

For Immediate Release

Northern Policy Institute releases briefing note on Northern Ontario's Health Policy Agenda

February 25, 2015, Thunder Bay, ON – A new briefing note released by Northern Policy Institute identifies expanded use of primary health care models as the best way to address shortages of primary care options in the region. The briefing note, prepared by Patrick Timony, Kelly D. Coons, and Mallorie Leduc of the School of Rural and Northern Health at Laurentian University, addresses the top priorities of Northern Ontario's health policy agenda over the next three to five years.

“Northern Ontario is home to a large portion of First Nations, Francophone, and rural populations, all of which represent regionally unique challenges for addressing proper access to health care than the rest of the province,” the paper reads.

The briefing note focuses on mental health care, care for the elderly, and primary health care models. Some of the recommendations explored by the authors include:

- Training non-medical personnel to identify and refer individuals experiencing mental health issues to improve service utilization.
- An increase in access to community-based mental health services will provide better care for people in Northern Ontario.
- A shift towards home and community-based care for the aging population is warranted.
- Options need to be available for patients to receive high quality care, in a timely manner, and within the comforts of home.
- Primary health care models should be tailored to respond to the health needs, resource limitations, and degree of rurality of each community.
- Models may range from team-based practices in more densely populated areas, to hub-and-spoke, and telemedicine models in rural communities.

The authors argue that the prioritization strategies that they outline address physician shortages, an aging population, and a lack of mental health support in Northern Ontario.

“Reimagining the way health care professionals work collaboratively in the north is a wide-ranging goal,” the paper states. “The approach includes strategic training and recruitment of providers to work in underserved areas with increased integration and an expanded scope of practice, [. . .] By encouraging collaboration between health care professionals, gaps in the system can be overcome.”

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To read the full briefing note on setting priorities for Northern Ontario's health policy agenda, visit www.northernpolicy.ca.

Media Interviews: Northern Policy Institute President and CEO, Charles Cirtwill, is available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our Operations are located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.

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