



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

# Supportive Housing Strategy

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## POSITION PAPER

**August 2024**

**Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Annual Conference**

**Prepared by:**

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

**Prepared for:**

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

# Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) urges the Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to collaborate with Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards to implement a Supportive Housing Strategy for Ontario.

## Summary

TBDSSAB urges the MMAH, MOH, and MCCSS to continue the important work established by the virtual engagement process in 2020-21. Municipalities are facing increasingly complex challenges without the financial tools to solve them. Budget 2024 makes several important commitments in response to AMO's advocacy on housing and social services, including:

- \$152 million over three years in supportive housing;
- an additional \$396 million over three years for mental health and addictions supports and treatment;
- and making surplus properties available to support affordable and attainable housing.

Through various funding streams, TBDSSAB has made significant investments in supportive housing. However, individuals experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay face disproportionately high incidences of poor mental health and addictions. A multi-ministry pan-Ontario supportive housing strategy will ensure a more efficient system that is positioned to better support people with mental health and/or addiction needs. For this reason, TBDSSAB urges the MOH, MMAH, and MCCSS to finalize and release an Ontario Supportive Housing Strategy.

# Background

Between October 2020 and February 2021, the MMAH, MOH, and MCCSS ministries held virtual engagement sessions to elicit targeted input on how the government can improve the supportive housing system. These engagement sessions culminated into the release of **What We Heard: Improving Ontario's Supportive Housing Programs 2020-2021**. This document detailed the inputs received from participants of the session and laid out next steps the ministries would take to make improvements for people who rely on the supportive housing system. In addition, the 2024 Ontario Budget references expanding access to supportive housing, including a \$152 million funding increase over the next three years to support individuals with mental health and addictions needs. Despite these developments, an official Supportive Housing Strategy for Ontario has not been released to-date.

Supportive housing solutions are required to ensure successful tenancies, prevent evictions, and end ongoing cycles of homelessness. For example, the Housing First approach to ending homelessness offers individualized and client-driven support to help sustain permanent housing.

For instance, the province-led Home for Good (HFG) initiative (now part of Homelessness Prevention Programs) committed funding to help Service Managers house homeless individuals and connect them with appropriate supports to facilitate successful transitions into stable housing.

Since the inception of HFG, the TBDSSAB has housed over 436 unique individuals, with a 75% increase in the past two years. As of May 2024, 59 individuals are receiving a portable Home for Good subsidy and 65 clients are provided with case management services through the HFG support staff from Dilico Anishinabek Family Care and St. Joseph's Care Group.

In addition, through investments from the concluded Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), TBDSSAB has worked with community partners to establish 31 transitional housing spaces. This includes providing capital funding towards the development of 10 low-barrier transitional spaces through Dilico and 21 transitional housing spaces through Matawa, with on-site access to cultural, health and educational supports. These new beds build upon the previous investments made in supportive and transitional housing stock.

As of April 2024, the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) has also enabled TBDSSAB to provide funding for 52 new supportive housing units. These include:

- 9 new units through partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- 17 new units through partnership with Shelter House and NorWest Community Heath Centre for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- 22 long-term supportive housing units through St. Joseph's Care Group and Northern Linkage for individuals with mental health and addictions challenges
- 4 new units through Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, for Indigenous individuals experiencing mental health and addictions challenges

Despite these investments, we believe more supportive and transitional solutions are required. The rationale behind this position is that the District of Thunder Bay's By-Name List currently has ~953 active individuals. Homeless individuals in the District of Thunder Bay experience high incidences of poor mental health and addiction. Data from the TBDSSAB's 2021 Point in Time Count showed that 78% of participants reported ongoing substance use and 53% reported having a mental health condition.

In connection to the data above, Ontario Health Northwest (OH NW) has indicated that admission rates to inpatient adult mental health units are the 3rd highest in the province (33.7 per 1000 population compared to 24.9 per 1,000 population provincially). Additionally, opioid-related morbidity and mortality in the District of Thunder Bay, like mental illness, occurs at a rate much higher than the provincial average<sup>1</sup>.

In a current analysis of gaps in the healthcare and housing systems, the current capacity of supportive housing units is highly inadequate to meet the population's needs<sup>2</sup>. Using a 'Needs-Based Planning' model, OH NW projects that the catchment area should have 1,677 units. Currently capacity is at 188 units, which is a gap of 1,498 units. This stark difference between the projected requirement and actual

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<sup>1</sup> Thunder Bay District Public Health Unit. Snapshot: Emergency Department Visits for Opioid Overdoses accessed May 29, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Noojmawing Sookatagaing Ontario Health Team – Gap Analysis Review (Draft). Accessed June 06, 2024.

capacity shows the alarming need for more funding to add more supportive units to our current stock.

Without appropriate support and adequate funding for additional supportive housing in place, homeless individuals have a much lower likelihood of housing retention.

A multi-ministry pan-Ontario supportive housing strategy will ensure a more efficient system that is positioned to better support people with mental health and/or addiction needs who require support from multiple systems.

Therefore, TBDSSAB urges the MOH, MMAH, and MCCSS to collaborate with CMSMs and DSSABs to implement a Supportive Housing Strategy for the province of Ontario.