

February 13, 2026

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

Dear Honourable Ministers, Members of Provincial and Federal Parliament, and Stakeholders,

Re: Board of Health Resolution and Recommendations for the 2026 Ontario Budget Consultation – Strengthening Social Assistance Rates

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) is writing to share the recent motion passed and correspondence sent by our Board of Health to the Province of Ontario for the 2026 Ontario Budget Consultation. Based on the results of our 2025 food and housing affordability data, our key recommendations are to increase Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates, and to index OW rates to inflation.

Annually, public health agencies in Ontario monitor food affordability as a requirement of the Ontario Public Health Standards.¹ This involves estimating food costs using the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket (ONFB) survey and examining them in relation to local rent rates within a variety of household income scenarios. Year after year, the results show that households with social assistance through OW or ODSP as their main income do not have enough money for the costs of living, including food.²

The rent data typically utilized in food affordability reporting is sourced from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).³ These rates are often criticized as they reflect averages that include long-standing rental agreements that maintain affordability and therefore are not representative of rates faced by households entering the rental market. In 2025, the Health Unit undertook a pilot project examining market rent data in North Bay and Parry Sound to determine how current rental rates compare with CMHC data. Both data sets are valuable, providing insight into the financial circumstances of households in longer-standing rental situations, and the reality for households who moved to new rental housing in 2025. Together with ONFB data, these data sets show that social assistance rates fall short of what is needed to cover housing and food expenses, with the situation being very dire for households who were seeking new rental housing in 2025.²

The 2025 factsheets on food and housing affordability for North Bay and Parry Sound are now available on the [Health Unit website](#). They present the financial situation of a single adult, and a single adult with two school-aged children, as about 95% of households receiving OW in Nipissing and Parry Sound districts are single adults.^{4,5} Although these scenarios only present rent and food costs, the urgent need for higher OW rates is clear. Current amounts are significantly mismatched with the real costs of living.

This information provides important local context about food and housing affordability. Adequate income is a foundational social determinant of health that significantly influences housing and food security. Recent homelessness data from the Nipissing District revealed that over 80% of people identifying as homeless had OW or ODSP as their main income. Respondents also cited low income and rent as the top barriers to finding housing.⁶ Homelessness and food insecurity continue to escalate in our district, with significant health consequences.⁶⁻¹⁰ Strengthening social assistance is a critical component of increasing income security for many of the lowest income households in Ontario. Sharing this information with

decision makers ensures they are aware of the local situation and that evidence from our district is available to inform policy decisions. The Health Unit's recent work to share local context to decision-makers related to affordability also includes our [submission for the 2025-2030 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation](#).

At its meeting on January 28, 2026, the Board of Health carried the following resolution #BOH/2026/01/12.

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

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 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 (DSSAB), District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB), Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM), and Council of Medical Officers of Health (COMOH).

Sincerely,

Original Signed by Rick Champagne

Rick Champagne
Chairperson, Board of Health

Original Signed by Dr. Zimbalatti

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

References

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4. District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board. Ontario Works data portal. 2024. Accessed January 5, 2026. <https://www.dnssab.ca/en/data-portal/ow-data-portal/>
5. District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board. Personal communication with J. Degagne, December 17, 2025.
6. District of Nipissing Social Service Administration Board. Nipissing counts. 2024. Accessed January 5, 2026. <https://www.dnssab.ca/media/2kwlugre/2024-nipissing-pit-count-infographic.pdf>
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8. Homelessness hub. Homelessness 101: health. Accessed January 5, 2026. <https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/health/>
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10. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Food insecurity & food affordability in Ontario. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario. April 2025. Accessed January 5, 2026.
11. Government of Ontario. Budget consultations. December 23, 2025. Accessed January 5, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/budget-consultations>