

January 30, 2026

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
Suite 213, 1150 Kingston Road  
Pickering, Ontario L1V 1C3

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the [2026 Ontario Budget Consultation](#). The Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) recognizes the Ontario government's efforts in the 2025 budget to include measures to promote affordability for Ontarians. For the 2026 budget, as a component of a system-wide strategy to address housing and food affordability, the Health Unit recommends that the Government of Ontario strengthen the social assistance system by:

- Increasing Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates to reflect the cost of living; and
- Increasing Ontario Works (OW) rates to reflect the cost of living and indexing OW rates to inflation going forward.

The Health Unit recently completed its 2025 reporting on food affordability. This year, the analysis was expanded to include local data collection on apartment rental rates in North Bay and Parry Sound. The [2025 food and housing affordability data](#) shows, in real numbers, that households reliant on Ontario Works do not have enough money to meet basic needs. This finding is consistent with [recent data](#) from the Maytree Foundation, which shows that social assistance recipients in Ontario live far below the poverty line.

The most recent local [homelessness count](#) in Nipissing revealed that over 80% of respondents identifying as homeless had OW or ODSP as their main income. Respondents also cited low income and high rental costs as the top two barriers to finding housing. Adequate income is a foundational social determinant of health. Strengthening social assistance in Ontario is a critical component of increasing income security for many of the province's lowest income households and represents an important and effective policy measure to take action on poverty, homelessness, and household food insecurity as important public health issues.

The importance of strengthening social assistance in Ontario was also communicated as part of the Health Unit's recommendations [submitted](#) to the 2025-2030 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation in November 2025.

At the Board of Health meeting on January 28, 2026, the Board of Health passed a resolution endorsing this submission and supporting increased ODSP and OW rates, as well as the indexing of OW rates to inflation.

**Whereas, the Ontario Public Health Standards require public health agencies to monitor food affordability, and assess and report on the health of local populations, describing the existence and impact of health inequities including housing and food insecurity; and**

**Whereas, income is an important social determinant of health that greatly impacts a household's ability to pay for the basic costs of living, including housing and food; and**

**Whereas, food insecurity and housing insecurity have detrimental impacts on physical and mental health; and**

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**Whereas**, the 2025 North Bay Parry Sound food affordability results show that households with social assistance as their main income do not have enough money for the costs of living; and

**Therefore Be It Resolved**, that the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit continues to support in principle the efforts of staff to monitor, raise awareness about, and work to reduce health inequities including poverty, homelessness, and household food insecurity; and

**Furthermore Be It Resolved**, that the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit calls on the Province of Ontario to strengthen social assistance by increasing OW and ODSP rates to reflect the costs of living, and index Ontario Works rates to inflation as part of the 2026 Ontario budget; and

**Furthermore Be It Resolved**, that the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit provide correspondence of these resolutions to district municipalities, Ontario Boards of Health, Victor Fedeli, MPP (Nipissing), Graydon Smith, MPP (Parry Sound-Muskoka), John Vanthof, MPP (Timiskaming-Cochrane), the Honourable Doug Ford (Premier), the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy (Minister of Finance) the Honourable Michael Parsa (Minister of Children, Community and Social Services), the Honourable Sylvia Jones (Minister of Health), the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA), Pauline Rochefort, MP (Nipissing-Timiskaming), Scott Aitchison, MP (Parry Sound-Muskoka), District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board, District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board, Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM), and the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health (COMOH).

Thank you for reviewing this important local data and considering the recommendation of the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit to strengthen social assistance in Ontario as a priority for the 2026 Ontario budget.

Sincerely,

*Original Signed by Rick Champagne*

Rick Champagne  
Chairperson, Board of Health

*Original Signed by Dr. Carol Zimbalatti*

Dr. Carol Zimbalatti, M.D., CCFP, MPH  
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

Copy to:

Vic Fedeli, MPP, Nipissing  
Graydon Smith, MPP, Parry Sound-Muskoka  
John Vanthof, MPP, Timiskaming-Cochrane

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Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

Pauline Rochefort, MP, Nipissing-Timiskaming

Scott Aitchison, MP, Parry Sound-Muskoka

Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA)

District Municipalities

Ontario Boards of Health

District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board

District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)

Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM)

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