



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

# Growing Supportive Housing with Increased Mental Health & Addictions Supports

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## POSITION PAPER

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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 2024<sup>1</sup>. 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 visits<sup>2</sup> occur at a rate of two and a half times more (123 per 100,000) compared to the province (46 per 100,000)<sup>3</sup>. The District of Thunder Bay also has higher rates of opioid related hospitalizations (31.4 per 100,000) compared to Ontario (12.6 per 100,000)<sup>2,3</sup>.
- As a result of these high rates, opioid-related healthcare costs have continued to increase, placing further pressure on hospitals. From 2015-2020, emergency department visit costs have increased from \$6.49 million to \$11.39 million<sup>4</sup>.
- Similarly, policing costs related to substance use of opioids have increased from \$237.54 million in 2015 to \$252.20 million in 2020<sup>4</sup>.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms (CSUCH). (2026). CSUCH Visualization Tool. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research. [CSUCH - Explore the Data](#)

- 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 Homeless<sup>5</sup>. 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 Indigenous<sup>6</sup>.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness are more at risk of substance use and mental health issues. Based on the 2024 Thunder Bay Point in Time Count that surveyed homeless individuals in the city, 80% of individuals experience substance use, and 61% report living with mental health issues<sup>7</sup>. 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. The value of the supports provided and received in a supportive housing environment would be seen in a reduction to emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and police intervention<sup>8</sup>.

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'

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<sup>5</sup> High Needs Homeless prioritizes people experiencing chronic homelessness on the TBDSSAB housing waitlist.

<sup>6</sup> BNL numbers are reported as of the end of 2025.

<sup>7</sup> 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>

<sup>8</sup> Ganesan, K., Matte, A., Williams, AR., Wilkie J., Chan., C., O'Connor, K. (2025). Unlocking Solutions: Understanding and Addressing Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Supportive Housing Needs. AMHO.

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 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.