

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

Prepared by Dr. Carol Zimbalatti
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

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myhealthunit.ca

📍 345 Oak Street West,
North Bay, ON P1B 2T2

☎ 1-800-563-2808
705-474-1400

📠 705-474-8252

📍 90 Bowes Street, Suite 201,
Parry Sound, ON P2A 2L7

☎ 1-800-563-2808
705-746-5801

📠 705-746-2711

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Medical Officer of Health Update

Strengthening Public Health

In August 2023, the Ministry of Health unveiled its *Strengthening Public Health* plan, which sought to realign three areas of public health administration: voluntary mergers of public health units (PHUs), review of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), and review of the provincial funding approach. While this plan was being developed, PHUs that were not merging were promised 1% funding increases in 2024, 2025, and 2026.

Voluntary mergers were established for January 2025, with 34 PHUs consolidating into 29. Although this change is less extensive than the Ministry of Health had anticipated, PHUs are not being asked to explore additional mergers.

The review of the OPHS took place largely throughout 2024. A draft of the revised OPHS was shared for PHUs feedback in May/June 2024. While the updated OPHS have not yet been unveiled, early indications suggest the new OPHS will not contain changes that right-size expectations to budget allocations.

The outcome of the funding approach review was expected to be implemented beginning in January 2026. PHUs have not received any information on changes to the funding approach and are therefore planning based on the promised 1% increase for 2026.

Over the past decade, 2018 was the only year the Health Unit received a provincial increase greater than 1% (excluding programs currently receiving 100% provincial funding and one-time funding), while inflation has averaged closer to 3%. This whittling of the budget is now causing tangible impacts on operations, and total cost projections for 2026 remain uncertain as collective bargaining is underway.

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (NBPSDHU) has begun its 2026 budget planning with the expectation that operational cost will increase far more than 1%. Managers are being directed to identify significant savings within their programs and are encouraged to think creatively about how to continue meeting population needs within our mandate.

It will be important to manage both internal and external expectations with respect to the level and scope of services the Health Unit can continue to provide in this difficult fiscal environment. At the same time, this adversity is stimulating innovation and helping clarify our priorities.

Our guiding lights when deciding upon changes to services are our accountabilities under the OPHS, our [Strategic Plan](#), and our organizational values of Accountability, Adaptability, Collaboration, Equity and Empathy.

Figure 1. Annual increases in provincial contributions to the NBPSDHU budget compared to annual increases in the Ontario Consumer Price Index (CPI)¹

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total [§]
Provincial cost-shared mandatory programs	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	6.1%
Inflation	2.3%	1.8%	1.5%	2.1%	1.1%	5.7%	5.6%	2.7%	1.7%	2.4% ^ε	29%

* Includes base funding and mitigation funding, but not lines currently 100% funded provincially (e.g. Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program) or one-time funding (e.g. COVID)

§ compounded

ε partial year: January 2025 to July 2025

¹ Statistics Canada. [Table 18-10-0004-02 Consumer Price Index by geography, all-items, monthly, percentage change, not seasonally adjusted, Canada, provinces, Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit](#)

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Facilities Operations

North Bay

- Exterior wood features (fence, pergola, and wood benches) were stained.
- Graffiti removed from multiple areas in the parking lot and entrance walkway.
- Exterior windows cleaned.
- Air conditioning repairs completed for both the office and server room units.

Information Technology

- Continuing mobile phone refresh to replace select end-of-life devices.
- Planning and preparation underway for migration to Windows 11.
- Planning for changes to organizational Identity and Access Management (IAM), including biometrics and single sign-on.

Human Resources

Employee and Labour Relations

Following negotiations with the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) in June, the next meeting is scheduled for September 29, 2025. Negotiations with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) have been rescheduled from September 15-17, 2025, to October 30-31, 2025.

Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellness

In collaboration with Information Technology, we are transitioning occupational health and safety (OHS) issue reporting from a fillable document format to online submission through our current Service Desk software. This change is anticipated to enhance trend analysis and improve communication between staff, managers, and Human Resources.

Employee wellness events over the summer included a Strawberry Social, an Iced Coffee & Popsicle Day featuring a performance by the Uke4ia Ukelele Group, an Indigenous Foodways

Lunch, and a summer photo contest. September events include lunchtime trivia and an employee discount program offering for Treetop Trekking in Huntsville.



Pictured: Uke4ia Ukelele Group

Professional Development

Recent Learning Together Circles peer-to-peer learning sessions:

- *How to use Outlook – 9 participants*

Other internal professional development and compliance training offerings:

- *De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations - 29 participants*
- *Indigenous Foodways – 31 participants*
- *Biigiwewyan Cultural Safety Training – 18 participants*

Staffing

In addition to temporary positions, the following permanent positions were recently filled:

- **Program Manager, Healthy Families (1.00 FTE) - effective July 14, 2025**

- Community Health Promoter, Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Services (1.00 FTE) - effective September 8, 2025
- Manager, Indigenous Engagement and Development (1.00 FTE) - effective October 6, 2025.

There has been no net increase in permanent FTEs.

Finance

The Finance Team has submitted the following documents:

- 2025 Q1 Ministry of Health Standards Activity Report
- 2025-26 Q1 Infection Prevention and Control Hub Report
- 2025-26 Q1 Planet Youth Report

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is an infection transmitted through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. Most human cases result from exposure to areas where infected ticks are established. Climate change is contributing to the spread of blacklegged ticks to new areas of Ontario as warming temperatures make conditions more favorable to tick survival and will make tickborne diseases including Lyme disease a growing concern for the future.

Early symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, and an expanding red rash often referred to as a “bull’s-eye” rash. As of August 24, 2025, a total of 1,660 cases of Lyme disease have been reported in Ontario. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has reported eight cases to date in 2025. The number of human Lyme disease cases has been increasing in the health unit area since 2019, with the highest number reported in 2025. Prior to 2019, 0-2 cases of Lyme disease were reported in the health unit area each year.

Multi-Jurisdictional Measles Outbreak Update

On October 18, 2024, exposure to a travel-related case in New Brunswick led to measles cases in Ontario. Ontario and additional provinces have reported measles cases linked to this

outbreak, with Ontario's first outbreak cases occurring the week of October 28, 2024. As of August 21, 2025, Ontario has reported a total of 2363 measles cases (2051 confirmed, 312 probable) associated with the outbreak occurring in 26 public health units. As of August 28, 2025, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit reported 38 measles cases (12 confirmed, 26 probable). The last measles case in the health unit was reported on June 12, 2025.

Planning for Seasonal Respiratory Pathogens

Seasonal respiratory viruses such as COVID-19, influenza, and RSV generally circulate in highest numbers between November and April. As a result, the health system experiences increased pressures during this time. To support local readiness, the IPAC Hub is disseminating guidance from the Ministry's Health System Emergency Branch to health system partners, such as long-term care, retirement homes, hospitals, and Indigenous health service providers to improve preparedness for surges of respiratory pathogens and outbreaks. This guidance outlines accountabilities of health system partners and draws from lessons learned in previous respiratory seasons and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professional Practice

During the reporting period, the Professional Practice Program supported several key initiatives to strengthen public health practice and collaboration. The program is contributing to the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) Intimate Partner Violence Best Practice Guidelines (BPG) Expert Panel. The panel will meet over the next 24 months to progress from the planning phase into the research phase. Professional Practice also participates as an employer representative from Public Health and Northern Ontario on the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) Employer Resource Group. Recent discussions have focused on nursing scope of practice changes, reviews of new and upcoming nursing practice standards and guidelines, and successes and challenges of integrating nursing students into practice settings.

Oral Health

Aligned with our strategic priorities, the Oral Health program is exploring collaboration with the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board Paramedic Service's [Clinical Access Mobile Partnership \(CAMP\) Van](#) to enhance access to oral health care for vulnerable populations, expand oral health education by reaching communities across the district, and foster meaningful partnerships with interested First Nations communities. CAMP stands for Clinical Access Mobile Partnership, which is a customized van designed to replicate a clinical

setting and is available to community partners across the Nipissing district. We hope to use the CAMP van to improve oral health outcomes throughout the region.



Pictured: Clinical Access Mobile Partnership Van

Sexual Health

In partnership with Community Health, Sexual Health nurses engaged with students at Nipissing University during “O” Week. A key focus was sexual health and harm reduction education, highlighting the importance of testing and increasing access through “GetaKit” - a service offering mail-out HIV self-tests and online requisitions for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection testing for eligible individuals.

The Syphilis Response Group, in collaboration with Healthy Families, is preparing to deliver key messaging on syphilis and prenatal screening recommendations at an upcoming Maternal Child Update virtual session. This session is intended for healthcare providers and professionals who support newborns and their caregivers, with the goal of promoting consistent, informed practices throughout the district and preventing congenital syphilis.

Harm Reduction Services

In August, a public service announcement and a community drug alert were distributed to healthcare, social, and community service providers, as well as partners. These communications alerted interest holders to the increased drug toxicity risks due to the presence of highly toxic substances confirmed in Ontario’s unregulated drug supply.

The Health Unit, in collaboration with community partners and volunteers, participated in International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) on August 27, 2025, at North Bay City Hall. The event featured traditional drumming, guest speakers, community agency booths, naloxone training, and a gathering of remembrance at the Overdose Awareness Gardens – honoring those who have lost their lives or been affected by substance use.

Launched in June, the Our North Bay Health Box provides low-barrier, stigma-free access to health and wellness supplies, including HIV self-test kits, naloxone, hygiene products (soap, toothbrushes, and menstrual products), socks, and condoms. It also serves as a platform for health promotion messaging, drug alerts, and an interactive service navigation map. Since its launch in June thousands of items have been dispensed to those in need, including 242 naloxone kits and 2,806 wellness supplies.



Pictured: Our North Bay Health Box

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

In response to the provincial measles outbreak, the Health Unit took a proactive approach during the summer to assess and offer vaccine to eligible children. Notices were sent to all parents/guardians of eligible children attending childcare and school. The notice informed parents of the outbreak and encouraged them to proactively have their children vaccinated for

measles now rather than waiting for the upcoming school year. This was important especially for families with summer travel plans.

In preparation for the upcoming seasonal vaccine season, 125 fridge inspections across the district were completed this summer. This is an essential step in the Ministry approval process for all healthcare providers and community partners who wish to participate in the influenza, COVID-19, and RSV vaccine programs.

In late August, the Ministry announced enhanced vaccine eligibility for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). As in 2024, certain high-risk adults aged 60-74, infants up to eight months of age in their first RSV season and high-risk children up to 24 months of age are eligible for RSV protection this year. New this year, RSV will be publicly funded for those 75 years of age and older in the general population.

Community Services

Environmental Health

Environmental Health has been made aware of ongoing supply constraints of the rabies vaccine and rabies immune globulin (Rablg) and is working through the implementation of the Ministry of Health's, *Rabies Vaccine and Rabies Immune Globulin – Interim Sparing Guidelines for Ontario*. These guidelines require a coordinated approach between health care practitioners (HCPs) and public health inspectors to ensure that limited supplies are used appropriately while not putting the public at undue risk for developing rabies following an exposure.

In response, a public health bulletin has been sent to HCPs, and internal policies have been updated to align with these interim guidelines. Public health inspectors will work closely with HCPs to determine when the administration of rabies vaccine and Rablg is warranted and when it is not. This represents a change from our usual practice and will require additional time to implement and communicate these changes.

To better understand the impact of these changes and the current demand for rabies investigations, recent case data has been reviewed.

In July and August 2025, there were a total of 217 animal bite and scratch investigations, with 74 involving bats, compared to 146 investigations in the same months of 2024, of which 23 involved bats. This reflects a 49% increase in overall investigations and a more than three-fold in bat-related exposures year over year.

The very publicized human rabies case that occurred in Ontario in September 2024 may be a factor in the increased number of reported exposures. While we encourage the reporting of potential rabies exposures to ensure that post-exposure prophylaxis (vaccine and immune globulin) are given to those who need it, rabies investigations are demand-driven work requiring immediate attention. The recent surge in exposure reports places increased demands upon the Environmental Health team that divert capacity from other critical activities.



Pictured: Big Brown Bat Sample

Healthy Families

As follow-up to the Medical Officer of Health's February report to the Board of Health, the Nipissing Parry Sound Perinatal Mental Health Committee recently launched the [Perinatal Mental Health Care Pathway](#) for Health Care Providers.

Mental health issues are some of the most common conditions that come up in pregnancy and postpartum. It can affect anyone including mothers, fathers, birth parents, and partners. If perinatal mental health problems are not recognized and not properly treated it can have a negative impact on the affected individual, child, and family. Major risk factors for mental illness in the perinatal period include a personal or family history of mental illness, low social support and current life stressors, such as financial problems, or child illness.

This Care Pathway provides a recommended approach for the identification, assessment, and monitoring of mental health issues for pregnant and postpartum people in Nipissing - Parry Sound District. It allows for different treatment approaches and interventions that may be required, depending on the severity of the illness and individual preferences. The care pathway

is meant to be applicable to a wide variety of populations and is to be used in conjunction with clinical judgement and individualized assessment to ensure safe, effective, and inclusive treatment to affected individuals in a timely manner. Over the next several months, the committee will be engaging with local health care providers to share the care pathway and to promote increased awareness and access to local perinatal mental health services.

Community Health

On August 26, 2025, the Health Unit was once again pleased to participate in Nipissing University's annual "O" Week event, "The Amazing Race." This longstanding collaboration provides a meaningful opportunity to engage directly with incoming students in an interactive and educational format. This year's event was hosted on the university campus, a strategic decision by the organizers to minimize transportation costs and maximize student participation. This ongoing partnership with Nipissing University continues to be an effective and valued avenue for student outreach.

Planet Youth Nipissing prevention activity funding was provided to organizations in the community in the form of microgrants. The aim was to support initiatives that addressed priority concerns emerging from the Planet Youth Nipissing survey data. 44 prevention initiatives were implemented and included a transit pass pilot project, school and family engagement events, youth sharing circles, hide mitten making workshop, kindness and leadership initiative, boutique of essentials, mental health coping kits, and more. Evaluation of the initiatives took place over the summer, led by a Master of Public Health placement student, and the stories of impact from these initiatives will be shared publicly within the next few months.

The Planet Youth Nipissing Steering Committee has drafted an action plan to guide the next year of work and continue addressing priority concerns. Goals listed in the action plan include:

1. Increase awareness among adults about the Planet Youth model and their role in promoting protective factors.
2. Increase participation in opportunities in the community such as youth programming, activities and supports.
3. Increase meaningful connections experienced by youth and caregivers.

The Public Health Agency of Canada recently announced the successful recipients of the second round of funding through the [Youth Substance Use Prevention Program \(YSUPP\)](#) including Planet Youth Nipissing. The Honourable Pauline Rochefort, MP, was at the main office of the

Health Unit on Friday September 5, 2025, to make the announcement in person for \$750,000 over three years.



(L-R) West Nipissing Mayor Kathleen Thorne Rochon, Planet Youth Nipissing's Nipissing's Community Development Coordinator Alyssa Bedard, Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer Dr. Carol Zimbalatti, Nipissing—Timiskaming MP Pauline Rochefort, and Board of Health Chair Rick Champagne at the Public Health Agency of Canada funding announcement held at the Health Unit's North Bay office on Sept 5, 2025.

Organizational Effectiveness

Indigenous Engagement

Indigenous Foodways

In June and August, staff co-leads from two Strategic Priority areas collaborated to host events for staff and management on Indigenous Foodways Teachings and Meal Sharing. Events were hosted in both North Bay and Wasauksing First Nation (near Parry Sound), with guest speakers from the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre and Wasauksing First Nation Health Centre. We were honoured to host two guest speakers who shared knowledge and teachings about Indigenous foods and the connection between food and mental, spiritual, emotional and physical health. At the end of each session, participants had the opportunity to enjoy a delicious meal together to support social connection and mental wellbeing.

This initiative aligns with two strategic plan priorities and was coordinated by the following strategy work groups:

- Health Equity: Foster Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the good life) with Indigenous partners, communities, and individuals.
- Organizational Well-being: Nurture a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

How Does Food Connect to Reconciliation?

For generations, food has been used to control Indigenous communities. From starving communities onto reservations, preventing access by banning fishing and hunting rights, to nutritional experiments within residential schools, Canada has an ongoing history of food injustice forced upon Indigenous People. Providing opportunities for Indigenous people to introduce their Traditional foods, food systems, and food teachings into public institutions is an act of reconciliation.



Pictured: Indigenous Foodways Participants

Communications

- Secured media coverage and released material to mark the official launch of Our North Bay Healthbox, organized in collaboration with Harm Reduction Services and Reach NEXUS. The Health Unit's response to the toxic drug crisis continues to be of public interest, with Communications receiving an influx in media inquiries and social media engagement on the subject following the release of the Chief Coroner's Report and Community Drug Alerts from the Health Unit and nearby partners.
- Actively posting to the Health Unit's repurposed Instagram account, [@nbpsd_hu](https://www.instagram.com/nbpsd_hu).

- Supported Environmental Health with several announcements over the summer in response to heat warnings, air quality statements, harmful algae blooms and ticks, highlighting the growing impact of climate change on public health.
- One individual's social media inquiry resulted in the Health Unit reaching out to provincial partners regarding the spraying of glyphosate in forests, with the lens of assessing risk to human health. Communications were able to leverage recent Indigenous cultural competency training offered by the Health Unit to ensure the inquiry was responded to appropriately.
- The Health Unit earned media coverage and established a new relationship with Pink Triangle Press, a well-respected media company publishing content for 2SLGBTQ+ community members and allies.
- Promotion of Healthy Families' *The Basics Nipissing-Parry Sound* campaign continues, with social media advertisements doubling registration numbers for *Insights*, a program that sends tips for implementing The Basics principles to parents' cell phones via text message.
- Coordination with Community Health to plan a successful press event related to the YSUPP funding announcement by the Honourable Pauline Rochefort.

Foundational Services

Population Health Assessment & Surveillance

- The Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Committee held its inaugural meeting in June 2025. This committee includes representative members across all Health Unit programs and will work towards identifying prioritized opportunities for conducting population health assessment and surveillance activities across the organization, including data access, collection, and management; data analysis and interpretation; reporting and knowledge exchange; and evidence informed action.
- Planning is underway to expand the 2025 food affordability reporting to include more data related to housing and income security to align with strategic plan priorities. With the support of a summer student, Foundational Services undertook a new project to estimate market rental housing rates. Data was gathered throughout the month of July for North Bay and Parry Sound. Traditionally, local rent rates from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation for North Bay are used in the food affordability reporting, but these rates are often criticized for appearing to underestimate current market rental rates. This new data will help increase understanding and accuracy of the

financial circumstances of low-income households, and support advocacy efforts related to reducing poverty, homelessness and food insecurity.

- Supporting a data request received from the West Parry Sound Ontario Health Team for population health data related to emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

Effective Public Health Practice

- Foundational Services and Vaccine Preventable Diseases been working with Wellington Dufferin Guelph Health Unit, learning from their Immunization of Pupils Act (ISPA) process, to help improve our workflow. This joint project is looking for efficiencies in immunization letter generation by trialing an automated letter generation methodology to students within our region.

Strategic Planning

- Coordinating the implementation of an internal staff survey in the fall that will collect data for multiple strategy workgroups to inform future work plan activities and outcomes.
- The next strategic plan update presentations will take place at the November Board of Health meeting.

Health Promotion

- The Health Promotion Planner role has officially begun in Foundational Services as of July 2025. This role primarily supports internal programs and services with planning, implementation and evaluation activities related to comprehensive health promotion initiatives. Work involves enhancing program capacity in delivering health promotion programming, building health promotion skills organizationally, and identifying opportunities for integration and coordination of health promotion planning activities. Several teams have already requested health promotion support from the Planner, and projects are underway.