District of Thunder Bay, not just the city of Thunder Bay. Outside of the city of Thunder Bay there are limited formal emergency shelter options. To help individuals access shelter, we rely on partnerships with organizations who would normally not be involved in the shelter system—this includes hospitals, the OPP, and hotels.

The emergency shelter system for The District of Thunder Bay is more difficult to map out than those in more urban, centralized districts in the province. Many of the key players involved are informal partnerships and not obligated to report back any statistics to help us make improvements. Currently, statistics provided in reports to our Board reflect only the data provided by the two funded shelters, and do not include information from community partners providing out of the cold shelter options. We will continue to try to improve the way we communicate how this system works and provide information that we do have available.

We recognize that there is a need for more emergency shelter right now, and recent events have highlighted the gaps in the system. We are working with service providers who have a



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direct link to individuals experiencing homelessness or seeking shelter to improve service pathways. TBDSSAB has also met with community groups, including spokespeople representing both the Warm Places for Winter and Not One More Death groups, and have welcomed their input and perspective. We will provide more updates about the outcomes of these discussions as they are available.

We will continue to explore short-term emergency shelter options, but our mission is to reduce the need for emergency shelter by increasing access to stable housing that enables individuals to be self sufficient. This includes connecting individuals needing shelter with TBDSSAB Transitional Outreach Workers as soon as possible to help them obtain housing outside of the emergency shelter system and to apply for income support.

We assure you TBDSSAB has been working diligently behind the scenes to investigate these issues and resolve them as quickly as possible. The system will not be fixed overnight, but we want the community to know that we are working on building sustainable solutions.

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