

For Immediate Release

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

June 23, 2015, Thunder Bay, ON – A new briefing note released by Northern Policy Institute identifies access to culturally appropriate health care services as the top health policy priority for the people of Northern Ontario. The briefing note, **Northern Ontario Health Care Priorities: Access to Culturally Appropriate Care for Physical and Mental Health**, prepared by Areej Al-Hamad and Laurel O’Gorman 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.

According to Al-Hamad and O’Gorman, the current health care strategy of the province is a patient-centred approach focussing on improving individual’s health behaviours, improving access to family health care, and providing Ontarians with the ‘right care, at the right time, in the right place.’

“These issues are still relevant in the North, however; the strategies to provide the right care for people at the right time and place will be different in northern and rural areas of the province than in the densely populated southern regions,” Al-Hamad and O’Gorman write.

The briefing note focuses on access to health care, culturally appropriate health services, and mental health challenges in the North. Some of the recommendations explored by the authors include:

- Access to culturally sensitive care for physical and mental health is required.
- Telemedicine should be viewed as one option to provide the right care, at the right time, in the right place, but not as the only way for northern residents to access care from health professionals.
- Support the development and implementation of Aboriginal people’s health strategies of community-specific healing strategies.
- Implement a collaborative group approach within mental health care in Northern Ontario.

The authors conclude that access to care and access to culturally sensitive care are the top priorities for the people living in Northern Ontario.

“In order to provide access to specialist services at the right time and place, alternatives to traditional doctor patient visits are required, such as the use of virtual health care services,” the report states. “As such, access can be seen as an umbrella issue that will cover inter-professional teams working together to provide culturally competent services (right care), when it is needed (right time), and without having to travel, when possible (right place).”

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This is the second briefing note in a three part series examining health care priorities in Northern Ontario. The first briefing note, **Setting Priorities for Northern Ontario's Health Policy Agenda**, was published on March 5, 2015. To read the full briefing notes 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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