

BOARD REPORT

REPORT No.: 2024-50

MEETING DATE: DECEMBER 19, 2024

SUBJECT: ROMA 2025 Position Papers

RECOMMENDATION

THAT with respect to Report No. 2024-50 (Chief Executive Officer Division), we The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (the Board) approve the 2025 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Position Papers as presented;

AND THAT we direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to send the final delegation package to the appropriate provincial Ministries;

AND THAT a copy of the approved delegation briefings package be sent to Thunder Bay District municipal councils for endorsement;

AND THAT the Briefings Package be circulated to the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers' Association, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario;

AND THAT the CEO attend the 2025 ROMA Annual Conference to provide support to the Board Chair and other Board members in their meetings with provincial officials regarding these issues.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide the Board with the position papers for the 2025 ROMA Annual Conference for review and approval.

BACKGROUND

ROMA will be holding its 2025 Annual Conference on January 19-21, 2025 in Toronto. As part of the conference programming, organizations may submit requests to meet with a Minister.

COMMENTS

Position papers have been drafted on five issues that are recommended to the Board for advocacy with provincial representatives. A first report of these papers was presented to the Board at the November 2024 meeting (Res. 24/89).

The proposed advocacy topics include:

- 1) Planning for the Future of Housing in the District of Thunder Bay COCHI OPHI Funding Approach: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)
- 2) Supportive Housing Strategy: Ministry of Health, MMAH, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)
- 3) Child Care Workforce Development: Ministry of Education
- 4) Social Assistance Shelter Rates: MCCSS
- 5) Release from Custody Taskforce & Strategy: Solicitor General, MCCSS, MMAH, Ministry of Health

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

This report aligns with the strategic plan's advocacy-related objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications related to this report.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the 2025 ROMA position papers are presented for review and approval.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Attachment	#1	ROMA 2025 Papers - Planning for the Future of Housing
	#2	ROMA 2025 Papers - Supportive Housing Strategy
	#3	ROMA 2025 Papers – Child Care Workforce Development
	#4	ROMA 2025 Papers – Social Assistance Shelter Rates
	#5	ROMA 2025 Papers - Release from Custody Strategy

PREPARED BY:	Carole Lem, Communications & Engagement Officer Tomi Akinyede, Supervisor, Research and Social Policy				
SIGNATURE					
APPROVED BY	Ken Ranta, Chief Executive Officer				
SIGNATURE					
SUBMITTED BY:	Ken Ranta, Chief Executive Officer				



Planning for the Future of Housing in the District of Thunder Bay

POSITION PAPER

January 2025

Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) provide details on the future funding allocation formulas for the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI), Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI), and Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) to allow Service Managers to effectively plan for housing programming and service provision in the upcoming funding cycle.

Summary

COCHI, OPHI, and COHB provide critical funding for TBDSSAB's effective planning for the provision of community housing, which includes capital projects, repairs and maintenance, housing supplements, and homelessness prevention in the district. Recent unexpected changes to COCHI's funding formula have resulted in severely limiting available resources that TBDSSAB could use to effectively provide these services. Access to the funding formulas will enable TBDSSAB to better plan for future funding allocations in the upcoming cycle.

Background

On April 30, 2018, Ontario and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation signed a Bilateral Agreement regarding the National Housing Strategy. This agreement provided an opportunity to align federal funds with Ontario's Community Housing Renewal Strategy priorities.

Currently, there are two National Housing Strategy funding streams that are transferred to Ontario Service Managers:

Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) - to protect
affordability for households in community housing; to support the repair and
renewal of existing community housing supply, and to expand the supply of
community housing over time.

 Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) - to address local housing priorities, including affordability, repair, and new construction.

In addition to these initiatives, on April 1, 2020, the province of Ontario initiated a separate funding program for housing:

 Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) – to provide portable housing benefits for households eligible to be on the community housing waitlist or with financial needs, who live in community housing, while assigning priority to vulnerable groups.

Since their inception, these three funding streams have become critical to TBDSSAB's effective provision of community housing. For example, in the past three years COCHI funding has been central to capital repairs for over 440 housing units, along with supporting maintenance of over 270 existing legacy housing units built under the Urban Native Housing Program. COCHI, OPHI, and COHB funding also significantly impact the TBDSSAB's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan that focuses on addressing housing needs and tackling the increasing problem of homelessness in the district.

However, in 2023 the funding formula for COCHI changed and TBDSSAB received approximately \$1,000,000 less than the amount anticipated and required to offset the funding decline from the Canada-Ontario Social Housing Agreement. In relation to COCHI, the MMAH has not provided a rationale or details regarding the new funding formula to Service Managers. As a result of the reduced COCHI allocations in 2023 and 2024, TBDSSAB has fewer resources available to effectively provide quality community housing for those living in the District of Thunder Bay. To mitigate these limitations, gaining access to future funding formulas will allow TBDSSAB to adequately plan for upcoming funding allocations and proactively pivot for any possible changes.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that that the MMAH provide details on the future funding allocation formulas for COCHI, OPHI, and COHB to allow Service Managers to effectively plan for program and service provision in the upcoming funding cycle.



Supportive Housing Strategy

POSITION PAPER

January 2025

Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) 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

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) release a government-wide Supportive Housing Strategy for Ontario.

Summary

TBDSSAB urges the MOH, MMAH and MCCSS to continue the important work initiated in the virtual engagement process (2020-21), which sought targeted input for the improvement of the supportive housing system. Supportive housing solutions are critical to ensure successful long-term tenancies and end ongoing cycles of homelessness. While the TBDSSAB has made significant investments in supportive housing, individuals experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay face disproportionately high incidences of mental health and addictions issues. For this reason, TBDSSAB urges the MOH, MMAH, and MCCSS to finalize and release a provincial Supportive Housing Strategy that includes an all-of-government approach.

Background

Between 2020-2021, the MOH, MMAH, and MCCSS ministries held virtual engagement sessions to elicit targeted input on the improvement of the supportive housing system, subsequently releasing **What We Heard: Improving Ontario's Supportive Housing Programs 2020-2021**. In addition, the 2024 Ontario Budget references expanding access to supportive housing, with a \$152 million funding increase over the next three years for mental health and addictions supports. Despite these developments, an official Supportive Housing Strategy for Ontario has not been released to date.

Supportive housing solutions are critical in ensuring successful tenancies, preventing evictions, and ending ongoing cycles of homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay and broadly. This outcome is evidenced by the following initiatives:

- a) Home for Good (HFG), now part of Homelessness Prevention Programs, provides funding for housing and appropriate social supports to facilitate successful transitions into stable housing. Through HFG, the TBDSSAB has housed over 462 unique individuals addressing homelessness and substance use, with a 52.5% increase in the past two years.
- b) The Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) has enabled TBDSSAB to provide funding for the creation of 52 new supportive housing units, in partnership with health service providers including (but not limited to) NorWest Community Heath Centres, St. Joseph's Care Group, and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services.
- c) The now concluded Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) enabled the TBDSSAB partners to establish 31 transitional housing spaces with Dilico and Matawa, including on-site access to cultural, health, addictions and educational supports.

Despite these investments, more supportive housing solutions are required.

In August 2024, the MOH released a Call for Proposals for the establishment of Homelessness and Addictions Recovery Treatment Hubs (HART Hubs), that would incorporate a range of critical services including mental health supports, addictions treatment, primary care, case management and supportive housing. This Government-wide approach seems to follow the goals of a Supportive Housing Strategy and is welcomed, however this demonstration project is time limited and would only be open to a maximum of 19 sites.

The District of Thunder Bay's homelessness By-Name List (BNL) currently exceeds 950 active individuals; 67% (639 individuals) self-reported as Indigenous. It is worth noting that homeless individuals in the District of Thunder Bay experience disproportionately high incidences of poor mental health and addiction. For instance, in TBDSSAB's 2021 Point in Time Count, 78% of participants reported ongoing substance use and 53% reported having a mental health condition. Similarly, Northwestern Ontario has the 3rd highest admission rate (33.7 per 1,000) in the province (24.9 per 1,000) for inpatient adult mental health and opioid-related deaths

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in the district occur at a rate three times (51 per 100,000) compared to the province (16.1 per 100,000)¹.

Given these statistics, without appropriate support and adequate funding for supportive housing, homeless individuals have a much lower likelihood of moving along the housing continuum. A multi-ministry Ontario-wide 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 continue the engagement process with municipalities and service managers to prepare to release a government-wide Supportive Housing Strategy for the province of Ontario.

¹ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). (2023). Quarterly Public Health Unit Opioid Mortality Reports: May 2017 to March 2023 [unpublished data table]. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario



Child Care Workforce Development

POSITION PAPER

January 2025

Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon. Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Ministry of Education creates a provincial workforce strategy that guides system service managers on planning for the long-term future of childcare in Ontario with a key focus on sustaining the recruitment, retention and professional development of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).

Summary

Since 2022, the funding agreement between the Ontario and federal governments has resulted in significant childcare fee reductions and a corresponding increased demand for licensed childcare. However, this increase in demand has surpassed the available spaces and program staff capacity in the District of Thunder Bay, resulting in a growing childcare waitlist that cannot be served. A decreased workforce capacity significantly limits childcare spaces in the district. Therefore, the need for more qualified childcare staff is critical. Addressing this need requires a multipronged approach that would result in a long-term provincial strategic plan for the provision of highly functional and quality childcare.

Background

As of September 2024, TBDSSAB has a childcare waitlist totaling 3,910 children, with 2,570 (65.7%) of that number seeking to be placed as soon as space is available. In contrast, an average of 61 children have been placed in childcare centers from the waitlist each month from January to September 2024. At this rate it will take 42 months for all currently waitlisted children seeking immediate care to be actively placed. It is worth noting that this projection does not account for new waitlist additions. This sizeable and slow-moving waitlist is significantly impacted by the lack of qualified childcare workers required to meet the increasing demand precipitated by CWELCC fee reductions for families.

Accessible, inclusive, and high-quality childcare is essential to our provincial economy and Early Childhood Educators (ECE) are at the forefront. Without a viable workforce there is no childcare, which has a compounding effect. The current ECE workforce has seen a significant decline in Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), with a 20% reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, post-pandemic, childcare programs continue to struggle with staff recruitment and retention due to a shortage of qualified childcare workers. As a result, these programs have had to operate at a reduced capacity or suspend programs entirely.

To begin addressing the staffing shortfalls, TBDSSAB worked with Confederation College and implemented a RECE Fast Track program in 2023, which relied on the one-time federal investment in the Child Care and Early Years Workforce Funding Strategy. The outcome resulted in 12 of 15 registrants completing the program requirements and becoming RECEs. While this is a testament to the success of the program, TBDSSAB is currently operating at 48% of full ECE workforce and has projected a need for 130 more RECEs to meet the current demand for more childcare spaces.

Though the outcome of TBDSSAB's approach resulted in success this year, its continuation would not be sustainable in meeting the growing need for more childcare spaces. In addition, the dearth of qualified staff and the resulting consequence on the provision of services is not limited to the childcare sector in the District of Thunder Bay.

In a recently concluded study focused on the provincial ECE workforce, the report found that childcare providers across Ontario are plagued by similar workforce issues². For example, some of the findings showed that a shortage of a qualified workforce has led to compounding effects. These include having an unutilized capacity, which limits access to childcare and a growing waitlist of parents seeking childcare. In some communities, they have turned to the use of untrained staff as a stop gap measure, which results in qualified ECE staff having to provide on-the-job training while also fulfilling their work duties. The resultant effect has been a reduction

¹ Ontario Ministry of Education. (2021). Child Care and Early Years Workforce Funding: Ministry of Education.

² Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Schurter, M. Varmuza, P., Akbari, S., Mudie, S. (2024). Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario. Northern Perspectives.

Attachment #3 Report No. 2024-50

in the quality of care provided and staff burnout as they carry out their extended duties with little to no support.

Outside of the childcare sector, long-term care (LTC) homes recently experienced a similar workforce crisis, leading to decreased system capacity. As a response, in 2023 the Ontario government committed \$300 million over three years for the attraction, retention, and support of new PSWs. This funding offers up to \$25,400 for PSW students and new graduates, including (but not limited to):

- Up to \$5,400 stipend for students during a long-term or community care clinical placement.
- \$10,000 to support relocation costs for recent PSW graduates committed to working in a long-term or community care setting in a rural, remote, or northern area for one year.³

As with the incentivization introduced for PSWs, a provincial workforce strategy that focuses on addressing challenges faced by the childcare sector will allow for a sustainable increase in capacity of the childcare workforce, who, in turn, can accommodate the growing demand for more childcare spaces.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Education provide Service Managers with a provincial workforce strategy that would enable DSSABs and CMSMs to strategize on the long-term future of childcare and grow the number of qualified ECEs across the province.

³ https://www.healthforceontario.ca/en/Home/All_Programs/PSW_Initiatives



Social Assistance Shelter Rates

POSITION PAPER

January 2025

Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

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

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) adjusts social assistance shelter rates to match local average market rents to address the shortfall between shelter rates and the actual cost of shelter.

Summary

Social assistance (SA) shelter rates are well below average market rent in Ontario, which creates a large shortfall in rent revenue for service managers. As community housing is funded and administered by municipal governments, this shortfall results in higher costs for the service manager and ultimately a considerable impact on the municipal taxpayer. The low shelter rates act as a deterrent for further investment in community housing units.

Background

Since 2000, rent scales have not increased for community housing tenants. On a parallel scale, market rental rates have increased by 103.8% in Thunder Bay, 1 creating a growing gap between SA shelter rates and the actual cost of shelter.

A single Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefit recipient who is housed through a private market rental unit is eligible for the maximum shelter allowance under the respective program. However, if the same individual is housed through a community housing provider, the shelter allowance is determined by the geared-to-income (GTI) rent scales, resulting in a monthly difference in provincial rent support between \$300 and \$788 in the District of Thunder Bay depending on household size (see Appendix A).

¹ Thunder Bay. CMHC Housing Market Information Portal. https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/#TableMapChart/2240/3/Thunder+Bay+CMA

Based on the number of households who are recipients of social assistance (OW or ODSP) and reside in TBDSSAB direct-owned units, the difference between the rent scales and shelter allowance maximums has resulted in a loss of \$8.7 million over the past year. These funds could have significantly supported the backlog in community housing repair, renovation, or regeneration. In addition, current shelter rates have been insufficient to cover the actual cost of market housing in the District of Thunder Bay (see Appendix B). The difference between shelter rates and average market rents in the TBDSSAB service area is sizeable and results in a negative socioeconomic effect. Firstly, the significant difference leads households who are currently renting to reallocate their basic allowance (that is intended for food and necessities) to cover rental costs. Secondly, the lack of affordability for individuals looking to rent in the market has led to an increase in the waitlist for community housing. For instance, the average waitlist number in 2022 was approximately 1,001. In 2023, this increased to 1,242 and in 2024 there was an approximate average of 1,369 applicants on the waitlist.

Emergency shelter usage has also increased due to unaffordable market rent. The monthly cost for emergency shelter usage is \$1,340 but the average bachelor apartment rental rate is \$823. By matching OW shelter rates with the average market rate for a bachelor apartment in the district – an increase of \$433 – it could potentially save the TBDSSAB an estimate of \$907 per individual (monthly shelter stay \$1,340 - \$433 OW shelter rate increase = \$907) while providing a suitable home for the recipient.

Given the importance of providing safe, stable and adequate housing for individuals in the district, it is recommended that the MCCSS adjusts shelter assistance rates to match market rental rates to ease the overwhelming pressure on the individuals seeking social support and emergency shelter systems who are having to operate over capacity.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that MCCSS adjust social assistance shelter rates to match local average market rents to address the shortfall between social assistance shelter rates and the actual cost of shelter.

Appendix A: Difference in OW/ODSP Shelter Rates and HSA Rent Scales

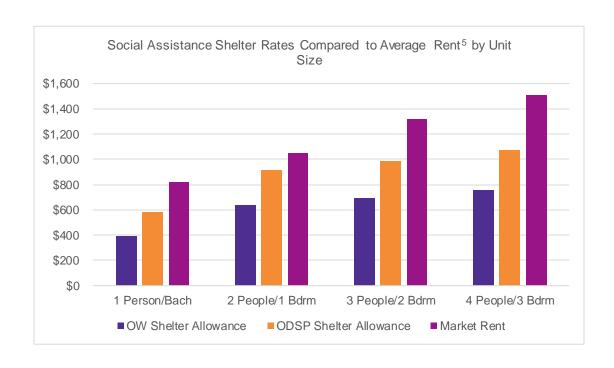
Household Size	OW Shelter Rate ²	Average HSA Rent Scale ³	Difference	ODSP Shelter Rate ⁴	ODSP HSA Rent Scale ²	Difference
1	\$390.00	\$85.00	-\$305.00	\$582.00	\$109.00	-\$473.00
2	\$642.00	\$175.00	-\$467.00	\$915.00	\$199.00	-\$716.00
3	\$697.00	\$212.00	-\$485.00	\$990.00	\$236.00	-\$754.00
4	\$756.00	\$254.00	-\$502.00	\$1,074.00	\$278.00	-\$796.00
5	\$815.00	\$296.00	-\$519.00	\$1,159.00	\$321.00	-\$838.00
6	\$844.00	\$339.00	-\$505.00	\$1,201.00	\$363.00	-\$838.00
7	\$844.00	\$381.00	-\$463.00	\$1,201.00	\$405.00	-\$796.00
8	\$844.00	\$423.00	-\$421.00	\$1,201.00	\$488.00	-\$713.00
9	\$844.00	\$466.00	-\$378.00	\$1,201.00	\$490.00	-\$711.00
10	\$844.00	\$508.00	-\$336.00	\$1,201.00	\$532.00	-\$669.00
11	\$844.00	\$550.00	-\$294.00	\$1,201.00	\$575.00	-\$626.00
12+	\$844.00	\$593.00	-\$251.00	\$1,201.00	\$617.00	-\$584.00

² Ontario https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/010298#BK4

³ Ontario https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-works-policy-directives/63-shelter

 $^{^{4} \} Ontario \ https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-disability-support-program-policy-directives-income-support/62-shelter-calculation$

Appendix B: Social Assistance Shelter Rates Compared to Average Rent by Unit Size⁵



 $^{^5}$ Thunder Bay. CMHC Housing Market Information Portal. $\underline{\text{https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/\#TableMapChart/2240/3/Thunder+Bay+CMA}}$



Release from Custody Taskforce & Strategy

POSITION PAPER

January 2025

Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon. Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General

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

Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) urges the Solicitor General, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), and the Ministry of Health (MOH) to develop a provincial Release from Custody Taskforce with the aim of establishing a strategy to address individuals being released from custody into homelessness or without appropriate supports.

Summary

To address the high provincial recidivism rates, TBDSSAB urges the Solicitor General, MCCSS, MMAH, and MOH to develop a provincial Release from Custody Taskforce and Strategy, to address supports for housing, addictions, mental health, medical care, transportation, and basic needs for individuals upon release from custody.

Background

Provincial recidivism rates for adults sentenced to custody or community supervision are as high as 50% within three years of release, with a custodial sentence resulting in a greater likelihood of reconviction over community supervision. Men aged 18 to 34 have the highest incidence of reconviction (56%), followed by women of the same age group (51%). Indigenous individuals experience the greatest risk (60%), at an average rate of 30% higher than non-Indigenous people. Additionally, mental health and substance use disorders are disproportionately represented in incarcerated populations across the province, with evidence that increased access to post-release substance-use programs effectively reduces recidivism rates. In the custom of the same age group (51%).

However, individuals released from custody face significant barriers to reintegration, including access to economic supports, employment, housing, medication coverage, mental health care and substance-use programming. These supports are important protective factors that prevents future incarceration.

Upon release, many individuals lack critical resources, including a place to live, financial means, transportation, and coverage for prescription medications. Additionally, individuals released in Thunder Bay are often far from their hometowns and communities, decreasing their ability to secure housing. These factors significantly increase the risk of reincarceration. For instance, over the past 16 months, TBDSSAB has been involved with the Thunder Bay Community Reintegration Planning Table to support 15 incarcerated individuals' post-custodial release. Currently, five (33%) of these individuals have been reincarcerated, demonstrating the significant need for additional reintegration supports to further reduce these rates.

The current average cost of adult correctional services for a single inmate is \$326 daily or \$9,780 monthly. Conversely, the rental cost for a single bedroom apartment in Thunder Bay averages \$1,054 monthly. Even with additional targeted services, development and investment in post-correctional supports would result in significant savings for the provincial government, while also facilitating effective reintegration into society for individuals. Key areas include effective discharge planning, stable housing, mental health and addictions supports, employment training and education, and medical care and coverage. Addressing the complex needs of those released through effective services, practices, and programs is critical for successful integration and therefore decreased likelihood of recidivism.

Therefore, TBDSSAB urges the Solicitor General, MCCSS, MMAH, and MOH to work with DSSABs and CMSMs to develop a provincial Release from Custody Taskforce with the aim of establishing a strategy to address individuals being released from custody into homelessness or without appropriate supports.

ⁱ Pedneault, Lee & Jones, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00002-eng.htm

[&]quot;Lebenbaum et al., 2024, The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 69 pp 21-32 https://doiorg.ezproxy.lakeheadu.ca/10.1177/07067437221140385

Ostermann, M., & Matejkowski, J. (2012). Exploring the Intersection of Mental Health and Release Status with Recidivism. Justice Quarterly, 31(4), 746–766. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2012.677465

iv John Howard Society https://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/No-Fixed-Address-Final-Report.pdf