

BRIEFING NOTE HS07-22

For Information or For Approval

Date: February 23, 2022

Purpose: Northern Policy Institute's Report on Homelessness

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Alignment with Strategic Plan: Healthy, Sustainable Communities

Maximize Impact Remove Barriers Seamless Access Learn & Grow

Report HS07-22 provides details of the Northern Policy Institute's paper entitled "Solving the Homelessness, Addiction and Mental Health Crisis in the North", for information purposes.

BACKGROUND:

- In January 2022, the Northern Policy Institute released a paper in response to growing concerns with homelessness, addiction, and mental health in Northern Ontario.
- The trends highlighted in the paper are particularly concerning as they relate specifically to homelessness, addiction, and mental health in North Bay and Nipissing District:
 - Sault Ste. Marie and the Districts of Kenora, Nipissing, and Cochrane have higher homeless populations per capita than the five largest municipalities in Ontario.
 - Between 2016 and 2020, opioid-related Emergency Department visits increased by 616% in the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit region. This is the second-largest increase in Northern Ontario.
 - Opioid-related deaths in 2020 compared to 2019 increased by 168% in the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit region. This is the second-largest increase in Northern Ontario.
 - 64% of homeless individuals in the Nipissing District suffer from mental health issues while 69% suffer from addiction issues.

CURRENT STATUS/STEPS TAKEN TO DATE:

A total of eight strategies were identified for governments to improve the homelessness, addiction, and mental health crisis in Northern Ontario. The strategies are as follows:

1. Provide long-term funding for capital repairs on community-housing units
2. Amend the *Health Protection and Promotion Act, 1990* to define a 'Northern Service Hub' and provide additional funding to these hubs
3. Establish a joint taskforce to collect data and intelligence on the underlying and systematic retention issues of healthcare professionals in Northern Ontario
4. Support new and existing 'Housing First' programs
5. Support new and existing Indigenous culturally sensitive community-housing facilities
6. Establish a 'Northern Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence' to address the unique challenges of service and program delivery in Northern Ontario
7. Contract a third-party operator for interfacility patient transfers to relieve the workload of paramedics
8. Establish mandated Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams (MCIT) in municipalities throughout Northern Ontario

RESOURCES REQUIRED:

The paper acknowledges the funding pressures placed on municipal governments to solve homelessness, addiction, and mental health issues. As such, the paper seeks a collaborative approach that involves federal, provincial, and municipal governments to solve the issues.

RISK IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION:

Local data and information, including the information contained in the paper, illustrate concerning trends in homelessness, addiction, and mental health across Northern Ontario. The eight strategies identified in the paper along with a collaborative approach are being proposed to solve these issues.

CONCLUSION:

The data contained in the paper illustrates the current homelessness, addiction, and mental health crisis in Northern Ontario. The data trends indicate that the current efforts made by governments are not keeping up with the growing vulnerable population, and that further investments are needed to address the crisis.

The strategies identified in the paper are evidence-based solutions for homelessness, addiction, and mental health. Action, therefore, should be made by all levels of government to implement the strategies and assist Northern Ontario communities.