

# Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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**Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer**

*November 27, 2024*

*Your lifetime partner in healthy living.*  
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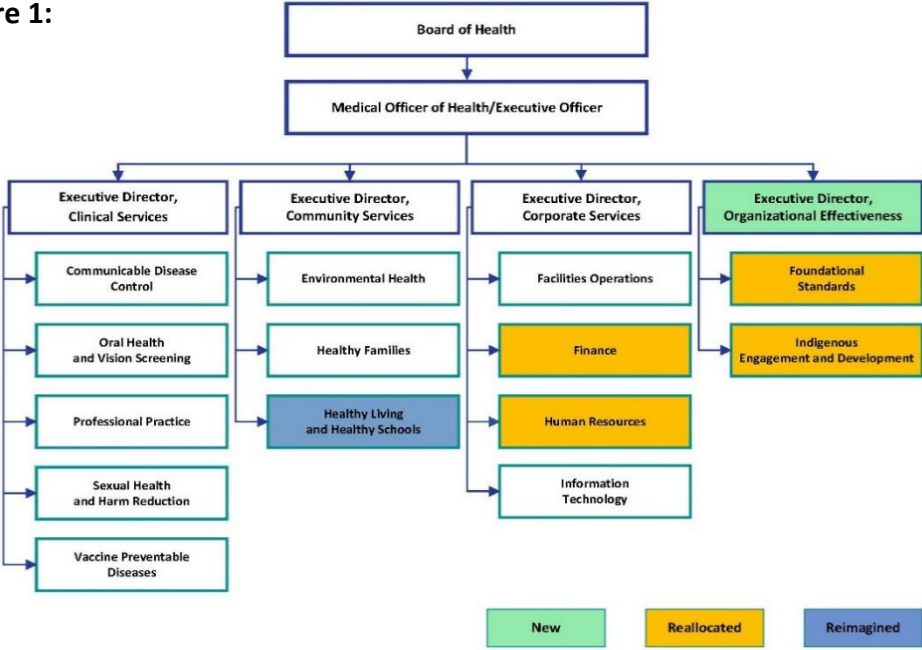
# Medical Officer of Health Update

## Organizational Restructure

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit will be implementing a new organizational structure in 2025. The new structure consolidates the traditional corporate services into one portfolio, creates a new executive director position, “Organizational Effectiveness” which is responsible for overseeing foundational and cross-cutting public health work, and consolidates some health promotional activities. The new structure is more financially sustainable and enhances a lifespan approach to health promotion, which will have long term benefits in key areas such as substance use and chronic disease and injury prevention.

The Executive Team has begun to implement the new structure starting with communicating the changes to the organization, prioritizing the individuals and teams most impacted. The new executive director position has been created and posted, and the selection committee has been appointed. Filling this position will facilitate the planning and implementation of other changes included in the restructuring plan.

Figure 1:



January, 1, 2025

Figure 1. “Future State” for North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit Organizational Structure

# Programs and Services Updates

## Indigenous Engagement

### Biigiweyan Indigenous Cultural Safety Training

To uphold the Health Unit's commitment to truth and reconciliation and support working towards a culturally safe environment, staff members across the organization are participating in Biigiweyan, which translates in Anishinaabemowin to "Coming Home". This two day in-person Indigenous Cultural Safety training at Canadore College targets health care professionals and students and uses Indigenous Ways of Knowing and relating to train professionals in offering culturally safe care to Indigenous peoples.

The most recent training session for Health Unit staff took place November 13-14, 2024. Since 2019, 10 sessions have been held with Health Unit staff, training a total of 185 individuals including Board of Health members, Management, Executive Team members, and students.

[Biigiweyan](#) was created from a two-year research project with joint efforts from Canadore College, Nipissing University, and Toronto Metropolitan University. It was developed in partnership with local First Nations and Indigenous organizations, and based on research with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community members, helping professionals, educators, and students.

In September, a member of the Executive Team participated in the *Indigenous Cultural Safety in Health Care Summit* in Toronto. This national summit was organized and hosted by the North Bay Indigenous Hub, the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council and the North Bay Regional Health Centre. The summit provided a forum for health care providers, Indigenous leaders, policymakers and community members from across Canada to engage in learning and critical dialogue about systemic issues experienced by Indigenous peoples when interfacing with health care providers and systems. In addition to the Health Unit, several community partners from across Nipissing and Parry Sound districts attended the summit. In follow-up to the Summit, partners decided to debrief the experience and identify areas where collective action could be taken to advance cultural safety in health care settings across the district.

## Corporate Services

### Communications

A successful promotional campaign for flu and COVID-19 vaccines using paid and unpaid advertising resulted in a high turn-out at community clinics.

The Communication team is working proactively with the Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) program, creating a communications plan to ensure a timely and targeted messaging over the coming year.

Looking ahead, the Health Unit is planning to launch a new Instagram account in 2025 to better engage 25–45-year-olds across the region with tailored health messaging.

### *Emergency Management*

The Health Unit Participated in Municipal Emergency Management meetings and exercises in Kearney, Powassan, Magnetawan, and Mattawa.

The updated Health Unit [Emergency Management Plan](#) was published, ensuring readiness and effective response protocols.

Two Health Unit staff attended an IMS 300 training offered locally by Emergency Management Ontario and North Bay Fire and Emergency Services. The training prepared participants to perform leadership roles within an expanded Incident Management System (IMS) structure during complex incidents involving multiple organizations. A total of 23 community partners attended the training, including representatives from the City of North Bay, Jack Garland Airport, North Bay Police Service, OPP, North Bay EMS, Township of Bonfield, Ottawa Valley Railway and Temiskaming First Nation.

### *Facilities Operations*

#### **North Bay**

- The addition of a smudging room feature in a meeting room has been completed.
- The concrete pad for [Our Healthbox](#) has been installed, with the unit and shelter expected to arrive this fall.
- The custodial services tender for the North Bay office was conducted and awarded.
- Facilities is collaborating with Oral Health on initiatives to create a more dementia and Alzheimer friendly clinic environment.

#### **Parry Sound**

- A noisy HVAC issue was resolved by the landlord.

### *Information Technology*

- Transitioning the Quality Improvement Report (QIR) from the legacy system to the Service Desk system.
- Providing technology instruction during the Health Unit wide *Learning Together Circle* educational sessions.
- Deployed additional emergency paging speakers throughout the North Bay and Parry Sound offices.
- Supported the *Maternal Child Update 2024*, a Healthy Families event that was held at the North Bay Regional Health Centre (NBRHC).

## *Planning and Evaluation*

### **Population Health Assessment & Surveillance**

An analysis of the incidence of kidney-related cancers for the Nipissing District was provided in response to a data request on cancers associated with exposure to poly- or perfluoroalkylated substances (PFAS).

A presentation entitled “COVID-19 outbreak at a residential apartment building in Northern Ontario, Canada” was delivered in collaboration with a consultant engineer at the 2024 CIPHI Ontario conference.

A presentation with other Health Unit staff was delivered at the Relationships for Resilience Climate & Health Symposium in North Bay, including local statistics of climate change impacts.

An internal opioid surveillance dashboard is being developed, to include opioid-related emergency department visits and deaths.

An evaluation of the Overdose / Negative Drug Reaction Reporting System was recently completed to determine what improvements can be made based on feedback from community partners. Analysis of the data collected, and a dissemination plan are being completed. The anticipated release date of the results is mid-November.

Data from the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) about mental health and physical activity has been analyzed and will be added to the website in the coming weeks.

Data related to the number of live births from the Better Outcomes Registry and Network (BORN) database was analyzed from 2015 until 2024 by municipality and shared with school boards.

### **Health Equity**

The internal Health Equity Hive Committee continues to develop the processes that will facilitate and coordinate a strategic, centralized, and collective organizational impact on health equity. Initial tasks continue to include scoping the organizational role of the group, mobilizing an internal communications plan, and finalizing a strategy to receive and address internal consultation or collaboration requests.

In 2024, the committee received 33 applications for the health equity training fund, to support professional development on health equity and best practice approaches. These applications were submitted by organizations in our district who serve priority populations. All requests were approved, and the training sessions are taking place between September and December 2024.

## **Effective Public Health Practice**

The Nipissing, Muskoka and Parry Sound Data Collaborative, in partnership with the Nipissing, Muskoka and Parry Sound Child and Youth Well-being Planning Table, is in the final stages of finishing an initial draft of a community health and well-being dashboard. The initial launch of this dashboard, anticipated for late Fall, will be focused on social determinants of health with more data domains added in the future.

## **Strategic Planning**

An internal implementation framework for the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan was developed and communicated to staff in October. The evergreen framework outlines the roles and responsibilities of the priority and strategy leads, reporting requirements, timelines, and evaluation touch points. The priority and strategy lead names have been confirmed and the next step is to form workgroups for each strategy, ensuring representation from various programs and services. These strategy workgroups will be developing work plans to implement each strategy over the next few months.

## **Clinical Services**

### *Communicable Disease Control*

#### **National Infection Control Week**

National Infection Control Week took place from October 14-18, 2024, with the theme “Prevent with Intent”. Prevention is the key element of infection control at the organizational level, particularly in preventing healthcare-associated infections. Using lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and past outbreaks we can be better prepared for the future.

#### **Pertussis (whooping cough) Outbreak Update**

Pertussis, caused by the *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria, is a serious infection of the lungs and breathing airways. Pertussis is known for uncontrollable, violent coughing fits that often make it hard for people to breathe. After coughing over and over, someone with pertussis often needs to take a deep breath, which causes a “whooping” sound. While Pertussis can affect people of all ages, it is most serious for infants, children under one year of age, and women in their third trimester of pregnancy, especially if they have not been vaccinated.

On May 29, 2024, a pertussis outbreak was declared in the Municipality of West Nipissing. On June 5, 2024, the outbreak and case definitions were expanded to include the entire North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit area. The outbreak was declared over on October 17, 2024. In total, there were 38 cases reported as part of the outbreak (30 confirmed and 8 probable), with 2 hospitalizations and 1 death. Historically, the five-year average case count for the Health Unit is 3.8 cases per year.

## Invasive Group A Streptococcal Infections (iGAS) Update

Group A *Streptococcus* (group A strep, *Streptococcus pyogenes*) can cause both non-invasive and invasive disease and may be present in asymptomatic carriers. Invasive group A streptococcal infections occur when the pathogen infects normally sterile sites, such as the blood, cerebrospinal fluid, joints, pleural or pericardial fluid. Two of the most severe forms of invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) are necrotizing fasciitis or “flesh-eating disease” and Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome, for which, rapid diagnosis, aggressive management, and early use of appropriate antibiotics are critical.

The Health Unit continues to observe an increase in iGAS infections in 2024. In 2023, the Health Unit observed the highest number of cases in over 20 years (20 cases). As of October 31, 2024, 30 confirmed cases have been reported, almost double the five-year average of 15.4 cases per year. Four cases reported in 2024 were confirmed to have emm type 1 with the M1UK subtype, which is an emerging hyper-virulent strain first identified in England and is associated with scarlet fever and iGAS disease.

### *Professional Practice*

Professional Practice has been focused on several key initiatives in the last few months. The program coordinates all student placements and is working with Health Unit preceptors to adapt to the new nursing placement model following the separation of Canadore College and Nipissing University's BScN programs. This change affected the third-year community placements, which began in September 2024. We currently have 24 student nurses participating from September to December. Additionally, the program is in the process of organizing placements for the upcoming semester.

In collaboration with the Administrative Professional Resource Group, Professional Practice is coordinating professional development opportunities for the Health Unit's administrative staff, aimed at improving competencies in various Office 365 programs.

### *Oral Health and Vision Screening*

The dental software conversion in Oral Health is progressing well. Additionally, a new purchased service agreement has been secured at the Parry Sound office, allowing clients to access a dentist three days per week. So far this year, the programs have seen the following volume of appointments:

<b>Service</b>	<b>North Bay</b>	<b>Parry Sound</b>
Health Smiles Ontario	935	58
Health Unit Adults	418	58
Ontario Seniors Dental Care Plan (OSDCP) – in office	709	104
OSDCP – through external providers across district	894	



## *Sexual Health*

The Syphilis Response Group continues to evaluate syphilis infection trends and implement interventions from both a health promotion and case and contact management lens. We continue to see new syphilis cases on a regular basis. In response to a shift in the population being infected with syphilis, the group launched a new health campaign titled “The Invisible Suspect” in September. The campaign features posters distributed to community agencies to raise awareness and encourage individuals to get tested.

The internal HIV Urgent Response Team is continuing to plan and implement activities to address increased HIV rates in the Parry Sound area. To further increase access and decrease barriers for priority populations, the Parry Sound office has been added as a GetAKit pick-up location for HIV self-test kits. This provides an option for individuals who do not have a home mailing address or who may feel uncomfortable having a kit mailed to their home.

A community workgroup, including the Health Unit, local Indigenous partners and the AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area, are developing promotional materials to raise awareness about HIV in the Parry Sound area and encourage testing. These materials will include social media posts and posters, which will be distributed in coordination with the Canada Healthy Community Initiative (CHCI) Grant outputs in the coming months.

## *Harm Reduction/Clinical Information/Needle Syringe Program*

We are nearing completion of projects funded by the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative, which aims to help communities create safer and vibrant community spaces. The grant funding focused on three main areas: safe sharps handling and disposal, health promotion messaging, and the [Our Healthbox](#) (OHB).

Through the CHCI Grant, the Health Unit has funded the upfront costs to host an [Our Healthbox](#) vending machine at our 345 Oak Street West location in North Bay. The OHB provides low-barrier access to health products, harm reduction supplies, and community health and social service information. Individuals will be able to anonymously access take-home HIV self-testing kits and other harm reduction supplies, naloxone, hygiene products (e.g., toothbrushes, soap, menstrual products), socks, and condoms. The anticipated installation date for the OHB is December 2024.

## *Vaccine Preventable Diseases*

### **Seasonal Vaccines Underway**

The Fall COVID-19 and influenza (flu) campaigns are well underway across the district. Community clinic appointments have been fully booked, and walk-in clients have more than doubled the volume at each clinic. In addition to community clinics, COVID-19 and flu vaccine has been available at our in-house Health Unit clinics in North Bay and Parry Sound, local

pharmacies and by primary care providers. Health equity and general population clinics began in early November.



**Photo: NBPSDHU Staff members at a community clinic, ready to receive clients.**

### **Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Prevention Program**

The RSV prevention program is underway, with Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes providing the vaccine to older individuals. The Health Unit, hospitals, and local primary care providers offer RSV vaccines to pregnant individuals, as well as a preventive treatment to infants, and high-risk children within our district.

### **Grade 7 Vaccine Program**

October marked the beginning of the annual grade 7 vaccine program, which includes Hepatitis B (Hep B), Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), and Meningococcal vaccines. This year, we introduced a collaboration with school boards to trial electronic consent forms. This new process aims to increase efficiency and improve consent return rates ultimately increasing vaccine uptake. The effectiveness of this new process will be evaluated once clinics in all grade 7 schools have been completed.

## Community Services

### Environmental Health

The 2024 summer season for the Environmental Health Team has concluded, with 61 food safety inspections conducted at seasonal facilities, along with 39 re-inspections to address non-compliance issues. A total of 29 public beaches were sampled, most beach samples fell within safe parameters. However, some beaches reported high levels of E. coli, which were related to precipitation and bird fecal matter.

The Health Unit has received 7,038 water samples, which were shipped to the Public Health Labs for analysis, with most of these samples collected during the summer.

Inspections of year-round high, medium, and low risk food premises, small drinking water systems (SDWS), personal service settings, as well as pools and spas are ongoing. Tobacco enforcement activities also continue.

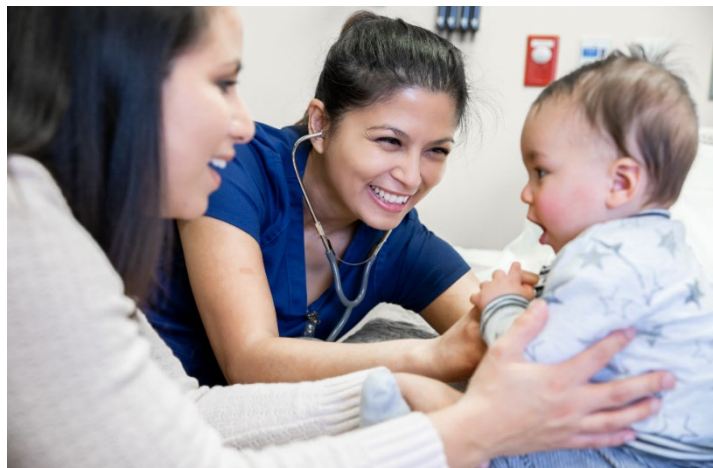
### Healthy Families

#### 2024 Maternal Child Update

Organized by the Healthy Families team, an education day was held on October 4 for healthcare providers and professionals on breastfeeding, perinatal mental health and nutrition. The education day was held during National Breastfeeding Week, with the theme *“Closing the gap: Breastfeeding support for all”*. Approximately 200 individuals attended the event either in-person or virtually (live streamed).

Dr. Zimbalatti provided the opening remarks, emphasizing the importance of early relational health. The morning session focused on breastfeeding best practices, provided by Kathy O’Grady, International Certified Lactation Consultant. In the afternoon, perinatal mental health was highlighted by Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout and Dr. John Krzeczowski, who addressed topics such as perinatal depression, its impact on children, and its detection and management. Presentations were also provided by area community partners from the Community Perinatal Mental Health Services working group, and Healthy Families’ Dietician, Alex Lacarte.

The event’s evaluation showed strong success with 98% of participants indicating they would attend a similar event if offered again.



## *Healthy Living*

In partnership with the [Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation](#) and with the support of the Health Unit's Planetary Health Work Group (PHWG), members of the Healthy Living program hosted a Climate Change and Health Symposium on October 9. The purpose of this event was to promote an equity-focused, collaborative community response to climate change, as a coordinated approach can help build resilience and reduce the local health impacts of climate change.

Approximately 40 people registered, with registrants including municipal council members and staff, First Nation health centre staff, and representatives from education and conservation organizations. Presentations included topics related to systems thinking and community perspectives on climate change adaptation. Through facilitated activities and discussion, six themes emerged:

- collaboration
- education, awareness, buy-in
- human and social health, emergency management
- infrastructure, built environment, land-use planning
- sustainable systems
- advocacy and policy change

In a follow-up meeting later in November, participants will share their work on climate adaptation and/or mitigation to help create a collective understanding of the parallel, complimentary, and amplifying climate change actions unfolding across the region.

## *Healthy Schools*

Planet Youth Nipissing has released reports based on data from student surveys conducted in Spring 2024. These reports are available for the overall project area, as well as for the two pilot communities: North Bay and West Nipissing. The reports are available on the Planet Youth Nipissing website ([www.planetyouthnipissing.ca](http://www.planetyouthnipissing.ca)) and include data on substance use, wellbeing, and on risk and protective factors within the domains of parents/family, school, leisure time, and peer group.

Data dissemination and community engagement are underway to build public understanding of the Planet Youth Nipissing initiative, gather feedback, identify priorities, and understand the strengths in the community. The next steps for the project include goal setting and action planning based on the local data and learnings from community engagement.

In partnership with the Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic District School Board, the Health Unit has purchased a fleet of 20 bikes and helmets to support student cycling skills at the high school level. This initiative aims to promote safe cycling, which can help reduce social and health inequities by improving accessibility to essential services such as healthcare, jobs, grocery stores, and recreational facilities. Safe cycling not only encourages physical activity and better

health outcomes but also contributes to environmental sustainability. Educators will also receive cycling skills training to teach students safe riding practices, further enhancing the development of healthy learning environments.



**Photo: Information booth at St. Joseph Scollard Hall with the Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic Board Parent Engagement Council during a family evening. Information about Planet Youth Nipissing and the data specific to the Board was shared with families.**

## Finance

The Ministry continues to work on Strengthening Public Health initiatives, but no new decisions have been made affecting funding at this time. We continue to await approval for COVID immunization funding and Infection Prevention and Control Hub funding.

Finance staff have been focused on the year-end forecasting for the Q3 report and budget calculations for the Operation Plan, which will be presented in December. Additionally, final financial reports on the CHCI federal grant have been prepared and submitted as required.

## Human Resources

### *Occupational Health and Safety*

An occupational health and safety education session was held in the Parry Sound office, providing practical training on various emergency procedures, handling sharps, and identifying illicit substances. Similar training is planned for Clinical Services and Reception staff in the North Bay office, with online training to be offered for the remainder of staff.

A comprehensive mental health training program and anti-stigma campaign is currently in development, with an anticipated launch in early 2025.

### *Professional Development*

Internal professional development sessions coordinated by Human Resources since the last report include Basic Life Support Certification (52 participants) and Defensive Driver Training (15 participants).

### *Staffing*

The following permanent position was recently filled. This vacancy was created because of a resignation:

- Program Administrative Assistant, Healthy Schools (0.72 FTE) effective October 15, 2024

There has been no net increase in FTE of permanent positions.

*Approved by*

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