

Pathway to Healthy Communities in the Thunder Bay District

A Summary of Community Recommendations



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to assist people across the Thunder Bay district to work together for community change. The community consultations and planning behind the recommendations were made possible through funds from the Healthy Communities Fund, Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport. These recommendations would also align the Ministry's Healthy Communities Grants with local priorities.

A steering committee was formed to guide the planning process. 947 community members from across the district participated in 24 focus groups and an email survey. They were asked a number of questions, including, "What should we do to create a healthy community?" The responses were grouped into common themes and combined with information collected from recent youth consultations and other local reports.

Hopes, dreams and conditions of well-being emerged from the consultations. These are captured under broad statements called "Results." Each result has indicators that can be monitored for progress. While the recommendations are more specific than the results, they are still meant to be broad in scope. They are intended to provide direction for community leaders interested in developing more specific initiatives.

Vision Statement:

"Diverse, involved communities that foster safe and supportive environments where optimal health and well-being is achievable for all."

Overarching recommendations

Citizens recognize that there are underlying factors that have an impact on health, especially mental health. This is supported by growing evidence around the "determinants of health." Efforts may be required at all three levels of government to address the following determinants of health identified locally:

- **Employment and income:** Economic development strategies are key. Industry decline has eroded the tax base and fractured families as one parent is forced to move away to find work.
- **Culture:** Aboriginal people and Francophones are at risk for poorer health. Successful health outcomes for Aboriginal people require solutions that address severe social problems rooted in colonialism and systemic racism. Francophones require services and supports in French.
- **Access to health services:** Mental health and addiction services for all ages and cultures are limited in smaller district communities and First Nations communities.
- **Physical environments:** Citizens value clean air and clean water. As well, safe and affordable housing is critical to addressing a variety of issues.
- **Transportation:** Lack of transportation to grocery stores and leisure activities is a major barrier for seniors and people on limited income. Small communities have no public transportation system.



Suicide and motor vehicle collisions are the leading causes of death among youth and young adults.



**The Aboriginal population is 13.5%.
The Francophone population is 4.1%.**

Result One: All children and youth have optimal success and health.

Poor early child development leads to significant challenges in health and learning. Many sectors need to work together with parents and caregivers to provide seamless support for children at every age. Poor early child development leads to significant challenges in health and learning.

Strategies are required to keep young people in school, connected to their neighbourhoods, and engaged with their families. Different ages need different strategies to foster friendships, and build self-esteem, positive self-identity and leadership skills. These resiliency factors are linked to reduced suicide, tobacco and substance use, and better physical activity and food choices.



The Thunder Bay district has high rates of chronic disease. It is critical that initiatives include both structured and unstructured opportunities for all ages to be physically active.

Recommendations to Achieve Result One:

- 1.1 Support parents throughout their reproductive years to give birth to healthy babies.
- 1.2 Support parents and caregivers to raise healthy and resilient children and youth.
- 1.3 Increase the number of accessible and affordable activities for children that appeal to a variety of interests and cultures.
- 1.4 Increase the number of accessible and affordable youth-friendly programs and activities that appeal to a variety of interests and cultures.
- 1.5 Incorporate positive child and youth development strategies into programs and initiatives in all sectors in order to build resiliency, e.g., early years, education, sport, recreation.
- 1.6 Develop strategies to support youth through their major life transitions, e.g., grades 7, 9, and 12.
- 1.7 Build on inter-sectoral strategies for youth attending high school away from home so they cope and thrive, e.g., housing, social services, education, recreation, employment, etc.
- 1.8 Support a “whole school” approach to promoting health and well-being, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment.

Result Two: All citizens are included and connected to their community.

One’s level of mental and emotional wellness is improved through opportunities to build spirituality, and take part in arts, cultural, sport and recreation activities. Involvement in community groups and networks is also critical, and accessible, affordable transportation enables participation. Given the aging population, intergenerational activities should be considered whenever possible.

Living in a community free of racism and discrimination is also linked to improved mental health. For this document, the term culture refers to one’s heritage, ethnicity and unique way of life, e.g., the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community and Deaf culture.

Efforts to improve community safety are also important. When people feel that their neighbourhoods are unsafe, they are less likely to spend time outside or encourage their children to play outside. Activities that increase physical activity will further improve health.

Recommendations to Achieve Result Two:

- 2.1 Incorporate strategies in all sectors that build acceptance and address bullying and discrimination based on culture, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, special needs, income, etc.
- 2.2 Expand activities that provide opportunities for people of all ages to learn about and take pride in their culture and the culture of others.
- 2.3 Increase access to affordable activities, facilities, and groups or clubs that appeal to a variety of ages, interests, abilities, and cultures.
- 2.4 Implement strategies in all sectors to address barriers to participation in local physical activity, recreation and sport opportunities.
- 2.5 Use existing neighbourhood facilities, e.g., schools, community centres, churches, to create community hubs that bring people of all ages together.
- 2.6 Establish strategies that connect all ages to the outdoors, and ensure communities, neighbourhoods, parks, trails, etc. are safe, accessible and well maintained.
- 2.7 Build on local strategies that focus on personal and community responsibility to address root causes of crime.



Heart disease and cancer are the leading causes of death among adults.



There is a high proportion of seniors across the district, except in the Aboriginal population where there is a high proportion of children and youth.

Result Three: All people have enough healthy, culturally appropriate food.

Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life (World Health Organization, 1996). There is increasing evidence that links gardening, food preparation and cooking skills with improved food choices and diet.



Community design can improve access through the location of grocery stores, community gardens and support for local agriculture. Strategies that improve the system that supplies food benefits isolated communities where there is only one grocery store.

Most people know what healthy foods are. However, the healthy choice needs to be the easy choice when away from home.

The nutritional value of food served and sold in schools, workplaces, recreation centres, and other places can be improved through policy development.

Recommendations to Achieve Result Three:

- 3.1 Strengthen food systems through strategies that improve the supply, variety, freshness and affordability of food, use of wild foods, and local food production, especially in small communities and First Nations communities.
- 3.2 Increase access to healthy foods among individuals who are food insecure (all sectors).
- 3.3 Increase access to affordable healthy food and decrease access to unhealthy food choices in public places through municipal planning, and policies in a variety of sectors, e.g., schools.
- 3.4 Provide opportunities for people of all ages to learn more about healthy eating and where our food comes from, and to improve food skills such as cooking, budgeting, food preparation, gardening, food storage, preservation, etc.

Result Four: All people have a reduced risk of preventable injuries.

According to emergency room statistics, the five most common causes of unintentional injury in the Thunder Bay district are motor vehicle collisions, ATVs, falls, and sports.

Motor vehicle collisions occur most in men ages 17 to 24. ATV injuries occur most in children and youth, and sports injuries occur most in young people ages 10 to 14. Falls occur mostly in older adults.

Community design and policy play an important role in injury prevention, e.g., infrastructure that ensures pedestrians and cyclists are safe.



Recommendations to Achieve Result Four:

- 4.1 Work collaboratively to address current trends around motor vehicle collision rates.
- 4.2 Develop strategies to increase the safe use of ATVs among children and youth.
- 4.3 Sustain existing falls prevention initiatives targeting seniors.
- 4.4 Incorporate strategies that ensure sports trainers and coaches are equipped to meet the safety needs of the children and youth under their direction.
- 4.5 Develop outreach strategies, infrastructure and policies that support and improve Active Transportation safety in all sectors, and in all seasons, i.e., travel that is self propelled like walking, wheeling, and cycling.





Building on Strengths

The “Pathway to Healthy Communities” recommendations do not stand alone. Other planning efforts are working on specific issues. While most are for Thunder Bay, they may provide a starting point for smaller communities. These include the following:

- Thunder Bay Drug Strategy
- Overcoming Racism and Discrimination in our Community: Thunder Bay Plan for Action
- Thunder Bay Youth Strategy
- Thunder Bay Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy
- Thunder Bay Crime Prevention Strategy
- Age Friendly Communities
- Thunder Bay Active Transportation Plan
- Earthwise Community Environmental Action Plan
- Best Start Strategic Plan
- Northwest Falls Prevention Strategy
- Tobacco Control Area Network (TCAN) Regional Action Plan

Thank you!

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- Thunder Bay District Healthy Communities Steering Committee
- Agency Stakeholders
- Community Members

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Access the full report: www.healthythunderbaydistrict.ca

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