

Association of Municipalities Ontario

Annual Meeting

FONOM
The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities

 **NOSDA**

 **noma** **Northwestern Ontario
Municipal Association**

Affordable Housing Crisis in the North

First, we want to thank you for your government’s considerable financial commitment to the Social Services Relief Fund during the Pandemic. Along with all the other COVID Relief funding.

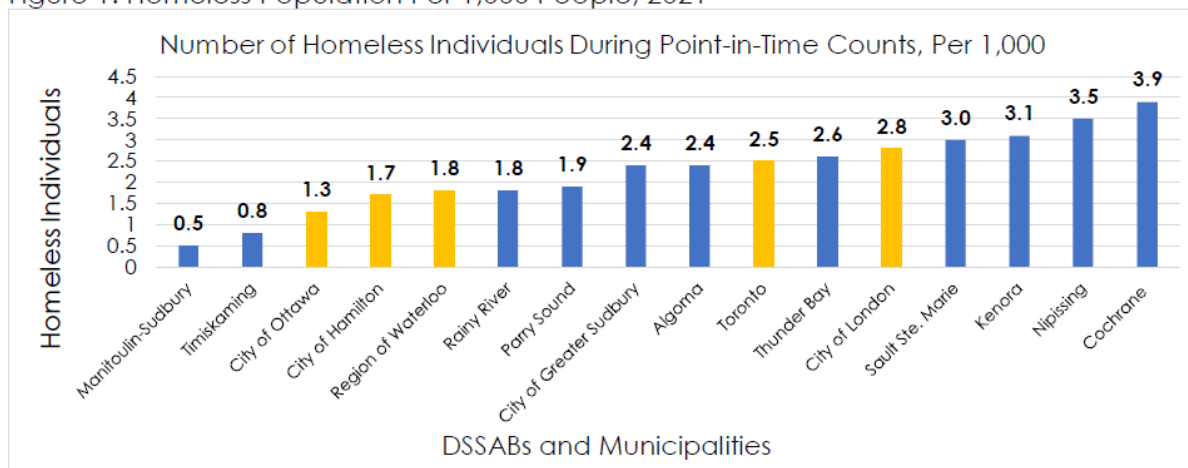
The three organizations believe we needed to provide clean and concise analyses of what is happening in our part of the province. Therefore, we collectively commissioned the Northern Policy Institute (NPI) to analyze the state of homelessness, mental health, and addictions in Northern Ontario. This led to the initial NPI report “[More than Just a Number: Addressing the Homelessness, Addiction, and Mental Health Crisis in the North](#)”

We believe it is essential for those Northern MPPs in the meeting to mention how important a role the Northern Policy Institute provides to our Region.

This morning all of us in this meeting woke up in a safe comfortable place, even if it was in a hotel room in Ottawa. But unfortunately, all elected officials know at least one individual who did not wake up secure today in our community.

We compare the point in time count illustrated in Figure 1 with previous years. The North is seeing a shocking increase of homeless people; this trend concerns us all.

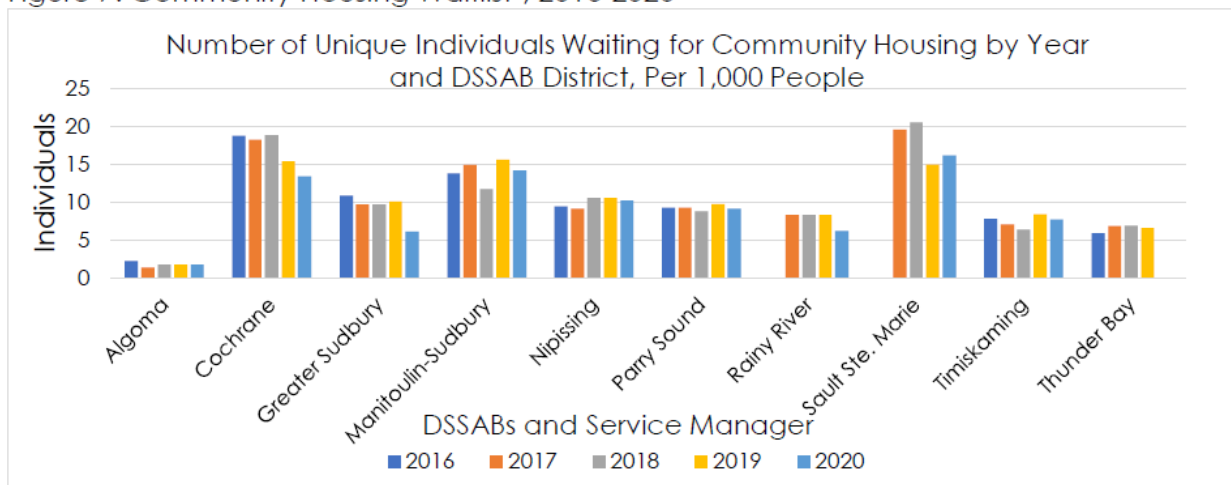
Figure 1. Homeless Population Per 1,000 People, 2021³



Source: Author’s calculations from 2021 enumeration reports from DSSABs and municipalities, and Statistics Canada census district population projections.

In the past three years, all of the social and affordable housing built in the North has received considerable Provincial Funding. But as Figure 7 shows, the demand remains. In addition, we are experiencing an increase due to the rising homeless population in the past year.

Figure 7. Community Housing Waitlist⁸, 2016-2020



Source: Author's calculations from direct outreach to DSSABs and the City of Greater Sudbury, and Statistics Canada Census Division Population Projections for the corresponding years.

There are 8,488 individuals/families on the Community Housing waiting list in Northern Ontario. The Community Housing waiting list represents 50% of the entire public and non-profit housing stock.

Employers who want to expand/develop or relocate their business to Northern Ontario cannot find employees because of the lack of affordable housing in the North.

The province has failed to recognize the District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) as eligible applicants allowed to borrow from Infrastructure Ontario and thereby disadvantaging 144 Northern municipalities.

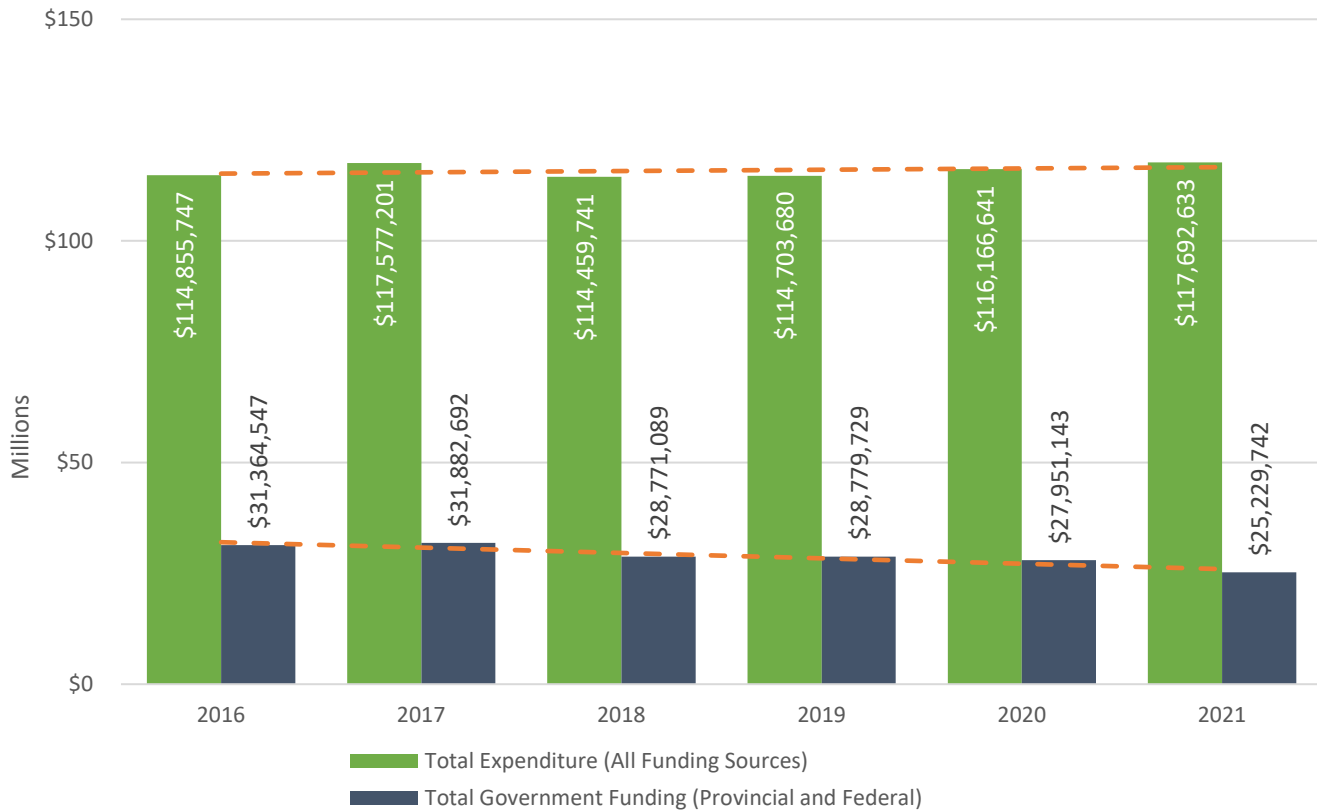
Over the years the 10 DSSABs have borrowed more than **120 million** from banks and various lending institutions. DSSABs would like to have the Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program as an option when they go to borrow.

As you can imagine, a majority of the 9,322 public housing units in the North were built in the 1970's and 80's, these units are slowly reaching their end of life.

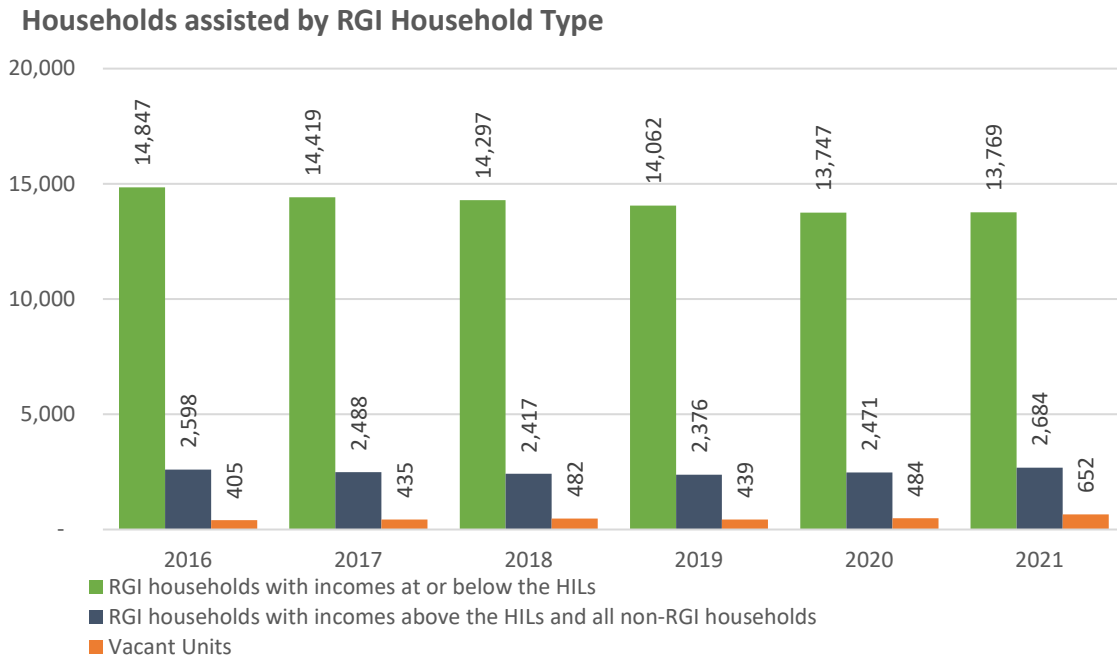
At an estimated construction costs of \$400 per square foot to build new, most units are around 750 square feet so \$300,000 per unit. DSSAB's could be looking to borrow as much as **2.5 billion** dollars to replace existing units over the next 20 years.

The chart below clearly shows that in Northern Ontario, the federal and provincial funding is declining as the municipal share continues to increase.

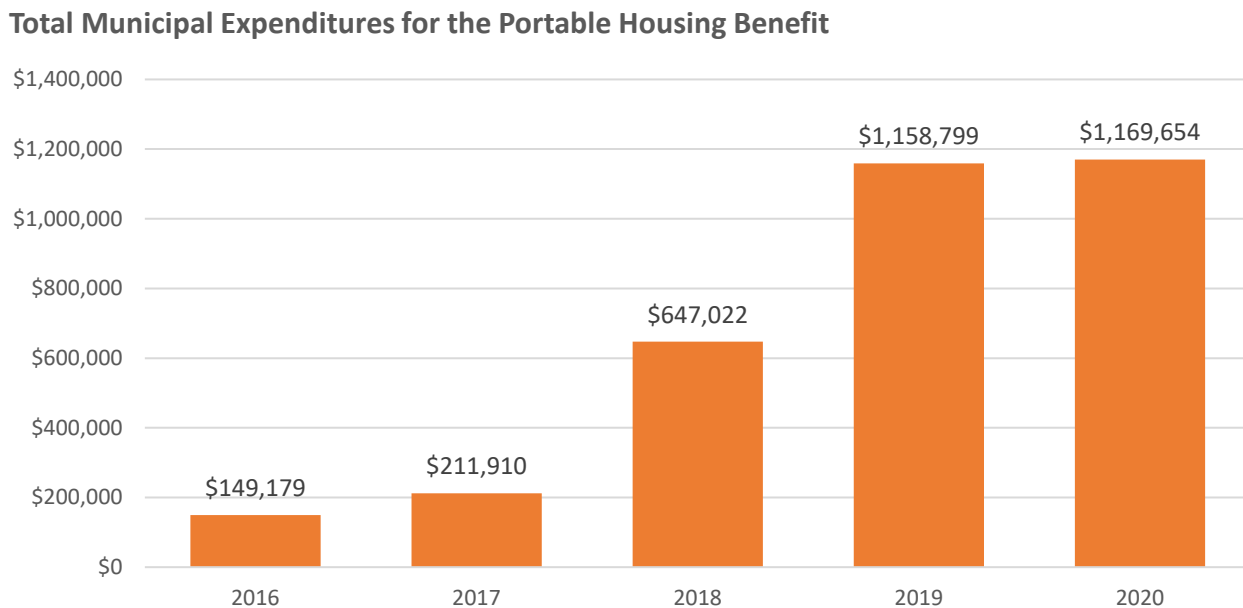
Total Expenditure vs Total Government Finding



Since 2016, the North has managed to relatively maintain the RGI units as our housing stock reaches end of life and non-profit providers reach the end of operating agreements.



In Addition, northern municipalities through their DSSABs are using 100% municipal funding to increase the number of local Portable Housing Benefits.



Northern municipalities and DSSABs find that ministries like Health, Solicitor General and Social Services in the North are all struggling because of the lack of equity, but DSSABs/Municipalities are not even being considered partners.

Request:

- **The North is asking the Ministers to employ an ‘all of government’ approach to provide sufficient stable funding to Northern Ontario to address the Affordable Housing crisis and provide coordinated funding to support local Service Manager strategies.**
- **The North is asking the government to support NOSDA in its request to make the required changes that would allow DSSAB’s to have access to capital financing options through Infrastructure Ontario.**
- **The North is asking the government to build on the Housing and Affordability Taskforce report by using the provincial revenues raised by land transfer tax to create a primarily grants-based Northern Ontario Affordable Housing Investment Fund that would enable Northern communities to grow their economy, create good-paying jobs and support the most vulnerable people with a safe affordable place to live.**

Housing Affordability in the North

Northern Ontario is experiencing an Affordable Housing Crisis wherein many singles, families, and seniors in addition to vulnerable populations cannot afford the market rents in many communities.

The cost of construction for new residential and multi-residential housing has increased significantly over the years and developers are forced to charge market rents at much higher rates to cover their margins.

New businesses looking to expand or setup in Northern Ontario are not able to find suitable housing for their employees.

The health care sector is trying to recruit doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals to the North, but they are hampered by the lack of market housing for sale or rent in many Northern communities.

The construction trades sector is unable to attract trained professionals to the North because of the lack of market housing for sale or rent.

Many seniors who are returning north to their hometowns or simply looking to move out of their current homes into more accessible homes are faced with skyrocketing market rents that are unaffordable.

The Housing Crisis and Homelessness is a complex challenge. But our organizations are here and willing to work with the Government to address it together.

Request:

- **The North is asking this government to work with us to address this Northern Ontario crisis and develop a strategy for Northern Ontario that would see market housing more affordable to middle-income individuals and families.**

Homelessness, Addiction and Mental Health Crisis in the North

We would like to thank you for your incredible leadership and the financial assistance provided through the global pandemic. Your commitment and dedication to helping municipalities navigate through these unprecedented times has been greatly appreciated.

The pandemic has both magnified and exasperated the mental health and addictions crisis in the North and highlighted how crucial mental health care is to our well-being. How the government adapts to address the needs of those suffering from mental health, addictions, and homelessness will shape the future. We need to get this right! We want to work with government to

ensure the right resources are put in the right communities to reach people who need the resources where they live as soon as possible.

The mental health crisis is not merely restricted to vulnerable populations in the North, but rather Northern Ontarians in general are experiencing poorer mental health than the rest of the province. We appreciate the governments new action plan to address mental health and addiction in Ontario outlined in the ‘Roadmap to Wellness’ to establish a ‘Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence’ that will strive to standardize and monitor service delivery, report on performance, and provide support to health professionals.

Northern Ontario, however, faces unique challenges which must be considered by government before the establishment of a new standardized and centralized system of care for the province. While the Roadmap to Wellness addresses many addiction and mental health issues, the implementation and delivery of these services must look different in the North for them to be effective.

That is why FONOM/NOMA/NOSDA jointly commissioned a study by the Northern Policy Institute (NPI) [“More than Just a Number: Addressing the Homelessness, Addiction, and Mental Health Crisis in the North”](#)

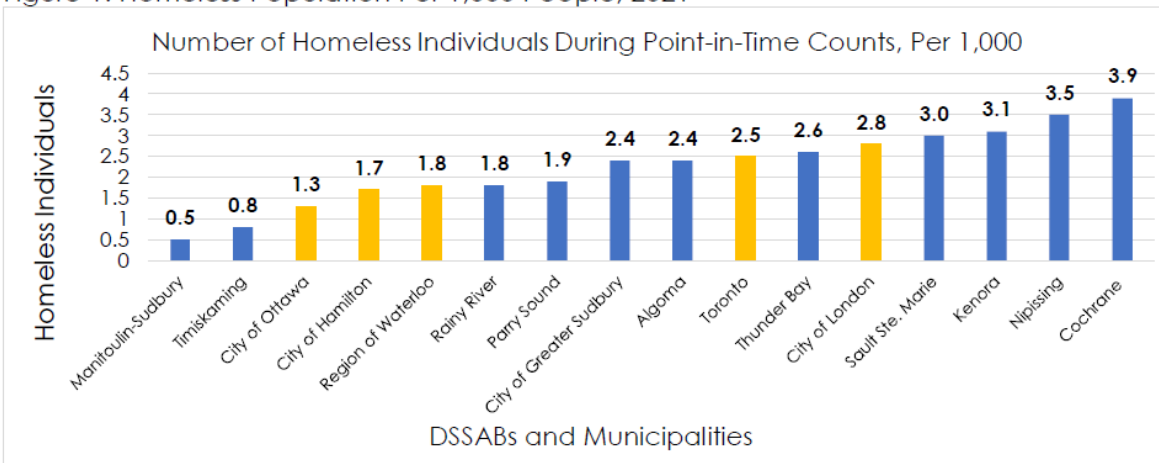
The report calls on for urgent action by the provincial and federal government to address the homelessness, addiction, and mental health crisis in Northern Ontario.

The 2021 Homelessness Enumeration for Northern Ontario:



Figure 1 from the NPI report below, from the 2021 homeless enumeration data, shows the Districts of Sault Ste. Marie, Kenora, Nipissing, Thunder Bay and Cochrane have proportionately larger homeless populations than the five largest cities in Ontario.

Figure 1. Homeless Population Per 1,000 People, 2021³



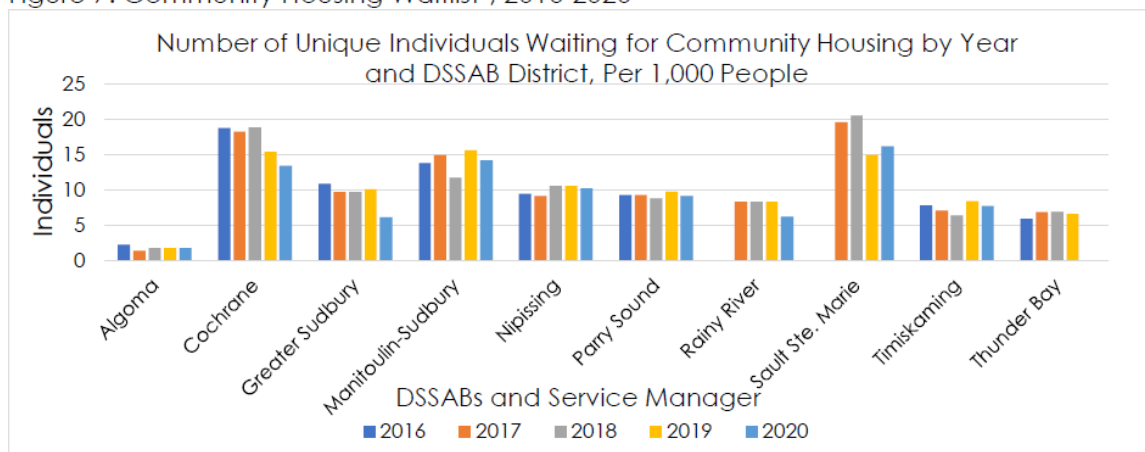
Source: Author's calculations from 2021 enumeration reports from DSSABs and municipalities, and Statistics Canada census district population projections.

According to the NPI report, the Districts of Thunder Bay and Cochrane have more than double the homelessness rates of Ottawa, Hamilton, and Waterloo.

The homelessness shelter system is sparsely spread across 806,000 square kilometres in Northern Ontario and is predominantly only available in larger Northern cities.

The Community Housing waiting list represents 50% of the entire stock, Figure 7 below providing the waiting list number by Northern DSSAB/CMSM.

Figure 7. Community Housing Waitlist⁸, 2016-2020



Source: Author's calculations from direct outreach to DSSABs and the City of Greater Sudbury, and Statistics Canada Census Division Population Projections for the corresponding years.

The numbers in the NPI report are based on data from Point-in-Time counts but many believe the actual numbers would be much higher.

Request:

- **The North is asking this government to support and fund Housing First programs developed specifically by the North, for the North**
- **The North is asking the Ministers to work with the Federal government to make capital grants available to so the North can properly care for its residents whether they need a shelter or affordable housing options**
- **The North is asking the Ministers to provide long-term funding for capital repairs on existing community housing units to maintain the current affordable housing stock in the North.**
- **The North calls on the Federal and Provincial governments to support new and existing Indigenous culturally appropriate community housing facilities.**
- **The North is asking the province to establish a Northern Mental Health and Addictions Centre for Excellence to address the unique challenges of service and program delivery in Northern Ontario.**
- **The North is asking for the establishment of mandated Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams in municipalities throughout Northern Ontario**
- **We ask that this government recognize municipalities and DSSABs as a partner in our collective efforts to address the growing mental health and addiction challenges.**

Northern Policy Institute

- **Finally, we ask the province to work with NOMA, FONOM and NOSDA as we work with the Northern Policy Institute (NPI) to develop the strategies in the [“More than Just a Number: Addressing the Homelessness, Addiction, and Mental Health Crisis in the North”](#) paper.**
 - The intent is to provide concrete steps decision makers and community practitioners can take to implement these recommendations (or others like them) in Northern Ontario. The three recommendations that will be explored in this subsequent piece are: amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act to support service hub communities; support new and existing culturally sensitive community housing facilities for Indigenous peoples; and establish a Northern Mental Health and Addictions Centre in Northern Ontario.
 - The steps identified in this paper will be informed not only by the analysis of the first paper, but by real-world case studies and best practices that will be gathered from literature as well as community members in Northern Ontario. From this information, this second paper will be a guide tool that can inform decision-makers and community practitioners.