



	REPORT No.: 2021-33
MEETING DATE: JULY 15, 2021	DATE PREPARED: JUNE 28, 2021
SUBJECT: BRIEFINGS PACKAGE FOR MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS AT AMO 2021 CONFERENCE	

RECOMMENDATION

THAT with respect to Report No. 2021-33 (CAO Division), we, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (the Board), approve the delegation briefings package for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) 2021 conference as presented;

AND THAT we direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to send the delegation package to the appropriate provincial Ministries;

AND THAT a copy of the approved 2021 delegation briefings package be sent to Thunder Bay District municipal councils;

AND THAT the CAO attend the virtual 2021 AMO 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 District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with the briefing package for the 2021 Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference for review and approval.

BACKGROUND

AMO will be holding its 2021 Annual Conference virtually, August 15-18, 2021. As part of the programming for the Annual Conference, organizations may submit requests to meet with a Minister or Parliamentary Assistant.

COMMENTS

Briefings have been developed by the Integrated Social Services Division team in consultation with the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer on four issues that are recommended to the Board for advocacy with provincial Ministers. The AMO conference is one opportunity for the Board Chair, supported by other Board members and Administration, to present these issues to Ministers.

The Briefings Package contains 4 key recommendations.

- 1) TBDSSAB urges the Ontario government to establish a province-wide, low-cost plan structure with the telecom industry that provides access to telephone and internet technology for a reasonable \$10/month fee. This would remove barriers to accessing education, training, employment, and community services.
- 2) TBDSSAB urges the Ontario Ministries of Health and Municipal Affairs and Housing to partner to provide: a) designated funding in the District of Thunder Bay for mental health and addictions supports for in situ tenants of community housing, b) a new purpose-built supportive housing project(s) consisting of a minimum of 50 units and c) addictions agencies to be provided a long-term commitment for support funding.
- 3) TBDSSAB urges the Ontario government to combine Home for Good and CHPI allocations, increase the combined funding to \$5,440,093 from \$4,812,590, and allow for capital projects to be funded under this program.
- 4) TBDSSAB urges the Ontario government to convene a staff-level working group to inform and guide a whole of government approach regarding homeless individuals released from incarceration, including the development of a supported transitional housing option.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS



There are no immediate financial implications related to this report.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the briefings package are recommended for approval.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

Attachment #1 – [Briefings Package for the 2021 Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference](#)

PREPARED BY:	Carole Lem, Communications & Engagement Officer The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
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THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

August, 2021

Brief: The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) establish a low-cost, province-wide plan structure with the telecom industry that provides low-income Ontarians with access to telephone and internet technology for a reasonable \$10/month fee. Access to a home-based internet service and cell phone service will allow individuals and families to connect to needed services and educational supports. This would remove barriers to accessing education, training, employment and community services.

Summary

Individuals and families without adequate resources to acquire communication devices and services face additional barriers in trying to access employment and training opportunities, health supports, and other community resources and services. The resources should exist to allow vulnerable people to access technology and service plans in order to remove barriers to accessing education, training, employment, health and community services.

Background

The inability to access communication services and devices for individuals and families supported by TBDSSAB increases the barriers that people face in trying to access employment and training opportunities and limits access to other community resources and services.

There has been a shift towards increasing the number of support programs and services that are now available through a digital platform and a corresponding decrease in the number of services available in person. This shift includes services provided or funded by the Province of Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated this shift and poses a greater challenge for those without access to computer and/or smart phone technology due to economic pressures.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became increasingly apparent that our tenants and clients are lacking in technological supports. There are many people that do not have the financial resources to ensure the same access that others in our

community have. With the closure of many of the computer resource centres (libraries, community centres, etc.) across the District of Thunder Bay, many of those who had access to phones, computers and internet no longer do. In a time of uncertainty and potential crisis, this means having no way to reach out for assistance, nor the ability to be reached by family or community organizations.

In response to this issue, TBDSSAB entered into a partnership with Tbaytel, the largest independently owned telecommunications provider in Canada that offers products and services that include smart phones, mobility, and internet service.

In March 2020, TBDSSAB purchased 66 phones from Tbaytel to be distributed to clients and tenants in the District of Thunder Bay. These phones came with discounted data packages and calling / texting capacity. These plans were set to expire at the end of June 2020, however TBDSSAB has committed to continue to fund these services through March 31, 2021.

The distribution of the 66 phones during the COVID-19 pandemic was intended to assist individuals with medical appointments that are now done via phone, counselling services being conducted online or over the phone and those suffering from isolation requiring a way to communicate. Some of the phones were provided to those clients that fall within the TBDSSAB's High Needs Homeless (HNN) population or those individuals supported through the Home for Good (HFG) program. This was done to ensure connection with support workers, connection with landlords to find accommodation, and to connect with other community programs. Phones were also provided to youth that require a means to connect with counselling services or require the means to connect with their educational institution, and to clients and tenants that require a means to communicate for financial reasons, to connect with Ontario Works staff, to make employment connections, or to make EI inquiries.

If an individual were to arrange direct access of a device and connection package, the cost would be \$210 for an entry level smartphone (or \$10/month added to a package), and \$55/monthly for a limited voice and data package. For a single individual receiving Ontario Works basic needs benefits of \$343 /month, this represents almost 20% of their monthly income. For most individuals, this poses an undue hardship in order to access telephone communication and basic supports and services, including online provincial programs.

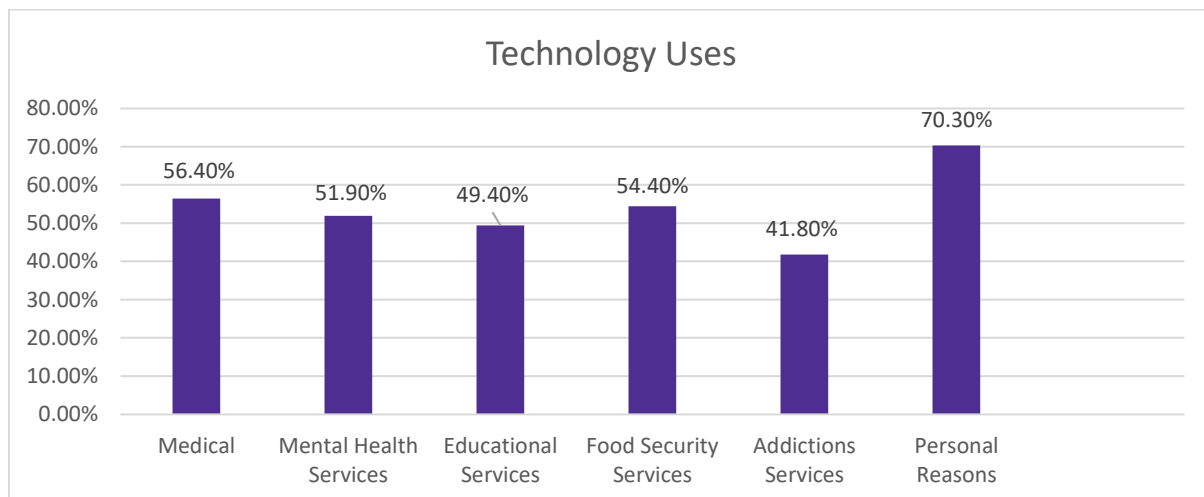
This program has had a profound impact on the lives of recipients. For example, a client was coming into the office actively looking for work and spending 1-3 hours following up with employment services. He received a phone, and shortly after he received a job offer as he came to print and fax information to the employers.

Another example is an 18-year-old dependant of a tenant with TBDSSAB housing who required help to leave an unhealthy and unsafe living environment. Her family had addiction issues and she needed to leave for her safety and reached out to a TBDSSAB Tenant Support Coordinator. She was given a phone under the program. With the help of several community organizations, she was able to secure safe accommodations and apply for Ontario Works on her own. She secured employment through the summer

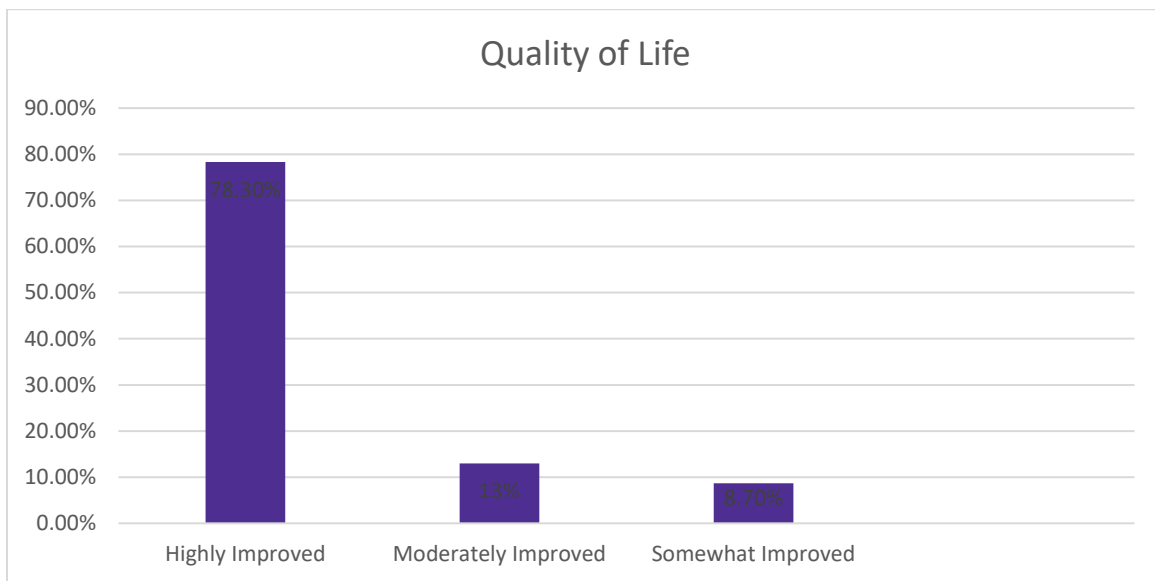
allowing her to build on skills and confidence. She is now back to school online and thriving. To her, that phone was a lifeline that would not been accessible otherwise.

Subsequently, TBDSSAB saw the value of providing technology resources to those in need and invested in another 200 smartphones with data packages in March 2021. These new devices were made available similarly to the initial 66, and all were assigned within 3 weeks. The data packages for these devices, as well as the initial 66 devices, are in place until March 31, 2022. TBDSSAB also initiated a laptop computer lending program, to facilitate the needs of those who were engaged in employment training programs or other life stabilization efforts. TBDSSAB purchased 17 laptops and distributed these to individuals who had expressed a need. Agreements were established for the lending, and the devices have all been assigned.

TBDSSAB recently conducted a survey with the 240 recipients of smartphones and laptops. The survey asked respondents to specify the resources or services they were able to access because of the technology. The following chart demonstrates the responses to this question.



The survey also asked respondents to indicate to what extent having access to technology has improved their quality of life. The following chart indicates the responses to this question.



In addition, 91% of survey respondents indicated that cell phone and internet access is very important to them. As more services move to an online format it is imperative that all Ontarians regardless of income can access all programs and services in an equitable manner.

In parts of Ontario where Rogers operates, the company offers a program called Connected for Success that offers high-speed, low-cost internet to subsidized tenants, seniors and to individuals receiving disability and income support.

(<https://www.torontohousing.ca/residents/your-home/phone-cable-internet/Documents/Rogers%20Connected%20for%20Success%20Internet%20Plans.pdf>). Access plans under this program start at \$9.99/month for eligible households.

Unfortunately, Rogers is not available in the District of Thunder Bay.

TBDSSAB encourages to the Ontario government to pursue a similar program province-wide.

Therefore, TBDSSAB urges the Ontario government to establish a province-wide, low-cost plan structure with the telecom industry that provides access to telephone and internet technology for a reasonable \$10/month fee. This would remove barriers to accessing education, training, employment and community services.



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Hon. Christine Elliot, Minister of Health
Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister Mental Health and Addictions

August, 2021

Brief: TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Health partner with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide designated funding in the District of Thunder Bay for a) mental health and addictions supports for in situ tenants of community housing, b) a new purpose-built supportive housing project(s) consisting of a minimum of 50 units and c) addictions agencies to be provided a long term commitment for support funding to build upon the positive results of the programs funded using the one-time \$1,040,046 mental health & addictions funding that was provided to the TBDSSAB to assist vulnerable populations to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) recognizes and applauds the government of Ontario's supportive approach to addressing homelessness by creating permanent and independent housing solutions. However, additional resources are required to provide mental health and addictions supports for in situ tenants of community housing and for the non-homeless requiring supports.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Health partner with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide funding for a) mental health and addictions supports for in situ tenants of community housing, b) a new purpose-built supportive housing project(s) consisting of a minimum of 50 units, c) mental health and addictions agencies to be provided a long term commitment for support funding to build off of the positive results of the programs that were funded using the one-time \$1,040,046 mental health & addictions funding that was provided to the TBDSSAB to assist vulnerable populations to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This flexible funding helped address the pandemic needs of vulnerable people living with mental health and/or addictions issues and was used for eligible operating activities within the TBDSSAB service area. However, increased and sustained funding is necessary to address the plethora of needs found throughout the District of Thunder Bay.

Background

a) Mental Health and Addictions Supports for In situ Tenants of Community Housing

Research has shown that certain groups are more at risk for substance abuse related harms. These include people who have had adverse childhood experiences, people with mental health disorders, people with workplace injuries and older adults, youth who have a history of trauma or neglect, homeless people, people working in the sex trade, and Indigenous people.

Many of the vulnerable populations cited above are represented in the community housing sector and as tenants in the private market. As a cross section of the broader population, it is reasonable to assume that incidence of mental health and addictions in the community housing tenant population occurs at a rate at least equal to the District as a whole.

Starting in 2016, TBDSSAB tracked the number of referrals for tenants involved in some type of presumed mental health and addiction issue. Approximately 409 of the referrals in 2019 were for such issues and this number increased to 427 in 2020. It is also estimated that an additional 100 referrals from the broader community housing sector were for mental health and addictions.

b) New Purpose-Built Supportive Housing Project(s) Consisting of a Minimum of 50 Units

It is evident that various supports are required to ensure successful tenancies, prevent evictions, and to end the cycle of homelessness. For example, the Housing First approach to ending homelessness is well-known for its individualized and client-driven supports as a core principle in sustaining permanent housing. Similarly, the Home for Good initiative launched by the province has committed funding to help Service Managers house homeless individuals and connect them to appropriate supports to support successful transitions into stable housing.

The supportive approach implemented by MMAH to addressing homelessness is the proper method for creating permanent and independent housing solutions.

In the context of the District of Thunder Bay there is need for a minimum of 50 transitional supportive housing beds. The actual number of beds required in the District of Thunder Bay far exceeds the requested minimum of 50, given that the incidence of mental health and addictions is much higher in the District of Thunder Bay than the provincial average, as demonstrated through the information in Figures 1-3. However, the addition of a minimum of 50 dedicated transitional mental health and addictions beds would demonstrate an important step toward meeting the needs in the District of Thunder Bay.

Figure 1: 2019 Comparative Opioid-related morbidity and mortality in Ontario and the District of Thunder Bay, rate per 100,000 people

	Ontario	District of Thunder Bay
Emergency Department Visits for Opioid Poisonings	71.6	117.8
Hospitalization Rates for Opioid Poisonings	13.6	23.3
Deaths from Opioid Poisonings	10.3	24.6

Source: Public Health Ontario, Interactive Opioid Tool

In addition to the impacts of opioids in the District of Thunder Bay, the impacts of alcohol on the population is equally troublesome. The following information from a Thunder Bay District Health study shows a comparison between the provincial and district averages.

Figure 2: Percentage of Adults who Exceed the Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines, 2015

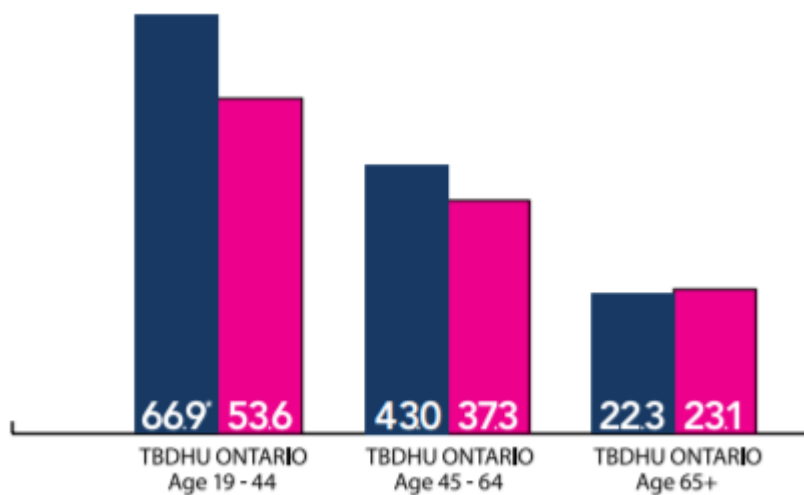
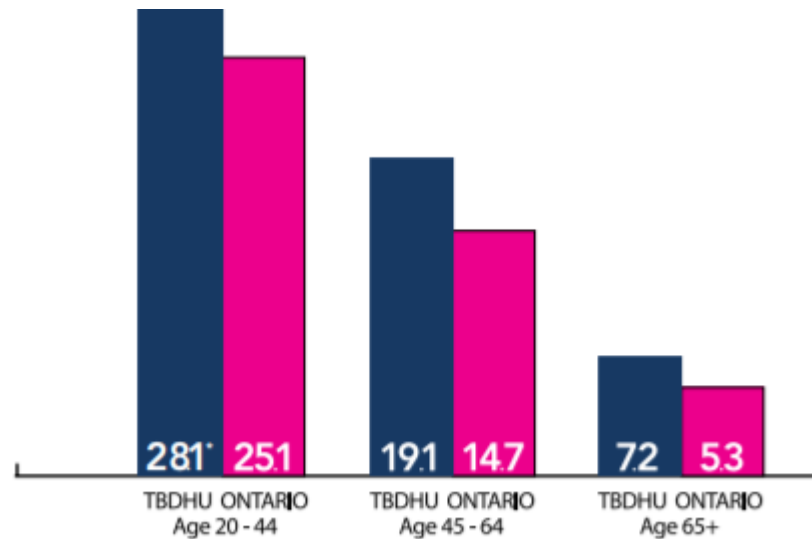


Figure 3: Percentage of Adults Who Self-Report Heavy Drinking by Age, 2015



TBDSSAB supports the involvement of the mental health and addictions sector in seeking these additional supports and resources to address this challenge.

Through the creation of new transitional supportive care housing, individuals in need would receive the care they require, and the burden of addictions would be reduced. This would also open space for those waiting to access community housing, reducing the homeless population and those struggling to pay rent in the private sector.

As the evidence demonstrates, the District of Thunder Bay has a much higher incidence of mental health and addictions when compared to the Ontario average. This creates more demand for services and supports that can be provided through dedicated supportive housing.

c) A Long-Term Commitment for Additional Support Funding

The TBDSSAB is grateful for the one-time allocation of \$1,040,046 received to support a range of mental health and addictions-related supports and services. Through this funding, the TBDSSAB provided funding to 14 programs.

The main focus of this funding was the provision of direct mental health and addictions supports within the District of Thunder Bay. Services were provided in the form of software applications to support suicide prevention in youth, 200 cellular phones were allocated to support clients maintain connections for medical, mental health, addictions, job connections and education links. Patients in rural settings post discharge were provided access to a culturally safe patient navigator. Support options for females released from custody via housing navigators were created. Mental health connections to reduce social isolation for those with acquired brain injuries was developed.

Funding for the local police services was provided to make connections with individuals living in encampments, providing care bags and support services connections. An Indigenous mental health and wellness program was created through community and

land-based supportive mental health programs. TBDSSAB connected with local pharmacies to support coverage for mental health and addictions prescriptions for twenty-five individuals.

Remote clinical care was provided through the implementation of the Lifeguard overdose prevention application. The Wet Warming Centre care bus was established to provide the homeless or precariously housed with connections to a nurse, shelter or housing contacts, COVID-19 prevention education, and a safe space to connect with mental health and addiction supports.

Through these programs 5,967 households were assisted, with 479 households that include a member with mental health and addictions issues and at risk of homelessness receiving services and supports directly related to housing stability. Additionally, 2,364 households experiencing homelessness that include a member with mental health and addictions issues were supported.

Though the funding provided was gratefully received, it is evident by the successful deployment and usage of over \$1,000,000 in less than 3 months that there is a very real need for increased and consistent funding to address the mental health and addictions need within the District of Thunder Bay.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Health partner with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide designated funding in the District of Thunder Bay for a) mental health and addictions supports for in situ tenants of community housing, b) a new purpose-built supportive housing project(s) consisting of a minimum of 50 units, and c) addictions agencies to be provided a long term commitment for support funding to build off of the positive results of the programs that were funded using the one-time mental health & addictions funding that was provided to the TBDSSAB to assist vulnerable populations.



**THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD**

Hon. Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

August, 2021

Brief: The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) appreciates and acknowledges the Home for Good (HFG), Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), and Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) funding allocations received this year, and requests that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing: a) combine the HFG and CHPI allocations, b) increase the combined amount to \$5,440,093, and c) allow for capital projects to be funded through CHPI.

Summary

The emergency shelters in the District of Thunder Bay have been over 100% capacity for much of the previous 5 years, relying on overflow spaces to meet the demand for their services. The emergency shelters are funded through CHPI and, despite the successful implementation of the Home for Good (HFG) program, emergency shelter usage has often remained at or above 100% capacity. To build upon the success of the HFG program and reduce emergency shelter usage, the TBDSSAB requests that the MMAH combine the HFG and CHPI allocations and increase the combined funding amount to \$5,440,093. Further, it is requested that the MMAH allow capital projects to be funded through this combined program.

Background

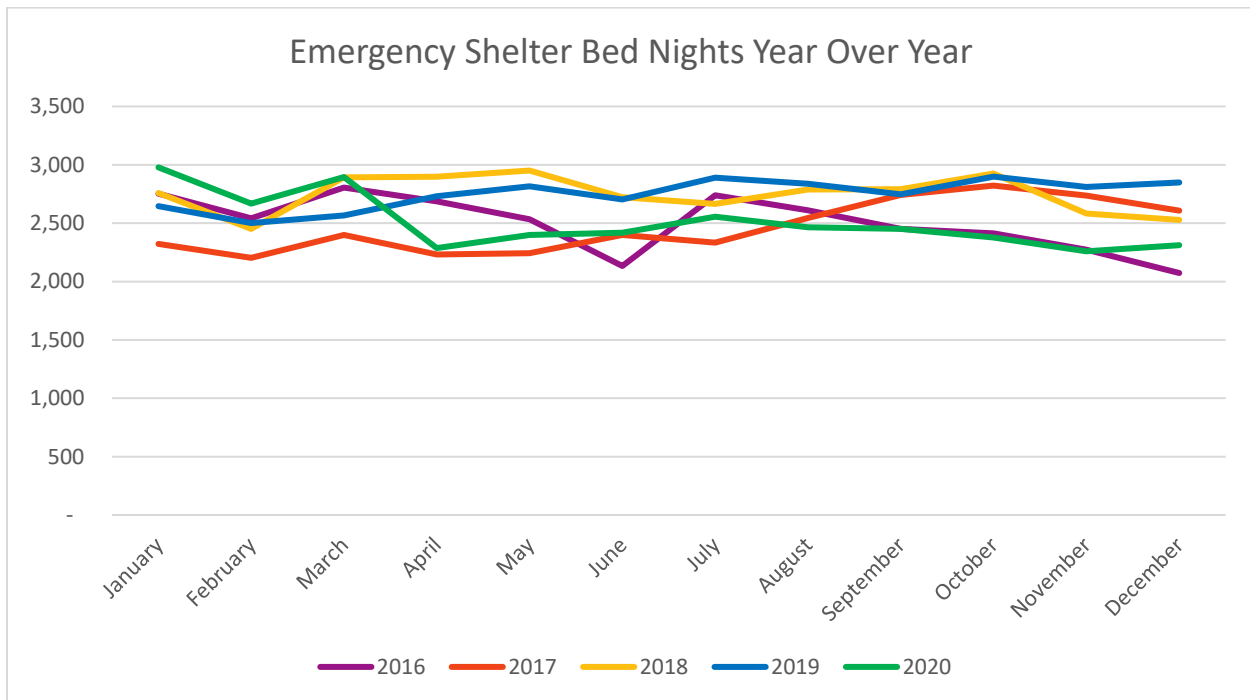
For 2021/22, TBDSSAB received \$1,270,124 in HFG allocations and \$3,542,466 for CHPI, for a combined total of \$4.8 million. Through the HFG funding allocation, the TBDSSAB created a system to house homeless individuals and families with appropriate supports by utilizing a special category on the community housing waitlist called the High Needs Homeless (HNH). The system works by the TBDSSAB Transition Outreach Support Workers (TOSW) attending the emergency shelters to assist the homeless to complete the community housing application as well as completing an initial Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) assessment to determine their support needs.

Once completed, and if determined eligible, the individual or family is placed on the HNH waitlist and a support referral is made to one of the HFG funded support agencies. TBDSSAB has established partnerships with Dilico Anishinabek Family Care and St.

Joseph’s Care Group to deliver support services. The HFG support workers, in partnership with the TOSW, work to stabilize their support needs and work to secure stable housing. Once an individual is established at the top of the HNH waitlist they may receive a unit within the community housing stock, a rent supplement unit or may receive a portable benefit funded through the HFG program. In circumstances where an individual is determined to need more time to adjust to independent living, they will be referred to the Lodge on Dawson, a transitional housing environment that was established through the capital component of the HFG funding.

The HFG program has been tremendously successful. In 2020, the HFG funding supported 176 households. Of this total, 92 individuals received both housing assistance and support services with HFG funding. This has resulted in housing chronic emergency shelter users into transitional or more permanent housing.

Despite the successful implementation of the HFG program, emergency shelter usage has often remained above 100% capacity in the District of Thunder Bay, due to new users accessing the system.



Currently there are 67 individuals on the High Needs Homeless waitlist for HFG supports. With an increase in CHPI/HFG funding, the TBDSSAB will be able to support an additional 45-50 chronically homeless individuals and families, helping to achieve the province’s stated goal of addressing chronic homelessness.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed existing gaps within the homeless and homelessness prevention service system that the TBDSSAB was able to address through the SSRF funding. When this temporary funding ceases, these gaps will again appear as the TBDSSAB cannot continue to address these areas within the regular CHPI allotment.

These gaps include, but are not limited to, funding for a cold weather shelter where individuals who are barred from the emergency shelters have a warm place overnight during the frigid winter months. The elimination of rent arrears has been another area of focus for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and this has allowed individuals to obtain permanent housing and retain their current housing. Funding was also made available for needed repairs to the infrastructure that support homeless individuals. Food, clothing and supports were also provided through the SSRF funding.

The impact of COVID-19 brought to light many of the issues related to 'hidden homelessness', as the supports and resources that were supporting these most vulnerable were no longer accessible. This put greater pressures on the homelessness services funded and administered by TBDSSAB, though the provincial resources provided through SSRF allowed more to be done. Without the continuation of these resources through CHPI, there will again be individuals who are unable to access supports.

Through the SSRF capital funding, more than \$2.9 million was invested in the District of Thunder Bay to address the needs of establishing and maintaining safe shelter for those most in need. Allowing more funding for capital through CHPI would provide for increased transitional capacity – eventually leading to a reduced need operationally for emergency shelters as TBDSSAB addresses more permanent measures for the chronically homeless.

Further, providing additional CHPI funding and allowing capital expenditures permit TBDSSAB to leverage federal funding programs like the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) and create more local transitional/supportive housing solutions. The RHI was initiated this past year, but there was not a significant availability of funds for Service Managers in smaller areas, and without sufficient capital to create capacity in transitional and permanent housing, the homelessness issue will continue.

Without the increased funding received through SSRF and the expanded eligibility that allowed for capital improvements, these projects cannot continue to exist and will create significant gaps to the homelessness service system.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the MMAH combine the HFG and CHPI allocations, increase the combined amount to \$5,440,093 to address the needs identified through the pandemic, and allow for capital projects to be funded through CHPI.



**THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD**

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General

Hon. Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

August, 2021

Brief: The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that a staff level working group is convened to inform and guide a ‘whole of government’ approach regarding homeless individuals released from incarceration, including the development of a supported transitional housing option. As this is primarily a housing and homelessness prevention issue, in our view the group should be led by the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing along with a housing service manager co-chair. Composition of the group should include both housing service manager representatives and those from the ministries of the Attorney General and Health.

Summary

The current discharge process, along with the lack of availability of housing options and community and health services to support successful reintegration to society, is continuing the cycle of homelessness post-incarceration. TBDSSAB requests that a ‘whole of government’ approach, led by the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing along with a housing service manager co-chair, be convened to address this issue.

Background

With both a District Jail and a Correctional facility in the Thunder Bay area that serve the broader region, there are many people who are released from custody into our communities with not enough community resources currently in place to support them. The additional resources that the Ministry has committed to expand skills development and mental health and addiction services while people are incarcerated will greatly assist in reducing the magnitude of homelessness upon release. Some of these new resources are already in place. However, in the short to medium term, additional investments in community resources are needed until the full impact of the investments in the new facilities and programming take effect.

The discharge process, along with the lack of availability of housing options and community and health services to support successful reintegration to society, continues to be problematic and challenging for both former inmates and communities. It is a contributor to the ongoing cycle of chronic homelessness for these individuals. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards as housing service managers are challenged to prevent homelessness among this population under these conditions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue became a major issue in the District of Thunder Bay when individuals released from provincial incarceration were homeless and COVID-19-positive. As these released individuals sought shelter in the community emergency shelter system, the virus was transmitted through the homeless and vulnerable population, resulting in a major outbreak. This in part led to a declaration of emergency by the City of Thunder Bay, as the health and support resources were taxed to the extreme and human resources to address the outbreak were in short supply.

Had there been a supported transitional housing facility to receive these individuals upon release, the impact on the community would have been reduced, and the care and support for the individuals would be improved.

The TBDSSAB requests that the following measures be considered for discussion and implementation:

1. Implement a community re-entry planning process that begins at the time an individual is sentenced with discharge planning commencing well before the inmate's release date.
2. Provide information about employment and housing services and options in the area where the ex-offender wishes to live, including applications for affordable housing and social assistance.
3. Establish specialized program supports that target inmates who are more likely to be homeless upon release and who have a history of homelessness, mental illness, and/or addictions.
4. In situations where homelessness is likely, establish a process by which municipal service managers jointly develop and sign off on the discharge plan.
5. Establish a system where inmates are transferred to pre-release facilities near the offender's intended post-release home, including increased funding for a supported transitional housing facility, more transitional housing beds, hotels or motels. This will allow them to search for housing and work and reintegrate into society.
6. Expand the bail-bed program to allow low-risk and vulnerable individuals to be released back into the community with supervision and supports.
7. That the Ministry of the Solicitor General assess the availability of community supports (e.g. mental health and addictions) for released inmates and identify gaps to the Ministry of Health and other relevant ministries.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing— along with a housing service manager co-chair—convene a working group to address the issue of homelessness upon release from incarceration.