



BOARD REPORT

REPORT No.: 2026-16
MEETING DATE: MAY 21, 2026
SUBJECT: AMO 2026 POSITION PAPERS

RECOMMENDATION

THAT with respect to Report No. 2026-16 (Chief Executive Officer Division) we, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (the Board) receive the 2026 Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Position Papers as presented;

AND THAT we direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to incorporate any edits to the position papers recommended by the Board by consensus into a final delegation package;

AND THAT we direct the 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 the District of Thunder Bay municipal councils for endorsement;

AND THAT the CEO attend the 2026 AMO 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 2026 Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Annual Conference for review and approval.

BACKGROUND

AMO will be holding its 2026 Annual Conference on August 16-19, 2026 in Ottawa. As part of the conference programming, organizations may submit requests to meet with a Minister.

COMMENTS

Position papers have been drafted on four issues that are recommended to the Board for advocacy with provincial representatives.

The proposed advocacy topics include:

- 1) Increasing Housing Stock to Support Indigenous Peoples Experiencing Homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay
- 2) Growing Supportive Housing with Increased Mental Health & Addictions Supports
- 3) COCHI-OPHI Investments for the Future of Housing in the District of Thunder Bay
- 4) Amending Ontario Works' Income and Exemptions Directive

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

This Report aligns with the 2024-2027 strategic plan's Advocacy-related objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS



There are no immediate financial implications related to this report.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the 2026 AMO position papers are presented for review and approval.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

- Attachment #1 Position Paper – Indigenous Housing Stock
 #2 Position Paper – Supportive Housing
 #3 Position Paper – COCHI-OPHI Investments
 #4 Position Paper – OW Income & Exemptions Directive

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THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Increasing Housing Stock to Support Indigenous Peoples Experiencing Homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay

POSITION PAPER

August 2026

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon Greg Rickford, Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation and the Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships

Copy to: Hon Rob. Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation provide dedicated funding through the First Nations Infrastructure Funds program to enable the development of new affordable housing units to support Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.

Summary

The need for new Indigenous affordable housing units in District of Thunder Bay remains urgent, particularly as urban Indigenous populations continue to face disproportionate levels of core housing need, overcrowding, and housing insecurity. While investments have historically focused on on-reserve housing, there is a clear and growing gap in support for Indigenous peoples living in urban centres, particularly in provision of housing options. Expanding culturally appropriate, affordable housing through TBDSSAB in the District of Thunder Bay would directly contribute to responding to this need, and in turn, help to stabilize families, improve health outcomes, and strengthen community well-being. Dedicated funding in this area would allow TBDSSAB to continue our work with Indigenous-led providers to create more affordable housing units accompanied by Indigenous-led supports. These additional units will support the continued provision of culturally appropriate, safe, and affordable housing for Indigenous peoples in the District of Thunder Bay.

Background

Past funding streams have positively impacted the targets TBDSSAB set in our previous 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan by facilitating the preservation of existing community Urban Native Housing units and supporting the creation of new Indigenous-led affordable housing. Future funding allocations will also support the targets defined in our new 10-year plan by driving the creation of new affordable housing stock. As part of the plan, there is a priority consideration for addressing the increasing number of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in the District.

The construction of additional housing units for Indigenous peoples is central to TBDSSAB's new 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan with the goal of providing culturally appropriate supports delivered by our Indigenous partners. In the District of Thunder Bay, a higher portion of residents are Indigenous (16%) compared to all of Canada (5%)¹.

As indicated in the Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy, culturally appropriate housing is necessary for Indigenous people who face heightened discrimination, stigmatization, and higher rates of homelessness². In Canada, 17.5% of Indigenous peoples report living below the poverty line, compared to 9.5% of non-Indigenous people³. This is especially true in the District of Thunder Bay where an increasing number of Indigenous peoples are experiencing homelessness.

As a result, the need for more affordable housing for Indigenous people is increasing, as demonstrated by data that reflects current realities:

- On the TBDSSAB housing Waitlist 36.6% (457) of applicants self-reported their housing status as homeless, which is a 5.8% increase over the last two years. Additionally, 74 individuals are under High Needs Homeless (HNN) status, which prioritizes people experiencing chronic homelessness⁴.

1 Statistics Canada (2021). Census of Population. Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population

2 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2023. CMHC.ca/IndigenousHousingStrategy.

3 Statistics Canada. (2024). Canadian Income Survey, 2022. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240426/dq240426a-eng.htm>

4 As of February 2026.

- In the District of Thunder Bay's homelessness By-Name List (BNL) 1129 individuals are actively homeless⁵, and 58% (660) self-reported as Indigenous⁶. This is double when compared to general statistics across Canada, whereby consistently since 2015 about 30% of individuals who have used shelters across Canada were Indigenous^{7,8}.

Past research also supports the noticeable overrepresentation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. In a 2022 Homelessness Migration Study by TBDSSAB and faculty staff from Lakehead University, the research project focused on understanding the disproportional increase. Of those who participated in the study, 86% were Indigenous, and 57% of participants migrated directly from a First Nation community in Northern Ontario.

One of the findings showed that a high number of individuals who were experiencing homelessness in the city of Thunder Bay moved from First Nation communities⁹. The findings also highlighted common factors that drove migration into the city. These include social factors (friends, family, sense of community) and service factors (health care, housing, social services). For instance, a frequent theme that came up from the 'service factor' was respondents, who self-identified as Indigenous, migrated to the City of Thunder Bay to receive necessary supports that are not available in their communities. Upon arrival, respondents ended up staying in an emergency shelter space as they had no other options.

Other findings showed that 46% of Indigenous respondents did not have access to permanent housing in their community, and 32% do not have access to safe housing. This takeaway further highlights the importance of providing Indigenous housing

⁵ BNL numbers are reported as of the end of 2025. It is not entirely accurate as reporting switched from excel sheets to the new Homelessness Service System Data tool (HSSDT) in September 2025.

⁶ TBDSSAB expects that this number is underreported as a result of optional self-identification.

⁷ Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2023 Update (2023). Stats Can. [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2023 Update](#)

⁸ Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada (2025). Everyone Counts 2024: Highlights Report Part 2- Survey of People Experiencing Homelessness. [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Everyone Counts 2024 Highlights Report Part 2 – Survey of people experiencing homelessness](#)

⁹ R. Gokani., K. Lovato-Day, R. Liyanage, V. Mago, A. Park, T. Hay, R. Schiff, K. Ranta, & S. Cummings. (2022) Why Are So Many People Who Experience Homelessness in the City of Thunder Bay from Out of Town or Province? A Report on a Preliminary Mixed Methods Study Using Machine Learning Models to Understand Migration and Homelessness. Lakehead University, Thunder Bay.

solutions in the District that are designed and managed by Indigenous-led entities to provide safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing options.

Through initiatives under the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), and other programs such as Homes for Good (HFG) and COCHI/OPHI funding, TBDSSAB supports and partners with many Indigenous organizations to provide housing and supports to Indigenous individuals. The importance and benefits of funding allocated through these programs are evident in the following examples:

- HFG has been central to funding 30 transitional housing spaces and providing appropriate social supports to facilitate successful transitions into stable permanent housing. Since its inception, the HFG Program has supported a total of 677 individuals, 419 of which have been housed. In the program, 157 Indigenous people have been supported, and of that 75% (117) have been housed. Currently, HFG supports 177 clients, 28.6% (50) of which are Indigenous.
- Funding allocated towards preserving Urban Native Housing (UNH) units assists The Native People of Thunder Bay Development Corporation and the Geraldton Native Housing Corporation to meet their housing needs by providing subsidized housing units, as well as supportive and transitional housing for Indigenous peoples. Through these organizations, TBDSSAB supports over 270 existing legacy UNH housing units, yet there are still long waitlists for access to this housing.

TBDSSAB has worked with our local Indigenous housing partners for many years, including Dilico Anishinabek Family Care, Matawa First Nations, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, and Beendigen as they play a vital role in supporting individuals and families on their journey toward stable, safe, and culturally appropriate housing. Through their deep community connections and holistic approaches, these organizations provide not only shelter but also wraparound supports that address mental health, addictions, family wellbeing, and cultural reconnection. TBDSSAB is committed to continuing these relationships to collaboratively reach success for our community.

Without adequate funding that provides appropriate resources for supportive and affordable housing, Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness have a much lower likelihood of moving along the housing continuum. Dedicated program funding would enable TBDSSAB to develop new affordable housing units that help provide

shelter and culturally-appropriate supports to Indigenous Individuals who are currently on the housing waitlists.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs provides funding through the First Nations Infrastructure Funds program in the amount of \$6,750,000 that would focus on supporting the development of a minimum of 20 new units to house Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Growing Supportive Housing with Increased Mental Health & Addictions Supports

POSITION PAPER

August 2026

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

Hon Rob. Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provide designated funding for the District of Thunder Bay to support the construction of 40 new supportive housing units and the necessary addictions and mental health supports.

Summary

The TBDSSAB acknowledges and appreciates the government of Ontario's commitment to a multi-ministry approach to addressing homelessness and creating permanent and independent housing solutions. However, additional resources are necessary to adequately provide mental health and addictions support for the number of individuals who are unable to live independently. As is widely known, people experiencing homelessness are plagued with higher rates of mental health and addictions issues. Currently, the limited treatment resources required to address these issues in the District of Thunder Bay further create barriers to individuals who are on the path towards long-term employment and housing. Therefore, an increase in available supportive housing units in the District, with resources from mental health and addictions agencies, would provide more housing options for people who require support for their complex needs and keep them housed long-term.

Background

For those experiencing mental health and addiction issues, various resources are required to ensure successful tenancies, prevent evictions, and end the cycle of

homelessness. For example, in Ontario, 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 (HFG) initiative launched by the province provided committed funding to help Service Managers house homeless individuals while connecting them to appropriate resources to support successful transitions into stable housing.

Since 2016, TBDSSAB has supported the construction of various transitional and long-term supportive housing projects in the District of Thunder Bay. This support has been funneled through several provincial funding envelopes including HFG, Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), Homelessness Prevention Program, and Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative. And in many cases, TBDSSAB has utilized our own reserve funds to support developments.

TBDSSAB has funded the development of 309 transitional and long-term supportive housing units over the past several years. While we have been able to support many individuals that resulted in positive outcomes, local service gaps continue to persist, as demonstrated by the findings below:

- Thunder Bay remains the highest per-capita opioid mortality rate in Ontario, with 80 opioid overdose deaths in 2024¹. Opioid-related deaths occur at a rate of almost five times (69 per 100,000) compared to the province (14 per 100,000). In addition, opioid-related emergency department visits² occur at a rate of two and a half times more (123 per 100,000) compared to the province (46 per 100,000)³.
- The rate of homelessness in the District continues to increase. On the TBDSSAB housing waitlist in February 2026, 74 applicants' status are reported as High Needs Homeless⁴. In addition, 36.6% of applicants on the waitlist self-reported their housing status as homeless, a 6% increase in the last two years.
- In the District of Thunder Bay's homelessness By-Name List (BNL) 1129 individuals are actively homeless, and 58% (660) self-reported as Indigenous⁵.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness are more at risk of substance use and mental health issues. Based on the 2024 Thunder Bay Point in Time Count

¹ Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) (2024). [Opioid Toxicity Deaths in Ontario](#).

² Not all opioid overdoses result in emergency department visits; therefore, this data is an underrepresentation of the full picture opioids have on the community.

³ The Thunder Bay District Health Unit (2024) Opioid Information System. <https://www.tbdhu.com/opioidinfo>

⁴ High Needs Homeless prioritizes people experiencing chronic homelessness on the TBDSSAB housing waitlist.

⁵ BNL numbers are reported as of the end of 2025.

that surveyed homeless individuals in the city, 80% of individuals experience substance use, and 61% report living with mental health issues⁶. In addition, 63% of people reported visiting the emergency department in the last year.

Supportive housing solutions would address the gap for individuals living with mental health and/or addiction issues to find stable housing, while also receiving supports that require complex treatment solutions.

In addition, an increase to the current transitional and supportive housing stock is central to TBDSSAB's new 10-Year Housing and Homelessness plan. Based on recommendations received from OrgCode Consulting, who assessed the homelessness service system in the District; transitional and supportive housing is necessary to address the cycle of homelessness and addictions. OrgCode's recommendations includes a housing projection of an additional 475 transitional and supportive units by 2030, 280 of which should be added by 2027. While the TBDSSAB has continued to add to its supportive housing stock, the projections highlight an increasing need for housing with the required supports available.

To address this need, TBDSSAB plans to work with agencies, such as NorWest Community Health Centres who leads the Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub, to coordinate opportunities for expanded supportive housing solutions. In the District of Thunder Bay, the previous Consumption and Treatment Services Site (Path 525) was transitioned into a HART hub. Currently, the 'hub' provides primary care, employment supports, and mental health and addictions supports. With increased funding, the TBDSSAB and HART Hub could provide housing solutions that address the gaps in care that have been prevalent in the system.

The outcome (for the District) of providing additional funding in the requested area would help improve homelessness prevention supports, provide safe and stable housing spaces, and promote the well-being of residents recovering from/experiencing substance use and living with mental health issues. Without appropriate supports and adequate funding for supportive housing, people plagued with these issues have a much lower likelihood of moving along the housing

⁶ Lakehead Social Planning Council, Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Lakehead University, and Thunder Bay District Health Unit (2024) <https://infograph.venngage.com/pl/jWe8WLXZHI?flipBook=1>

continuum and could end up relapsing, thereby exacerbating the level of homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provide designated funding in the amount of \$4,000,000 for the District of Thunder Bay to support the construction of 40 new supportive housing units and the necessary addictions and mental health supports.



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

COCHI-OPHI

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

POSITION PAPER

August 2026

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon Rob. Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) provide additional funding through the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI), and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) to support the development of new affordable housing units in the District of Thunder Bay.

Summary

COCHI and OPHI provide critical funding for TBDSSAB's effective support of the Community Housing sector. This funding is used to support capital projects, the crucial repairs and maintenance of aging housing stocks, and rent supplements for Urban Native housing in the District of Thunder Bay. Affordable housing solutions are critical to providing easier access to housing in the District, while ensuring long-term tenancies contribute to the mitigation of ongoing cycles of homelessness. That said, the request for additional COCHI/OPHI funding to increase the stock of affordable housing units would help address growing constraints that are increasingly visible due to the increased cost of living.

Background

On April 30, 2018, Ontario and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation signed a Bilateral Agreement regarding the National Housing Strategy (NHS). This

agreement provided an opportunity to align federal funds with Ontario's Community Housing Renewal Strategy priorities.

Currently, there are three key initiatives under the NHS that are delivered by Ontario: Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI), Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) and the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB). Both COCHI and OPHI provide critical funding for TBDSSAB's effective planning for the provision of community housing, which includes allocations towards capital projects, repairs and maintenance, housing supplements, and homelessness prevention in the District.

Since their inception, these funding streams have become critical to TBDSSAB's effective provision of Community Housing. Over the past five years, COCHI funding has been central to the repair of over 2,900 housing units, along with supporting maintenance of over 270 existing legacy housing units built under the Urban Native Housing Program.

TBDSSAB has also supported a total of 237 affordable housing units. Most recently, in 2025, COCHI funding was used to help build a 14-unit affordable housing project that will support individuals living with disabilities, individuals living with mental illness or addictions, and those experiencing homelessness in the District. These projects are evidence of successful affordable housing initiatives that provide safe, affordable, and sustainable housing solutions for those who need it most.

COCHI and OPHI funding streams will also significantly impact the goals laid out in the TBDSSAB's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan by supporting the preservation of existing community housing units and the creation of new affordable housing. In the 10-Year Plan, TBDSSAB has an expansion target for the 2025-26 fiscal year of 30 new units. This target is in line with the goal of developing rent-assisted units in the District to support Ontario's overall NHS commitment¹. The purpose of these intersecting targets is to expand the rent-assisted housing stock. COCHI-OPHI investments have been and continue to be imperative to reaching these combined goals.

¹ Units that are eligible to be counted toward the 30-unit target include COCHI and OPHI rent assisted units, such as expired Urban Native Housing units, new units created through investment of HPP, OPHI, and COCHI funding, Municipal investments in new rent supplement or rent supported units.

While strides have been made to grow the current affordable housing stock, the continued need to develop additional affordable housing units is demonstrated in the following data that reflects current realities:

- **Rental Rates:** The demand for affordable housing units continues to grow with the increasing cost of rent, making it even more difficult for low-to-moderate income households to secure affordable housing. From 2022-2025 average rent costs² rose 22% for a one-bedroom unit and 27% for a two-bedroom unit³. As of October 2025, the average cost of a one-bedroom unit in Thunder Bay is \$1,173, and two-bedroom is \$1,495.
- **Community Housing Waitlist:** As of February 2026, the TBDSSAB housing waitlist sits at 1,243 applicants. Majority of demand is for one-bedroom units, which has increased from 71.4% in 2025 to 77.4% in 2026.
- **Rising Homelessness Numbers:** The rate of homelessness in the District continues to increase. On the TBDSSAB housing waitlist, 74 applicants are under High Needs Homeless⁴ status⁵. In addition, 36.6% of applicants on the waitlist self-reported their housing status as homeless, a 6% increase from the last two years. In the District of Thunder Bay's homelessness By-Name List (BNL) 1129 individuals are actively homeless, and 58% (660) self-reported as Indigenous⁶.

Given these stark realities, the creation of new affordable housing for the District would provide further stability for the community as the cost of living and demand for affordable housing increases. With limited funding, coupled with an average cost of \$450,000 to build a single new unit, the current funding constrains TBDSSAB from reaching its yearly housing targets.

Therefore, the TBDSSAB requests that the MMAH provide additional funding to enable us to support the continued development of affordable housing stock in the District of Thunder Bay.

² Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. **Ontario** — Rental Market Statistics Summary by Metropolitan Areas, Census Agglomerations and Cities.

³ Average cost of a one-bedroom in 2022 was \$964, and two-bedroom was \$1,174.

⁴ High Needs Homeless prioritizes people experiencing chronic homelessness on the TBDSSAB housing waitlist.

⁵ As of February 2026.

⁶ BNL numbers are reported as of the end of 2025.



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Amending Ontario Works' Income and Exemptions Directive

POSITION PAPER

August 2026

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference

Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

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 Children, Community, and Social Services (MCCSS) review and amend the Ontario Works policy directive section 5.1 regarding the earning exemption structure and introduce a \$1,000 per month exemption for Ontario Works (OW) recipients who are employed.

Summary

The current Ontario Works directive 5.1 related to the earning exemption structure is discouraging to sustaining long-term employment and reducing poverty. For some individuals finding and retaining employment, the current earnings exemption disincentivizes them to pursue work due to current deductions. Changing the structure to a flat \$1,000 per month earning exemptions for OW recipients would adopt similar elements within the ODSP earnings exemption model. Against the background of the rising cost of living, the current earnings exemption cuts deeply for OW recipients. Amendment of this directive would drive individuals to build employment experience without facing a steep deduction in their benefits. In turn, recipients would be able to build and maintain financial stability while working on exiting to permanent employment.

Background

Earning exemptions allow Ontario Works (OW) recipients to participate in employment opportunities while maintaining social assistance benefits. However,

these earnings are subject to certain conditions and exemptions. The previous earning exemptions introduced in June 2005 reduced OW client net income by 50% once employed. This was changed in October 2013, where after three consecutive months of assistance, recipients can earn \$200 per month from their employer without deductions, and any additional income is subject to a 50% reduction in their assistance amount. This policy remains the current earning exemption structure, which deters recipients from pursuing employment due to the high wage deduction.

In comparison, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) previously had a similar structure to the current OW earnings exemptions. Starting in September 2013, ODSP recipients could also earn up to \$200 per month without deduction, and a 50% reduction for any income above that. In February 2023, this changed to promote employment and reduce the cycle of poverty for people with disabilities. Under the new directive, the full exemption was increased from \$200 to \$1,000 for a person living with a disability. The exemption rate was also changed from 50% reduction to 25% reduction¹. Therefore, a person with disabilities on ODSP can earn up to \$1000 a month through their employment without it affecting their income support, benefits, or eligibility.

For example, a breakdown of monthly earnings in 2026 for OW and ODSP are shown in Tables 1 and 2 (below). An OW recipient with basic needs and shelter can earn a maximum of \$733 per month on OW. If they earn \$600 net from their employment per month, \$200 is exempt, leaving \$400 to be deducted by 50%. Therefore, \$200 total is deducted from their benefits, which leaves them with \$1,133 per month. In contrast, a client on ODSP with basic needs and shelter can earn a maximum of \$1,408. If they earn \$600 a month from their employment, based on the current exemptions, nothing would be deducted. Therefore, they are left with \$2,008 per month. In a year the total income of the person on OW making \$600 per month would amount to \$13,596, while the person on ODSP would amount to \$24,096. As of 2023, the low-income measure sits at \$30,255 per year², meaning the OW client's yearly income is \$16,659 below the measure.

¹ The earning exemptions for non-disabled adults remains the same.

² The low-income measure is defined as income below 50% of the median adjusted household income in Canada.

Table 1: Single Person Earnings OW (Monthly)

OW Earnings	\$733
Net Employment Earnings	\$600
Flat Exemption from Earnings	\$200
50% of Earnings Deducted	\$200
Total Earnings Per Month	\$1,133

Table 2: Single Person Earnings ODSP (Monthly)

ODSP Earnings	\$1,408
Net Employment Earnings	\$600
Flat Exemption from Earnings	\$1,000
50% of Earnings Deducted	0
Total Earnings Per Month	\$2,008

In 2025, the average OW caseload for TBDSSAB was 2,459 recipients. Of that, 175 (7%) individuals were employed. This represents a 4% decrease in employed recipients since 2018³. Under ODSP, in 2025 the average caseload was 5,959, with 11% (677) employed. With a \$1,000 earning exemption, individuals on ODSP have more incentive to work more hours at a higher earnings rate.

Given the current economic situation, there continues to be an increasing gap between OW rates and the cost of living. OW rates have not seen an increase since 2018, and as a result, OW recipients are living well below the low-income measure line, with little prospects of moving beyond it. One major factor behind this constraint is the cost of living, which has significantly grown in Canada since the last increase. The Canadian Consumer Price Index (CPI)⁴ indicates a 19.9% increase in goods and

³ 317 recipients were employed in 2018.

⁴ The CPI measures inflation by tracking the changing cost of things such as food, shelter, transportation, clothing, etc.

services in the last five years⁵. In terms of housing, in the City of Thunder Bay the average rent for one bedroom in 2018 was \$831. In 2025, the average rent for one bedroom was \$1,173⁶. This represents a 41% increase in rent over seven years.

With the increased cost of rent and a higher cost of living, coupled with the unchanged OW rates, the Income and exemptions directive increases the burden on recipients as they strive to afford necessities and rent. The domino effect is seen in the reduction of the number of employed OW recipients. Many recipients may feel that it is not worth seeking enhanced employment as the benefits they receive are reduced. The impact noticed by front-line staff is that it creates more barriers in retaining employment and earnings income. For example, the lack of transportation, limited childcare, and availability of training opportunities in the District create additional costs and barriers for recipients who attempt to access employment. With a 50% reduction in net income after the \$200 exemption, this leaves little incentive for OW recipients to pursue employment.

If the OW earnings exemption structure mirrored the ODSP structure, TBDSSAB believes recipients would have more incentives to finding and retaining long-term employment. A flat exemption allows OW recipients to build employment experience without fear of steep reduction in benefits. In turn, this would benefit the employment numbers in the District as more recipients would be in a better position to successfully transition out of social assistance and into full-time employment. The net result of the increased earnings exemption would have no negative impact on current OW benefits cost and may result in reductions in OW recipients in the long run.

Therefore, the TBDSSAB requests that the MCCSS review and amend the Ontario Works (OW) policy directive 5.1 regarding the earning exemption structure and introduce a \$1000 per month exemption for OW recipients to increase incentive for seeking and sustaining employment.

⁵ Statistics Canada. Consumer Price Index: Annual Review, 2025.

⁶ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. **Ontario** — Rental Market Statistics Summary by Metropolitan Areas, Census Agglomerations and Cities.