

For Immediate Release

Is there additional capacity to address Northern Ontario's homelessness, mental health, and addictions crisis?

August 10, 2022 – Northern Ontario communities are experiencing a homelessness, addiction, and mental health crisis. In Northern Policy Institute's latest paper, *More than Just a Number: Addressing the Homelessness, Addiction, and Mental Health Crisis in the North*, author Holly Parsons explores current realities and eight policy strategies to help move Northern Ontario communities forward.

The paper was completed in partnership with the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, and the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association.

The most recent data on homelessness from 2021 shows that Sault Ste. Marie and the districts of Kenora, Nipissing, and Cochrane have larger homeless populations than some of Ontario's largest municipalities per 1,000 people. In addition, opioid-related emergency department visits and deaths have risen considerably in recent years. Furthermore, save for North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, the percentage of Northern Ontarians who perceived their mental health as 'very good or excellent' is below the provincial average.

The paper further shows that municipalities are constrained in their budgets to spend additional dollars on homelessness, mental health and addictions.

With these figures in mind, it is clear current services and programs are likely not meeting the needs of those in Northern Ontario communities. This paper identifies eight evidence-driven and economically viable strategies decision-makers can take to address these barriers and service gaps, both directly and indirectly:

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 make it available in communities;
3. Establish a joint action taskforce to collect data and intelligence on the underlying and systematic retention issues of health care professionals in Northern Ontario;
4. Support new and existing Housing First programs;
5. Support new and existing culturally sensitive community housing facilities for Indigenous peoples;
6. Establish a Northern Mental Health and Addictions Centre 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; and
8. Establish mandated mobile crisis intervention teams (MCIT) in municipalities throughout Northern Ontario.

“Homelessness, addiction and mental health issues in Northern Ontario are extremely complex and difficult to solve, in part, because they are largely interconnected,” states Parsons. “As such, coordinated policy initiatives, and action from various actors, is a must.”

This work was made possible through NPI's Northern Analyst Collective program.

Want to learn more? Read the full report here: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/more-than-just-a-number>

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Media Interviews: Author Holly Parsons, FONOM President Danny Whalen, NOMA President Wendy Landry, and NOSDA Chair Michelle Boileau are available for comment.

To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About the Author:

Originally from Calgary, Alberta, **Holly Parsons** moved to Australia and graduated with a B.A. in Politics & Policy Studies and International Relations from Deakin University in Melbourne. Holly gained experience in research, policy analysis, and advocacy while working at grassroots NGOs in Australia and Indonesia. Now, back in Canada, Holly is enjoying her experience in Sudbury as a Policy Analyst. On the weekends, you can find Holly hiking, camping, kayaking, and exploring the majestic Canadian Shield. Holly loves to travel, ski, read books, cook vegan recipes, and be outdoors.

About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our permanent offices are in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Kirkland Lake. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

About the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM):

The **Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities** (FONOM) is the unified voice of Northeastern Ontario, representing and advocating on behalf of 110 cities, towns and

municipalities. Our mission is to improve the economic and social quality of life for all northerners and to ensure the future of our youth.

FONOM is a membership-based association that draws its members from northeastern Ontario and the districts of Algoma, Cochrane, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Sudbury and Timiskaming.

About the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA):

The **Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association** (NOMA) was organized in 1946, incorporated on September 18th 2001, and is made up of four components: the Kenora District Municipal Association, the Rainy River District Municipal Association, the Thunder Bay District Municipal League and the City of Thunder Bay. Other than the City of Thunder Bay, membership is attained by being a member of the district organization. The area we represent extends from the City of Kenora in the west to the Town of Hearst in the east.

The objects of the Association are to consider matters of general interest to the municipalities and to procure enactment of such legislation that may be of advantage to the municipalities in Northwestern Ontario and to take united action on all matters where the rights of the municipalities may be affected to advance the standards of municipal government through education and discussion and generally to promote their interests.

About the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA):

The **Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association** or NOSDA was formed to develop a co-operative and collaborative approach with municipalities and municipal organizations, to facilitate the consolidated municipal delivery of services in Northern Ontario. NOSDA is intended to create a political forum for reviewing and developing both policies and program delivery issues from a Northern perspective.

About the Northern Analyst Collective:

The Northern Analyst Collective is a membership group of organizations, municipalities, charities, chambers, and more. By merging our collective resources, we can ensure that the smallest municipality or local charity can access high-end skills. The expert's salary and benefits are covered in part by NPI/IPN and our sponsors, and in part through the membership fees paid by participating organizations. The end result is members are able to secure the skills they need when needed.