



The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) represents the interests of 37 municipalities from Kenora and Rainy River in the west to Hornepayne and Hearst in the east. NOMA’s mission is to advance the needs of municipal governments whose services contribute greatly to the community well-being in Northwestern Ontario. It will promote activities and support partnerships that contribute to our vibrant and vital region. We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today to present a few issues that are of concern to us including providing equitable and effective health care for all, increasing affordable housing supply for residents, addressing the homelessness crisis, removing barriers for women and other marginalized groups to pursue elected office, enhancing safety on northern highways, and increasing revenue opportunities for municipalities to combat exorbitant inflationary costs.

Health Care Concerns

Public Health Care Funding

Ontario municipalities are legislated to cost share the funding of local public health agencies with the province to provide public health services and programming. Public health initiatives and the local public health response to the pandemic have proven to show a significant return on investment in the protection of the population, thereby improving healthcare, saving healthcare costs and resources, and reducing hallway medicine.

In 2019 the Ontario Government released detailed changes to local public health funding, changing the provincial/municipal cost shared ratio from 75%/25% to 70%/30%. Additionally, they added previously 100% provincially funded public health programs to the cost shared funding obligation.

For the COVID-19 public health response, the province provided mitigation funding to support municipalities and local public health units. However, the COVID-19 mitigation funding will not extend beyond 2023. This will have a devastating impact on Northern municipalities.

It has been determined that this decrease in the Provincial contribution will result in a 36% increase in the municipal levy for the municipalities in the Northwestern Health Unit catchment area. This is up 16% from January 2021, where this change resulted in a 20% increase in the municipal contribution. It is more costly to provide health services in the North due to the geographic distance to access these services. The province cannot continue to download costs to municipalities as this practice is unsustainable and will result in a reduction of care.

Northern Ontario remains in a healthcare crisis. More than 350 physicians are currently needed to fill shortages, and that is not accounting for anticipated retirements. We also lack specialists, infrastructure, equipment, and we need to retain financial resources to address the issues we experience to provide the same level of care as Southern Ontario. Our geographic location should not limit us. We should be afforded equitable resources to provide the same level of care to our residents.

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine University (NOSM) is an important solution to address the health inequities and lack of physicians in the North. Due to additional financial requirements of becoming a University, NOSM is also experiencing financial strain and requires a permanent increase in annual base funding of \$4.0 million before the end of this fiscal year in order to continue to educate our future physicians to work in the North.

NOMA asks the province to restore the 75%/25% funding ratio for all cost-shared programs, to assume 100% funding once again for those programs identified as such in the public health budget for 2018-2019 and continue the current mitigation funding until such time as the cost-shared arrangement is restored to 75%/25% to account for the additional costs we experience to provide health care in the North.

Agency Nurses & Locums

There were many consequences of COVID-19, and we are still experiencing adverse effects. It is difficult to secure permanent nurses in Northwestern Ontario. Healthcare centers and hospitals have resorted to hiring locums to fill the void, but this has become increasingly difficult as well.

Nurses faced great stress during the pandemic. They experienced an increase in workload, overtime, doing jobs they would not normally do, and mental health concerns (**Table 1**). As a result, many chose to leave nursing and change careers, and some chose to retire early. That combined with fewer young people choosing to pursue a career in nursing has resulted in a deficit of nurses.

Healthcare centers have been forced to recruit agency nurses at an elevated cost to keep their doors open. Of the 14 healthcare providers in Northwestern Ontario, all of them employ agency nurses except the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. **Table 2** outlines the percentage of agency nurses each health center uses across the region as of November 2022.

Using agency nurses comes with consequences. They are unfamiliar with procedures and staff which takes time to learn. They are paid upwards of 50% more than a permanent full-time or part-time staff which not only affects the hospital budget but also the ability to provide the same level of care. Additionally, regular staff are aware of the increased pay and that can cause negative tension among staff, especially when they are doing the same job duties.

Agencies are able to provide their nurses with incentives that healthcare centers are often unable to provide. Nurses have been drawn away from healthcare positions by being offered significantly more pay. There was a situation in Red Lake, where a nurse resigned from their position at the hospital to work as an agency nurse. They were hired back as an agency nurse to do the same job because the hospital could not find anyone else to work. This doesn't occur regularly, as hospitals try not to hire nurses who live in the region, but when desperate, some have in order to maintain operations.

Retroactive to April 1, 2023, there was a reduction in the number of Ministry of Health allocated physician spots on the Rural Northern Physician Group Agreement (RNPGA) Contract for Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital & Atikokan General Hospital. There was funding for 7 doctors at both hospitals but that was reduced to 6 in Red Lake and 5 in Atikokan. Furthermore, some of the existing physicians will be leaving in Red Lake. Therefore, as of October 1, 2023, it is anticipated that there will be only 4 full-time equivalents. This devastating change of losing 3 doctors

will negatively impact the ability to recruit doctors, draw locums and keep physicians working locally. Red Lake Hospital has stopped operating the Saturday morning urgent care clinic and answering incoming emails and/or messages from patients. This will impact the level of care, appointments, prescription renewals, and increase ER volume and wait times in Red Lake. In Atikokan, this change will reduce the number of doctor visits by a third.

Doctors in Red Lake and elsewhere are already struggling to cover 24/7 and find locums. More ER closures may be in the future if the hospital is unable to secure staff. The North deserves equitable and robust healthcare that includes more than a skeleton crew of rural doctors and nurses.

Furthermore, the RNPGA formula used is based on community population. Though the facilities are located in a designated community, it serves all of the smaller surrounding communities as well. Therefore, the formula should be based on “catchment area”, not the population of the hosting community.

NOMA asks the province to work with healthcare centers and hospitals across the region to secure adequate nursing staff to avoid closures. In the event that locums must be used, we ask your government to consider a cost-share funding solution to maintain affordability.

Bill 60 - Your Health Act

Bill 60 will expand the for-profit provision of health care in Ontario. This will result in a massive transfer of healthcare services and resources, including health human resources, to the for-profit sector through broadly defined integrated community healthcare services centres. This could result in poorer health outcomes at a higher cost to the system, particularly in Northern Ontario.

The lack of constraint on services to be delivered through what would become a for-profit healthcare system parallel to the publicly funded health system is concerning. The legislation does not appear to restrict shifting more complex and less routine surgeries than those suggested by the government, such as knee replacements and cataract surgeries, out of the public hospital system. The legislation does not disclose nor limit the full range of services that could be potentially conducted by these centres. The lack of constraints poses a threat to our not-for-profit health system and patient safety.

Ontario is experiencing an unprecedented healthcare crisis. The proposed expansion of healthcare delivery for the for-profit sector will result in a two-tier health system in our province. It will disproportionately affect Northern and Rural communities, that are less likely to see for-profit service establishment. The legislation would deepen the healthcare human resources crisis by draining staff into the for-profit sphere, more likely in the densely populated South end of the province and leaving the most complex procedures to the public sector, increasing wait times even further. It will result in competition for resources and funding, leaving the most costly and complex procedures to be borne by the public sector.

It is our view that Bill 60 threatens the framework and foundations of universal healthcare delivery in our province. For-profit health care will draw doctors and nurses from the small community hospitals, resulting in closures of small public community hospitals, forcing residents to travel hundreds of kilometers for treatment. NOMA believes that Bill 60 will lead to overall poorer health outcomes, higher costs, and less access to healthcare services for those most in need. NOMA asks the government to rescind Bill 60 and maintain a not-for-profit health care system.

Allow Municipalities to Retain Surplus Proceeds from Tax Sales

Municipalities are facing mounting financial pressures and they are in desperate need of tapping into alternative revenue streams besides their tax base and current government funding. Additional revenue streams are needed to compensate for the inflationary costs of materials and labour.

Prior to being repealed by the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, 2017, Section 380(6) of the Municipal Act, 2001, the province allowed for a municipality to retain surplus proceeds from tax sales within their jurisdiction.

Municipalities have limited opportunities to obtain revenue outside of municipal taxation. This surplus money can offset costs to improve the municipality such as replacing aging infrastructure and reinvesting the money to increase affordable housing. Retaining surplus funds would be vastly beneficial to municipalities, especially small and rural municipalities with a small tax base.

The Public Tax Sale process is burdensome to a municipality that invests a considerable amount of time and money recovering these proceeds for the potential sole benefit of the Crown in Right of Ontario. There are other associated costs with the Public Tax Sale process that have impacts on municipalities that are not recovered and municipalities have no other avenue to increase their revenue.

NOMA asks the government to reinstate legislation permitting a municipality to retain surplus proceeds from tax sales and to use those additional funds to address housing and other needs in their communities.

Women & Marginalized Groups in Politics

Women and other marginalized groups have historically been underrepresented in politics and continue to face barriers in their pursuit of elected office. Misogyny, harassment, and discrimination have been identified as significant challenges to these groups in politics. All individuals have the right to participate in a political environment that is free from these barriers. All people have a right to experience respect, integrity, equity, and inclusivity in all areas of life.

In the 2022 municipal election, approximately 6,325 candidates competed for the 2,842 elected positions. A total of 915 women were successful in acquiring an elected position, compared to 1921 men for a total of 32.3% of women elected or acclaimed (**Table 3**). This is slightly higher than in 2018, which was 29.4%, and 24% in 2014. There are 223 elected positions in Northwestern Ontario and 62 are occupied by women totalling 27.8%, lower than the provincial average. There are very few representatives for marginalized groups across Northwestern Ontario.

According to the provincial legislative member list in Table 4, Ontario experienced a 4% reduction in women in provincial government compared to the previous election. Visible minority representation did increase by 3.2% in Ontario (**Table 4**). However, in the 2021 federal elections, there was a 5.3% decrease in candidates from a visible minority in 2019 (**Table 5**). Ultimately, we need to do better.

Addressing political under-representation by women and other marginalized groups would greatly help ensure that women and cultural community interests are reflected in policy and parliamentary deliberations, thus enabling them not only to thrive in politics but in society.

Data from the North Superior Workforce Planning Board shows the gender balance in the region is shifting slower than elsewhere in the province in both municipal government and other sectors across the region. For example, only 8.5% of the 1,100 active apprentices in the Thunder Bay district last year were women, compared to a provincial average of 12.5%. Fewer than 10 women per year are taking trades apprenticeships in the Kenora and Rainy River districts out of 245 and 131 active apprenticeships, respectively. We appreciate the governments announcement of \$3.6 million to support 2,200 women and young people to prepare for a well-paying career in construction trades. However, it is unclear if this will directly benefit those specifically in Northwestern Ontario.

Women and visible minorities often experience greater rates of unemployment, which is a significant barrier to entering politics due to financial restraints. In Ontario, the unemployment rate among population groups designated as visible minorities was estimated at 6.4% in January 2023 compared to a 4.3% rate for those who are not visible minorities and did not identify as Indigenous.

Affordable childcare is another major factor to women not entering politics and the workforce as childcare is often the mother's role. If you focus on wage earning, it may also default to the women because on average they earn less. According to the Labour Market Report, as of January 2023, the average hourly wage rate was \$31.45 for women, rising by \$1.51 from \$29.94 a year prior. For men, the average hourly wage rate was \$36.44, an increase of \$0.91 from \$35.53 in January 2022.

NOMA asks the provincial government to create legislation to ensure equity, safety, and security for women and other marginalized groups to pursue a position in elected office.

NOMA asks the government to reduce financial barriers and ensure women and other marginalized groups have equitable resources to run for government.

Sale Of Crown Land

NOMA would like to thank the Ministry for consulting with municipalities on crown land in 2022. The consultations were a great step towards understanding the need for municipalities to have the ability to acquire land within their municipal boundaries to expand housing and economic development projects. Acquiring serviceable land within municipal borders has proved challenging. We would like to work with government to address the housing shortage in Northwestern Ontario.

Crown land represents 87% of the province, much of which resides in Northwestern Ontario. This presents a critical development opportunity for Northwestern Ontario municipalities. Municipalities are interested in pursuing crown land development within their municipal boundaries, with a particular interest in lakefront lots, to expand their property tax revenue and help meet the demand for housing supply.

It is important to note that some municipalities in Northwestern Ontario have large areas of crown land that are unpatented and therefore tax exempt. Some municipalities have expressed frustration that they are required to provide services in and around these lands (e.g., road maintenance and fire protection) but they receive no revenues from them. Even where the lands are used for certain purposes, such as the placement of hydro transmission lines, no property taxes or payment in lieu of taxes are paid to the municipality. This further exasperates the financial burden on municipalities as they do not realize revenue but pay for the cost of service.

The province requested a survey of all conservation land to be evaluated to determine if any are eligible to be developed for housing. **NOMA requests the province to conduct a survey and evaluate all crown land within municipal borders in Northern Ontario to determine if they are eligible to be sold for development to increase the housing supply and expand their property tax base. The province would benefit from generating revenue from the sale.**

NOMA asks the province to ensure compensation is provided to municipalities that are required to provide service to tax-exempt lands.

NOMA asks the Minister of Northern Development and Natural Resources and Forestry to clearly indicate if the Ministries will pursue this issue further after municipal consultations.

Northern Ontario Road Safety, Maintenance, and Rest Stops

According to Ontario Good Roads Association, 2023 is proving to be a fatal year for vehicle crashes. As of June 21, 2023, there have been 150 fatalities on Ontario roads so far this year. At this time last year, there were 125 deaths, a 16-year high. 2023 is on pace to eclipse the 359 fatalities in 2022.

In 2022, the OPP reported that it responded to 9110 crashes involving large trucks, the highest rate in more than a decade. Crashes involving transport trucks accounted for 71 of Ontario's Road fatalities last year. Charges were laid in 2858 of these cases, and the blame was distributed among both truck drivers and other drivers involved in the crashes – about 1/3 of the charges went to the other drivers.

Motorists don't seem to appreciate how long it takes for these large trucks to brake, as many of them carry very heavy loads. The most common risky behaviours cited as the cause for these crashes are improper lane changes, and following too closely, as well as the most predictable factor: problematic driving behaviours, such as speeding, careless driving, and lack of seatbelt use.

NOMA appreciates that governments increase in snow clearing standards to clear within 12 hours of a snowstorm instead of the previous 16 hours. However, despite this change we still experienced an increase in fatal collisions on our northern roads this past Winter. This indicates that this strategy was unsuccessful to address the safety conditions on northern roads. **NOMA recommends increasing snow clearing standards to 8 hours.**

This past Winter there were collisions daily. **Table 6** outlines numerous fatal accidents that occurred over the past year and 4 videos that show driving conditions in the North and accidents involving transport trucks. The province needs a clear plan on how to address the winter conditions in the north and ensure adequate funding is available to keep drivers safe. Removing the snow is an important factor to save lives but so is ensuring people are driving safely. We appreciate OGRA running the road safety audit course this Fall, but this does not guarantee the road safety of drivers. **The government should consider alternate ways to address safety including more safety signs to slow down and leave more space, more preventative anti-icing, and/or variable speed signs.**

Lastly, it is important that the government considers enhancing the standards for rest stops. There are multiple stretches of highway in Northwestern Ontario without a year-round maintained rest stop available to drivers (details outlined in **Table 7**). More rest stops should be available to drivers along the sections outlined in Table 7, especially given the unforgiving weather conditions we experience in the North. NOMA would be pleased to work with the government to help increase year-round rest stops in Northern Ontario.

NOMA asks the government to invest in other ways to increase safety on northern roads and clarify the government's plans to enhance highway safety in the north to reduce crashes in Northwestern Ontario.

NOMA asks the government to open more maintained year-round rest stops for truck drivers and other vehicles to access washroom facilities.

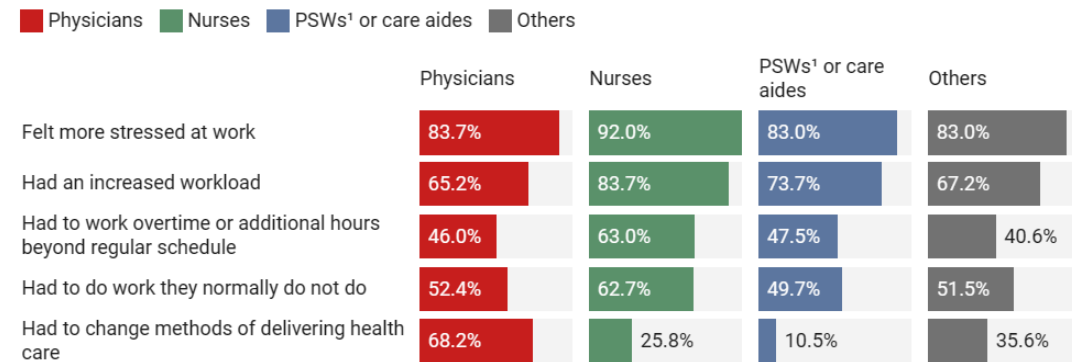
Additional Comments

Small and Rural Municipalities struggle to afford sending elected officials to AMO, ROMA and other conferences to meet with Ministers. NOMA asks that the government set aside time during or directly after the conference for municipalities to participate in virtual delegation meetings.

NOMA requests an update regarding the status of consultations with municipalities to discuss railway costs.

Appendix

Table 1: Impacts experienced by health care workers during the Covid-19



(Source: Statistics Canada)

Table 2: Regional Health Centre Data Estimates of % of agency nurses as of November 2022

	Location	% nursing staff (agency)
1	Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre	0%
2	St. Joseph's Care Group	15%
3	Nipigon District Memorial Hospital	9.6%
4	North of Superior Health Care Group	8 total (10.6%)
5	Sante Manitouwadge Health	6 total (25%)
6	Geraldton District Hospital	20%
7	Atikokan General Hospital	2.5%
8	LaVerendrye General Hospital	17.86%
9	Emo Health Centre	8.88%
10	Rainy River Health Centre	5.75%
11	Rainycrest Long Term Care	38.75%
12	Lake of the Woods District Hospital	11 total (7%)
13	Dryden Regional Health Centre	5%
14	Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital	4%
15	Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre	36%

Table 3: Municipal Electoral Results by Gender 2022

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>Acclaimed</i>	165	8.5%	388	8.8%	553
<i>Elected</i>	750	38.7%	1,533	35.0%	2,283
<i>Unsuccessful</i>	1024	53.8%	2,464	56.2%	3,489
Total	1,939	100.0%	4,385	100%	6,325

Source: Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2022

Table 4: Provincial legislature diversity 2022 compared with previous election.

	Women	Visible minorities	Indigenous Peoples
All	2.9%	1.5%	-4.2%
BC 2020	2.3%	3.4%	-3.4%
AB 2019	-3.4%	0.0%	-1.1%
SK 2020	3.3%	1.6%	-4.9%
MB 2019	3.0%	5.1%	1.6%
ON 2022	-4.0%	3.2%	-1.6%

Table 5: Proportion of visible minority candidates in federal elections, by party, 2015, 2019 & 2021

	Visible minority candidates (%)				Change 2015-2021	Total candidates (N)		
	2015	2019	2021	2015		2019	2021	
LPC	16.9	18.6	24.0	7.1	338	338	338	
CPC	14.2	16.6	17.2	3.0	338	338	337	
NDP	13.4	22.4	26.9	13.5	338	338	338	
Green	10.9	11.6	14.3	3.4	336	338	252	
BQ	2.6	5.1	11.5	9.0	78	78	78	
PPC		16.2	8.4	-7.8		315	310	
Total	13.4	16.8	18.2	4.8	1,428	1,745	1,653	

Sources: Authors' calculations based on official party biographies, media articles, social media, and name and photo analysis.

Table 6: Notable Highway 11/17 Accidents resulting in death in Northwestern Ontario

Date	Time	Condition Notes	Location	Vehicles Involved	Injuries/Fatalities
November 16, 2022	11:57 PM	Unknown	Highway 17 near Revell Township	Two trucks collided	One person deceased
November 17, 2022	3:44 PM	Road closed approx. 4 hrs.	Hwy 11/17, Balsam St. & Red River Rd.	Tractor trailer and pedestrian	The 43-year-old pedestrian died.
November 29, 2022	5:47 PM	Unknown	Intersection of Hwy 17 & Hwy 519	Truck & transport	One man deceased
December 16, 2022	6:47 PM	Hwy closed for 7.5 hours	Hwy 11/17, John St. & Oliver Rd	Three-passenger cars	Two hospitalized & one deceased
December 3, 2022	9:55 PM	Reopened late morning	Hwy 11-17 & Hwy 102	Snowplow and tractor-trailer	One deceased.
January 10, 2023	5:00 PM	Eastbound land closed for 8 hours.	Hwy 11/17, Dorion Loop Road	Two pick-up trucks	18-year-old died and one in hospital
February 15, 2023	10:00 AM	Hwy closed for 10 hours	Hwy 11/17, Dorion Wolf River Bridge	Two SUV's	Several were injured and one death

6a: Videos of notable accidents involving transport trucks:

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ce9lF_9m7yQ
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_U9vdZjYDo
3. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/9ABOHucMqLY>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7n2dqgEFG6s>

Table 7: Highway Stretches in Northwestern Ontario Without Year-Round Rest Stops

Highway Location	Distance
Marathon to Thunder Bay	300km (1 rest stop but can take 6 hrs. in Winter)
Nipigon to Hornepayne (Hwy 11/631)	350km (no rest stop)
Fort Frances to Dryden (Hwy 71)	310km (no rest stop)
Spruce River Rd to Armstrong	235km (no rest stop)
Nipigon to 35km past Terrace Bay	140km (no rest stop)
Nipigon to Spruce River Rd	100km (no rest stop)
Atikokan to Fort Frances	150km (no rest stop)
Highway 502 Fort Frances to Dryden	190km (no rest stop)
Dryden to Ear Falls	150km (no rest stop)