



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

# Supportive Housing Strategy

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## POSITION PAPER

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**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) 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 Health 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

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

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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