

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

Canadian Public Health Week 2026

This month, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit marked Canadian Public Health Week (April 6 - 10, 2026) with the completion of its 2025 Annual Report. The creation of this report was led by the Communications team, with contributions from all programs and services across the Health Unit. Together, they provided statistics and stories to shine a light on the often invisible yet vital work of public health over the past year. The report is expected to be available on our website soon.

Also, in time for Canadian Public Health Week, the Health Unit recognized individuals and organizations who have demonstrated extraordinary efforts promoting public health. Healthy communities are the result of collective action; no single organization can achieve this alone.

- **The AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area (ACNBA)** for their compassionate, client-centered approach to care, commitment to reducing barriers to service, and strong collaboration with public health to support vulnerable populations.
- **Georgian Bay Biosphere – Mnidoo Gamii** for their leadership in climate action, sustainable transportation and food systems, and community development initiatives that promote health, environmental stewardship, and community connection.
- **Kirk Hewitt** for his compassionate, non-judgmental, and client-centred support of individuals with complex health and social needs, and for his strong collaboration with Health Unit programs to improve access to care and strengthen community partnerships.
- **True Self – Debwewendizwin** for their peer-led outreach and harm reduction initiatives, commitment to culturally informed care, and collaboration with public health to expand access to services and improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

The Health Unit values all contributions to community health, large and small, and sincerely appreciates the ongoing partnerships that strengthen our communities.

HPV Awareness Day 2026

The month of March included HPV Awareness Day on March 4. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of over 200 viruses that, without vaccination, will infect about 75% of Canadians at some point in their lives. Infections are often asymptomatic, meaning most individuals are unaware they are infected. However, persistent infections can cause various cancers, which tend to occur many years after the initial infection.

HPV is responsible for nearly¹:

- 100% of cervical cancers
- 90% of anal cancers
- 60% to 73% of throat (oropharyngeal) cancers
- 40% to 50% of penile cancers
- 40% of vaginal and vulva cancers

HPV can also cause anogenital warts.

The good news is that a publicly funded vaccine is available for students in grades 7 to 12, as well as for individuals who meet high-risk criteria. The vaccine protects against nine strains of HPV, seven associated with cancer and two that most commonly cause genital warts, significantly reducing the risk of infection.

Despite this, HPV immunization coverage remains lower than for many other routine vaccines. In the 2024-2025 school year, only an estimated 56% of Grade 7 students in North Bay Parry Sound received two doses of the vaccine², and 70% received at least one dose, which is comparable to coverage rates across Ontario³.

¹ Government of Canada (Health Canada). Human papilloma virus (HPV): symptoms and treatment [internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 Mar 20]. Available from: [Human papillomavirus \(HPV\): Symptoms and treatment - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/vaccines-and-immunization/human-papilloma-virus-(hpv)-symptoms-and-treatment.html)

² E-mail correspondence from Manager of Vaccine Preventable Disease (March 31, 2026).

³ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Immunization data tool [Internet]. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario; 2026 [cited 2026 Mar 20]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Infectious-Disease/Immunization-Tool>

To coincide with HPV Awareness Day, the Health Unit launched an HPV vaccine campaign. Teams from Vaccine Preventable Diseases, Sexual Health, Oral Health, and Community Health, along with staff from other programs, collaborated with Communications and Foundational Services to create and deliver a robust video campaign designed to educate the public on the HPV vaccines.

The campaign was intended for parents/guardians, students, and teachers, and included seven videos organically shared throughout March on the Health Unit's social media platforms. Ads also ran on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Google Ads.

The goals of the campaign were to increase HPV vaccination rates, emphasize the critical role of vaccination in cancer reduction, and highlight the importance of vaccinating early, before exposure to the virus. This campaign will be evaluated in different ways, including social media analytics, teacher surveys and tracking HPV vaccination rates, to measure the impact that this important campaign will have throughout the region.

HPV vaccination *is* cancer prevention.

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Facilities Operations

North Bay

- Facilities staff attended software training for the upgraded Building Management System, which controls heating and cooling throughout the building.

Information Technology

- Completed the Vaccine Preventable Diseases program tablet refresh.
- Transitioned monthly Occupational Health and Safety inspections from paper-based forms to an electronic format.

Human Resources

Employee and Labour Relations

Planning is underway for the next All Staff Meeting and Service/Retirement Award Celebration, Scheduled for May 27, 2026.

Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellness

The process for reporting occupational health and safety concerns has moved to an online format through the existing ServiceDesk software. This change ensures timely documentation and keeps all parties (employees, supervisors, human resources) informed of issue status through to resolution.

Staff participated in an internal workplace survey developed by the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC), seeking input on general occupational health and safety, workplace violence, and psychological health and safety. Survey findings and corresponding implementation strategies will be shared with all staff and the Board of Health once finalized.

Talent Management

In addition to filling temporary positions, the following permanent position was recently filled:

- Reception Clerk, Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Services (1.00 FTE), effective February 11, 2026

There has been no net increase in permanent positions.

All student placements from Canadore College and Nipissing University will be complete as of April 30, 2026. The next cohort of student placements will begin in September, with placement requests due to the Health Unit by August 1, 2026.

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

Outbreak Activity

Since September 1, 2025, the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) program has managed 60 confirmed institutional outbreaks. Respiratory infections accounted for 71.7% of these outbreaks, with Influenza A (27.9%) and COVID-19 (34.9%) being the most common causes.

Influenza

As of April 11, 2026, a total of 418 influenza cases have been reported in the district for the 2025-2026 season, including 393 cases of influenza A and 25 cases of influenza B. Influenza activity in the district is currently categorized as 'sporadic', as there are no ongoing laboratory-confirmed influenza outbreaks in institutions or public hospitals.

Oral Health

In alignment with the Health Equity strategic priority, the Oral Health Program has initiated targeted outreach education sessions in low-income seniors' housing complexes to reduce

barriers and improve equitable access to care. These sessions provide oral health education and support seniors in navigating publicly funded programs, including the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) and the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP).

Assistance is provided with application completion, understanding eligibility, and connecting individuals to a dental home. Engagement among seniors has been strong, creating meaningful opportunities to build relationships with community partners and enhance coordinated, equitable service delivery.

Sexual Health

Public Health Nurses continue to deliver enhanced services to priority youth across the district in partnership with designated secondary schools. These services increase access to comprehensive sexual health care and support more positive sexual health outcomes. Services include access to low-cost birth control methods (including the emergency contraception pill), urine testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), treatment of reportable STIs in cases and contacts, 2SLGBTQ+ health and wellness, and counselling on sexual health and safer sex, healthy relationships, consent, contraceptive options, pregnancy testing, and pregnancy options.

On Friday, April 17, 2026, Public Health Nurses from Sexual Health and Communicable Disease Control delivered an education session to physicians and nurses at North Bay Regional Health Centre. The session focused on local rates of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection, emerging trends and treatment guidance, as well as provided an update on the Mandatory Blood Testing Act (2006).

Harm Reduction Services

The Health Unit has launched an updated version of its Safe Sharps Handling and Disposal Campaign, *“Community Safety. That’s the Point.”* The refreshed campaign incorporates insights from previous evaluation results and feedback.

Timed to align with Earth Day and upcoming training sessions, the campaign equips community members with the knowledge and skills to confidently and properly pick up and dispose of sharps found in the community, while reducing the potential health and safety risks associated with handling them.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Protecting Children from Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Throughout the school year, efforts were made to support students and families to meet immunization requirements and to minimize the need for school suspensions. The program worked proactively with school communities to reduce barriers to immunization and ensure access to timely, convenient services. These efforts included hosting clinics within schools, arranging additional clinic locations, offering extended appointment availability, and providing walk-in options for students at risk of suspension.

As a result of this collaborative and supportive approach, most students were able to update their vaccines and avoid suspension. While suspension remains a legislated component of Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) for students who are not compliant and do not have valid exemptions, it is used as a last resort. During this school year, out of over 17,000 students, 79 secondary students and 174 elementary students experienced suspensions related to ISPA requirements. Most updated their immunization records quickly or received required vaccines, allowing them to return to school promptly and continue their education with minimal disruption.

To further protect the health of school communities and prevent outbreaks, we continue to apply a comprehensive approach across all grade levels rather than focusing on specific groups.

Encouragingly, immunization coverage rates for school-aged children in the district remain above the provincial average, as reported by the [Public Health Ontario Immunization Data Tool](#).

The focus remains on education, accessibility, and partnership with families to keep students healthy, in school, and protected from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Community Services

Environmental Health

Three information sessions were held with municipalities on the beach water sampling program. The sessions provided an opportunity for municipalities to directly hear information on the program, associated health risks from recreational water, and changes to sampling and signage, and to also ask questions of Dr. Zimbalatti (MOH/EO) and Brent Allen (Acting Program Manager, Environmental Health).

Inspections of recreational water facilities and food premises continued throughout February and March. High-risk food premises were prioritized as the April inspection deadline approaches, and year-round recreational water facilities received focused attention to support completion ahead of the March deadline.

The Health Unit also enhanced its occupational health and safety practices with the purchase of five SPOT devices for use in areas where cellular coverage is unreliable. These devices allow staff, such as Public Health Inspectors, to send a text or email message when out of cell range, with notifications directed to the program manager and the general intake inbox. This ensures that staff can communicate their location or request assistance.

Healthy Families

Reading to Children at All Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Home Visits

HBHC staff have launched a simple but fun new early literacy initiative: at every home visit, staff share a short book with the baby or young child. These mini story times help show parents that reading doesn't need to be perfect, planned, or lengthy—it can be a fun, natural part of everyday life. A few minutes, a few pictures, and a warm voice can go a long way in supporting a child's early learning and creating positive moments for families.

The goal is to give children a strong start by encouraging families to make reading part of their routine from the very beginning. Many caregivers understandably think reading starts later, around age two, but babies begin benefiting as early as six months—they learn sounds, rhythms, and how pictures connect to words. Research also shows that early language exposure differs widely across households, and gaps in vocabulary can appear as early as 18 months. By modelling simple reading activities repeatedly, HBHC staff help parents feel confident, capable, and excited to read with their children.

Over time, these repeated, relaxed story moments build early vocabulary, spark curiosity, and strengthen parent–child connection. Most importantly, they help families see reading not as a task, but as a shared experience that is fun, nurturing, and easy to do anytime. This initiative supports HBHC's commitment to promoting healthy development and giving all young children the best possible start.

Community Health

Planet Youth Nipissing Sticker Design Contest

As part of Planet Youth Nipissing's efforts to strengthen youth engagement and amplify youth perspectives, a sticker design contest was held this winter. Local youth (ages 11-19) were invited to express what matters to them by creating a 2-inch sticker design. Over 40 submissions were received, showcasing a remarkable level of insight, talent, and creativity.

Because uplifting youth voices is central to Planet Youth Nipissing, 15 designs were awarded, exceeding the original plan to select 10. Winning designs were selected by a panel of youth judges, who carefully evaluated each submission based on creativity, relevance to the theme,

visual impact, and connection to youth experiences. Hard copy stickers with the [winning designs](#) are being distributed across the community by partner organizations.

Emergency Management

Throughout February and March, the Health Unit continued to monitor the Ontario Vigilance Bulletins from Environment Canada for extreme cold weather events, with 16 days meeting the criteria. As of December 2025, a total of 48 Extreme Cold Weather Alerts were issued.

Preparations to update the Health Unit's Hazard Identification Risk Assessment (HIRA) are underway as well planning for the upcoming heat season.

Organizational Effectiveness

Quality, Practice, and Relations

Communications

The tick awareness campaign will be launched in May with the goal of increasing public awareness of tick identification and prevention. This initiative is a collaboration between Communications, Environmental Health, and the Communicable Disease Control programs. Six humorous informational videos have been produced and will be released weekly starting on May 4, 2026. Static informational posts will also be shared throughout the campaign to reinforce key messages and provide supplementary education.

Professional Practice

The first 2026 session of the Transition to Public Health Orientation took place in April, with eleven staff participating. This program supports newer employees by strengthening their understanding of core public health concepts, including legislative frameworks, funding models, population health approaches, and commonly used provincial and organizational tools. It also helps participants understand how public health work is structured and how their individual roles contribute to the broader mandate of public health.

Professional Practices remains involved in the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) Best Practice Guideline on Intimate Partner Violence. Development of this guideline follows a three-year cycle, and the work has now entered Year 2, moving from an extensive literature review into the development of good practice statements.

In addition, Professional Practice participates in the Ontario Public Health Nursing Leaders Executive, a provincial group that provides systems-level leadership for public health nursing. As part of this work, Professional Practice contributed to the planning and delivery of the spring workshop held on April 16, which brought together nursing leaders from public health units across Ontario to discuss emerging issues, operational challenges, and opportunities in public health nursing.

Quality Assurance

Evaluation of the Quality Assurance system has advanced with the completion of a detailed process map. This mapping demonstrated strong staff understanding of the workflows related to managing operational policies, procedures and directives. The next phase will involve a staff survey to identify opportunities to strengthen the system's structure, clarity, and usability.

Work is in progress to develop a formal, consistent organizational process for managing public complaints. This process will be integrated into the Quality Issue Reporting (QIR) system to support consistent documentation, tracking, and follow-up. The QIR system provides a standardized mechanism for documenting, reviewing, and analyzing quality issues, identify trends, and inform continuous improvement. QIR reports are shared with the Board of Health, Executive Team, Managers Team, Nursing Practice Advisory Committee, and Continuous Quality Improvement Committee to support decision-making, organizational learning, and improvements to process and service delivery.

Indigenous Engagement

As part of ongoing relationship building with Indigenous partners, staff from Indigenous Engagement and Community Health participated in the planning committee for the North Bay Regional Health Centre Minowacihewin, Regional Service for Indigenous Peoples Minweyaang Round Dance, alongside seven partner organizations.

In advance of the event, staff attended a cultural teaching to learn about the history, meaning, and protocols of the Round Dance, supporting respectful engagement and deepened understanding of its cultural significance.

Cultural gatherings and ceremonies such as the Round Dance serve an important role in supporting Indigenous health and wellness by strengthening relationships, fostering belonging, and community connection. Staff also attended the Round Dance to offer support and demonstrate the Health Unit's commitment to reconciliation and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and partners. During the event, the planning committee was welcomed into the circle with a song in honour of the collective work involved in organizing the gathering. This acknowledgement reflects the importance of relationship, respect, and shared responsibility in supporting community-led events.



Foundational Services

Population Health Assessment & Surveillance

The [Mental Health and Wellbeing Dashboard](#) was recently launched on the Health Unit's website. Based on the Mental Health Promotion Framework, the dashboard presents local data on protective and risk factors at the individual, family, and community levels. A tutorial video was created to help user navigation, and the tool was promoted internally through intranet posts and a staff presentation.

A study summary on [Kidney Cancer in the City of North Bay](#) was also published in early 2026. The analysis aimed to better understand the potential impact of higher levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in North Bay's drinking water on kidney cancer rates.

Health Equity - Food and Housing Affordability

As a result of the resolution at the January Board of Health meeting related to [food and housing affordability](#), a [letter](#) was submitted for the [2026 Ontario Budget Consultation](#) calling for higher social assistance rates. [Correspondence](#) was sent to local leaders and elected officials to share the key messaging of our submission. Municipalities were also informed of the resolution and the budget submission. They were provided with a sample motion and letter they can tailor should they wish to join the Health Unit in calling on the province to increase social assistance rates. To date, six municipalities in our district have passed resolutions of support, including:

- Township of Mattawan
- Municipality of East Ferris
- Municipality of West Nipissing
- Township of Armour
- Township of Magnetawan
- Town of Parry Sound

Foundational Services staff worked with Communications to provide BayToday key messaging about the resolution, as they [published an article](#) in early March covering the budget submission.

Foundational Services, along with two Executive Directors, presented at the Housing Solutions Forum hosted by Ontario Health at the North Bay Regional Health Centre. The presentation

focused on the local data related to food and housing affordability. The forum brought together organizations addressing housing and homelessness, with discussion focused on examining the housing challenges impacting patient flow and timely transitions out of hospital.

Limited access to affordable and supportive housing can result in extended hospital stays, resulting in excessive healthcare spending, and contributing to hospital bed shortages. Planning is underway to advance collaborative solutions and strengthen partnerships identified through the forum.