



THUNDER BAY DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**  
2016

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Thunder Bay District  
**Health Unit**

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## Message from the Board of Health Chair



Joe Virdiramo, BOH Chair

As chair of the board, I'm pleased to share with you the progress the organization has made in 2016 as we continue to offer quality public health services throughout the Thunder Bay District and meet the accountability expectations of the taxpayers.

The year was a busy one for the organization, particularly during the fall when we embarked on establishing a new strategic plan for 2017-2020. The strategy will focus on four priority areas: communities and people first, mental wellness, indigenous people, and organizational effectiveness. These priorities emerged through an assessment of community needs and alignment with expected changes in the provincial public health landscape. As a

member of the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee which helped guide the plan's development, I saw first-hand the staff's passion for taking care of the public health needs of this community. Along with the rest of the Board of Health, I look forward to the implementation of this plan in 2017.

Of course, what makes the annual report such a pleasure to read is reviewing the innovative initiatives and projects undertaken by the different programs each year, and 2016 was no exception. An evaluation of the Healthy Living team's [gleaning program](#), for instance, revealed some impressive findings of the effectiveness of the program. As well, a [collaboration between the Vaccine Preventable Disease and Healthy Schools teams](#) increased efficiencies in service delivery, and the Sexual Health program's decision to take on the [leadership of the grassroots initiative SWAN](#) (Supporting Women through Adversity in the North) proved to be a success by providing health services to women in our community who might not otherwise be able to access them. These are just a few of the contributions that TBDHU programming has made to public health in 2016.

As I look at the year's achievements, I want to thank the TBDHU's team of professionals for their continued service to the people of this District. I also thank our residents, partner agencies, and the

province of Ontario for ongoing support of the TBDHU. The activities and accomplishments described in this report are a demonstration of their dedication and efforts.

## 2016 Board of Health

Alana Bishop, Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge	Andy Major, Township of Manitouwadge
Andrew Bringham, Provincial Appointee	Jack Masters, Provincial Appointee
Connie Bryson, Provincial Appointee	James McPherson, Municipality of Greenstone
Jay Daiter ( <i>Vice Chair</i> ), Provincial Appointee	Karen Morley, Town of Schreiber & Terrace Bay
Terry Fox, Town of Marathon	Aldo Ruberto, City of Thunder Bay
Norm Gale, City of Thunder Bay	Roger Shott, Municipality of <b>Neebing</b> /Township of Gillies
Richard Harvey, Townships of Red Rock, Dorion and <b>Nipigon</b>	Don Smith, Municipality of Shuniah
Bob MacMaster, Townships of <b>Conmee</b> & O'Connor	Joe Virdiramo ( <i>Vice-Chair</i> ), City of Thunder Bay

For a list of current Board of Health members and their contact information, visit: [Board of Health Members](#)



# Highlights

## Breastfeeding Workshop Delivery Expands Throughout District



The successful delivery of Ontario's Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) 20-Hour Breastfeeding Course throughout the District clearly demonstrates how collaboration – a key principle of public health – is essential to the efficient delivery of public health programming and to helping communities achieve positive public health outcomes.

The 20-Hour Breastfeeding Course is designed to equip community frontline workers with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide holistic, low-cost, in-house and interactive breastfeeding education to mothers and caregivers of infants and young children. The course is also a requirement for professionals working in accredited Baby-Friendly organizations (e.g. TBDHU) who provide direct care to pregnant women and parents of young children regardless of their infant feeding choices.

After taking a "train-the-trainer" course 3 years ago, members of TBDHU's Lactation Program, along with healthcare professionals from Dilico Anishinabek Family Care and Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, have collaborated to conduct five 20-Hour Breastfeeding Courses within the District. This resulted in 90 professionals learning the standardized BFI Ontario approach to teaching infant feeding and breastfeeding. The professionals ranged from registered nurses and doulas to early childhood educators and dietitians.

"We're very pleased with the reach these courses have had," says Katherine Gillespie-Slobojan, public health nurse and lactation consultant in the TBDHU Lactation Program. "Since empowering these frontline professionals with this evidence-based, standardized education, we are hopeful there will be less confusion and more consistency of information being provided to families and caregivers across the district, regardless if the information is delivered from a midwife, a nurse practitioner or a dietitian."

Being the first health unit in Ontario to receive [BFI designation](#) (2006), the TBDHU has had a long history of championing breastfeeding and a reputation of providing evidence-based infant-feeding information to communities in the district.

“We’re proud to build on this history through the successful implementation of this course,” says Gillespie-Slobojan. “We look forward to seeing the impact the training has on our community as agencies move along the path towards becoming baby-friendly.”

## Gleaning Program Evaluation Yields Many Benefits



Click on the image to view the Gleaning Program Evaluation video.

TBDHU’s gleaning program is one of several initiatives that aim to improve food security in the city. The program has been implemented for several years, working to increase access to local farms offering fresh fruit and vegetables that would otherwise be composted.

In 2016, the program was evaluated to identify outcomes and to determine how it could be improved. The evaluation involved surveys, telephone interviews and analyzing several years of program records.

Results of the evaluation showed that program participants benefited from the free, fresh produce, which they may not have been able to afford otherwise. Over the past six years, this amounted to about 4,000 kilograms of potatoes, 325 cobs of corn, and 4,000 litres and almost 3,100 kilograms of miscellaneous fruits and vegetables. Healthy free food wasn’t the only perk from the program. Participants also enjoyed the opportunity to socialize, get out of the city, be physically active and learn more about locally grown food. Although gleaners kept some of what they picked for themselves, a lot of it was shared with family, friends, and even donated to community organizations.

Aside from identifying the achievements of the gleaning program, the evaluation also pointed to improvements in program delivery. TBDHU is already putting the recommendations into

action to address program access barriers and enhance communication with community partners and gleaners. The program will continue to be monitored to ensure that the new

changes work towards building greater food security in the community.

The video can be viewed here:

<http://bit.ly/gleaningprogram>

## Program Partnerships Provide Improved Client Delivery Services



Laura Dennis, Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases Program with Laura Prodanyk, Public Health Nurse, Healthy Schools Program.

When the TBDHU's Healthy Schools and Immunization Teams piloted an approach for working together more closely to deliver their program mandates, the results were better than expected.

The well-planned collaboration between the two programs began in the spring when the Healthy School's public health nurses (PHN) accompanied the Immunization Team to school clinics to help administer vaccinations. The school PHN's also coordinated the logistics of

the immunization clinic within their assigned schools, acted as the key contacts during the visits, and addressed the health inquiries of students waiting to be immunized.

This arrangement helped increase the school PHN's presence within their assigned schools, resulting in more contact with students. It also resulted in an Immunization nurse being freed up to remain at the TBDHU main office and attend to client inquiries.

"I can't say enough about the partnership with Healthy Schools," says Infectious Disease manager Diana Gowanlock. "It has really helped improve our efficiency and capacity to serve our clients and that's the real measure of our success."

Due to the success of this model, it will continue in 2017.

## More Programming in Rural Communities



Effective collaboration and planning with community partners led to more TBDHU programming being held in rural communities.

In 2016, the TBDHU's Family Health Team connected with coordinators of Best Start Hubs in Murillo, Lappe and Shuniah Township to determine the viability of public health nurses (PHNs) participating in these established rural programs to reach families living outside of Thunder Bay with public health information. The Best Start Hubs - run by registered early childhood educators who provide a safe welcoming space for all community families with children 0 to 6 years of age - was seen as a suitable fit for PHN visits.

On the advice of the registered early childhood educators, optimal dates and time were chosen for monthly nurse visits to the Best Start Hubs throughout 2016. This resulted in 9 visits to the

Murillo Best Start Hub, 7 visits to the Lappe Best Start Hub, and 10 visits to the McKenzie Best Start Hub in Shuniah Township. Through the PHN visits, people attending these rural hubs received public health information about infant and child development, parenting programs, child injury prevention, immunizations, children's nutrition, children's environmental health, physical literacy, oral health, and hand hygiene.

A total of 387 people attended the PHN sessions, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, foster parents, and childcare providers of many ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. An evaluation showed that the public health visits were appreciated by the people attending. They provided opportunities to ask the PHN questions, weigh their babies, and receive toothbrushes, tick removal kits, nutrition guidebooks, and other items that promote good health. Friendships developed and families were connected to community resources and local events.

Due to this success, the Family Health Team and the registered early childhood educators continued to work



together to incorporate visits to rural hubs into regular TBDHU program planning for 2017 and beyond.

## TBDHU Leads Local Grassroots Initiative



Tanelle Rabachuk, Manager, Sexual Health Program

Supporting Women through Adversity in the North (SWAN) is one of those initiatives in our community that has really made a difference in the lives of vulnerable women in our community. The non-profit group began as a grassroots program designed to meet the needs of some of Thunder Bay's most high-risk women through providing a wide range of services, including fellowship, referrals, health care services, harm reduction and much more.

Until 2016, SWAN was overseen by the Salvation Army but due to unforeseen circumstances they were unable to continue and asked the TBDHU's Sexual Health Program to lead SWAN and help revive the program.

"We had seen some of the amazing work SWAN has been doing within the community," says Tanelle Rabachuk, Manager of Sexual Health. "We wanted to ensure this work could continue and since it was a natural fit for our program, taking the lead on it just made sense."

To ensure the initiative would re-emerge successfully, the Sexual Health Team allotted resources and a dedicated staff member to the program. Around the same time as the re-emergence of SWAN, one of TBDHU's community partners, Elevate NWO, began launching a high-risk women's clinic. The clinic was a natural fit for SWAN and quickly led to a partnership with Elevate NWO resulting in a monthly clinic, alternating between Elevate NWO and Grace Place, covering both sides of the city.

Since the revival of SWAN, new partnerships have been formed and relationships between clients and community partners have strengthened. The TBDHU is already looking at

providing more streamlined services and the possibility of connecting SWAN's clients with primary care providers during the monthly clinics.

"Through our partnership with community members and Elevate NWO,

we're able to provide services to women who might not otherwise have access," says Rabachuk. "The services offered will expand as we continue to grow and partner with more organizations. It's really exciting."

## Smoke-Free Champions Recognized



Dan DePeuter, Northwest Tobacco Control Area Network Coordinator, with 2 Smoke-Free Champions Award recipients and Dr. Janet DeMille, Medical Officer of Health

People and organizations committed to smoke-free living were honoured during the 2016 Northwest Smoke-Free Champions Awards. The 23 award recipients were acknowledged by Northwest Tobacco Control Area Network (NW TCAN) on May 31st – World No Tobacco Day – marking the 10th anniversary of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and those whose local efforts have supported the Act in creating a healthier Ontario.

Award recipients nominated by their peers for their dedication to preventing

use of commercial tobacco included Kathy Sanderson, an employee of Crossroads Centre who supported clients to quit smoking during their recovery from other addictions, and Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School for its ongoing commitment to smoking prevention and cessation through the annual Smoke-Free DFC Challenge.

"All 23 have made our work, play, community and province a better, cleaner and healthier place for everyone," says Dan DePeuter, NW TCAN coordinator. "With the support of local champions, the Act has been successful in lowering provincial smoking rates, creating smoke-free spaces and eliminating most marketing of commercial tobacco products to youth."

Despite the strides that this legislation and its supporters have made in preventing tobacco use in the province over the last decade, smoking is still the

leading cause of preventable death in Ontario. As well, there is more tobacco use in Northwestern Ontario than in the rest of Ontario. One in 5 people in

Northwestern Ontario smoke and up to half of them will die from illnesses related to smoking.

## Partnership with Schools Expands Fluoride Varnish Program



The TBDHU knows that good oral health contributes to improved health outcomes within our communities. It also knows that our district has a high child tooth decay rate. So when the TBDHU partnered with 6 targeted elementary schools within the city of Thunder Bay to deliver its fluoride varnish program to children in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2, there was an expectation among the Oral Health Team that this could be a game changer.

“Our community’s child tooth decay rate is currently double the provincial average. Children with significant oral health problems may miss school more, experience more pain and have poor

nutrition,” says Carolyn Tait, Manager of Oral Health Programs.

“The partnership to deliver fluoride varnish within the schools can hopefully indirectly address these issues, as well.”

The TBDHU had already been successfully running evidence-based fluoride programming in 11 daycares and 2 community sites throughout the city. The decision to expand into elementary schools in 2016 (with further expansion planned for 2017) was arrived at through a number of community indicators, including Thunder Bay’s child tooth decay rate, social barriers that impact access to oral health care and a lack of fluoride in our drinking water.

In addition to applying fluoride varnish to students’ teeth, school visits also provide the oral health team the opportunity to educate students on developing good oral hygiene habits which will serve them well into adolescence and beyond.

“We’re so grateful for this partnership,” says Tait. “As we evaluate the program’s impact on each child’s oral health at

Grade 2, it will be interesting to see how it has contributed to an increase in healthy mouths across these schools.”

## Research Leads to Expanded Community Approach to Reduce Alcohol Harms



A renewed focus on alcohol and health at the TBDHU has generated new research, increased TBDHU’s engagement with the community, and has laid the foundation for a community approach to reducing alcohol-related harms. With alcohol availability expanded throughout Ontario, and local data showing elevated risky drinking and increased vulnerability to harms compared to the rest of the province, the timing couldn’t be better.

Drinking alcohol is normalized in our society, so framing risky drinking as an important health and social issue and having people take action to reduce drinking is a challenge. In order to address the issue locally, the Injury and Substance Misuse Prevention and the

Family Health Teams worked to gather information and evidence, and provide recommendations for the community moving forward.

A [community report](#) by the Injury and Substance Misuse Prevention Team on alcohol use, harms, priority populations and potential actions within the Thunder Bay District, and a community consultation with key informants to describe alcohol use in our communities were completed in 2015. The report led to over 60 community stakeholders gathering in February 2016 to discuss alcohol in response to the TBDHU’s research efforts. Emerging from this forum, a cross-sectoral working group was formed, as part of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy committee, to focus on reducing alcohol harms.

Recommendations and actions were developed and integrated into the renewal process for the drug strategy. The health unit also hosted [Municipal Alcohol Policy](#) information sessions across the district, and a number of



municipalities have been strengthening their policies as a result. Local government policy plays an important role in reducing negative consequences of alcohol use and promoting the safe and responsible consumption of alcohol on municipally-owned properties such as parks, arenas and halls.

Meanwhile, the Family Health Team conducted a literature review of the effective interventions and strategies during preconception and pregnancy to prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies. [A](#)

[resulting report](#) will help guide the team's program planning.

Alcohol-related harms are significant and wide-spread and stand in the way of optimum health and success for residents of Thunder Bay District. The TBDHU looks forward to continuing the innovative work that has already begun and implementing actions that will lead to reducing harms from alcohol use in collaboration with its community partners.

## Classroom Cooking Builds Appetite for Learning



Students from St. Francis School taking part in the Cooking With Kids Program

Cooking with Kids (CWK) is one of TBDHU's most-popular school initiatives. This hands-on program brings the "kitchen to the classroom" to provide grade 5 students with a unique learning experience.

Through a series of curriculum-based workshops, children learn to prepare healthy snacks and meals by putting lessons about hand washing, knife safety, measuring ingredients, and simple cooking methods into practice.

"Having adequate food skills influences healthy eating," says Karling Draper, Healthy Schools Team registered dietitian. "Cooking With Kids is about equipping students with knowledge about food and with cooking know-how to help them develop and maintain healthy eating behaviours throughout their lives."

Recipes use common ingredients and are designed to be easy-to-follow so

that participants are successful in the cooking experience. Making kids feel competent in the kitchen and providing them with a positive experience with cooking is integral to the program's success.

"Kids learn about healthy eating in the classroom, but knowledge is not enough," Draper adds. "There are many barriers to healthy eating, including limited skill and confidence in preparing healthy food. Cooking With Kids helps to overcome those barriers. It gives students opportunities to practice food preparation and cooking."

In 2016, 45 Cooking With Kids workshops were delivered to Grade 5s with 702 children taking part. Recent evaluations show that the vast majority of kids reported they learned something new, and felt more confident to cook at home. Teachers' feedback indicated they were very pleased to see kids excited about learning and trying new, healthy foods. One teacher's comment adequately summed up the program's benefits:

"Important skills were learned and kids were completely engaged. Cooking is a great way to instill early healthy habits!"

## Pedestrian and Collision Analysis Research Project



Walking is an easy way to fit activity into everyday life. It's a convenient and affordable way to get the 150 minutes of weekly exercise recommended to improve health and prevent chronic disease, yet many people in Thunder Bay just aren't doing enough of it. The question is why? In 2016, the TBDHU, Lakehead University and City of Thunder

Bay Engineering Department worked together to get some answers.

Through the collaboration, a research process was conducted to gather Thunder Bay residents' attitudes and beliefs about walking, and to analyze pedestrian-vehicle collisions reported in Thunder Bay from 2004-2013. The purpose was to gain a clearer understanding of the barriers preventing locals from walking more often and as a main method of transportation.

Although this type of robust research has been collected in larger cities for

years - helping to build viable, walkable environments - the research was a first for Thunder Bay.

"This was an opportunity to gather local data that didn't exist before," says Joanna Carastathis, health promotion planner. "With the City of Thunder Bay redoing its Transportation Master Plan in 2017, the timing couldn't be better. It's a significant boost to the community's evidence base for engineering and planning efforts."

Using on-the-street interviews, over 300 people were surveyed over a four-month period at a random selection of locations in Thunder Bay. A diverse range of perspectives were gathered on pedestrian safety and the built environment – the factors that have the most influence on people's decision to walk.

"There are lots of aspects to safety. Traffic, sidewalks, lighting, and the threat of crime – real or perceived – all affect the decision to walk," says

Carastathis. "We wanted to measure which have the most influence on walkers in Thunder Bay in order to identify the priorities for making Thunder Bay more walkable."

Survey results indicated that residents wanted more sidewalks, trails, lighting, and separate areas for bikes and people built into the infrastructure to encourage them to walk. Analyses of the pedestrian-vehicle collision data indicated that collisions mostly happen at intersections and mid-block locations where there are no traffic controls – suggesting that there is a need for safer and more frequent crossing facilities.

City administration can use the findings during community consultations and the decision-making to take place in 2017 for the Transportation Master Plan. The TBDHU will apply the research to ongoing advocacy and policy-making towards creating viable active transportation systems.

## Superior North Greenstone Healthy Kids Community Charter



Click on the image to view the Healthy Kids Community Charter video.

The Superior North Greenstone Healthy Kids Community Charter was developed

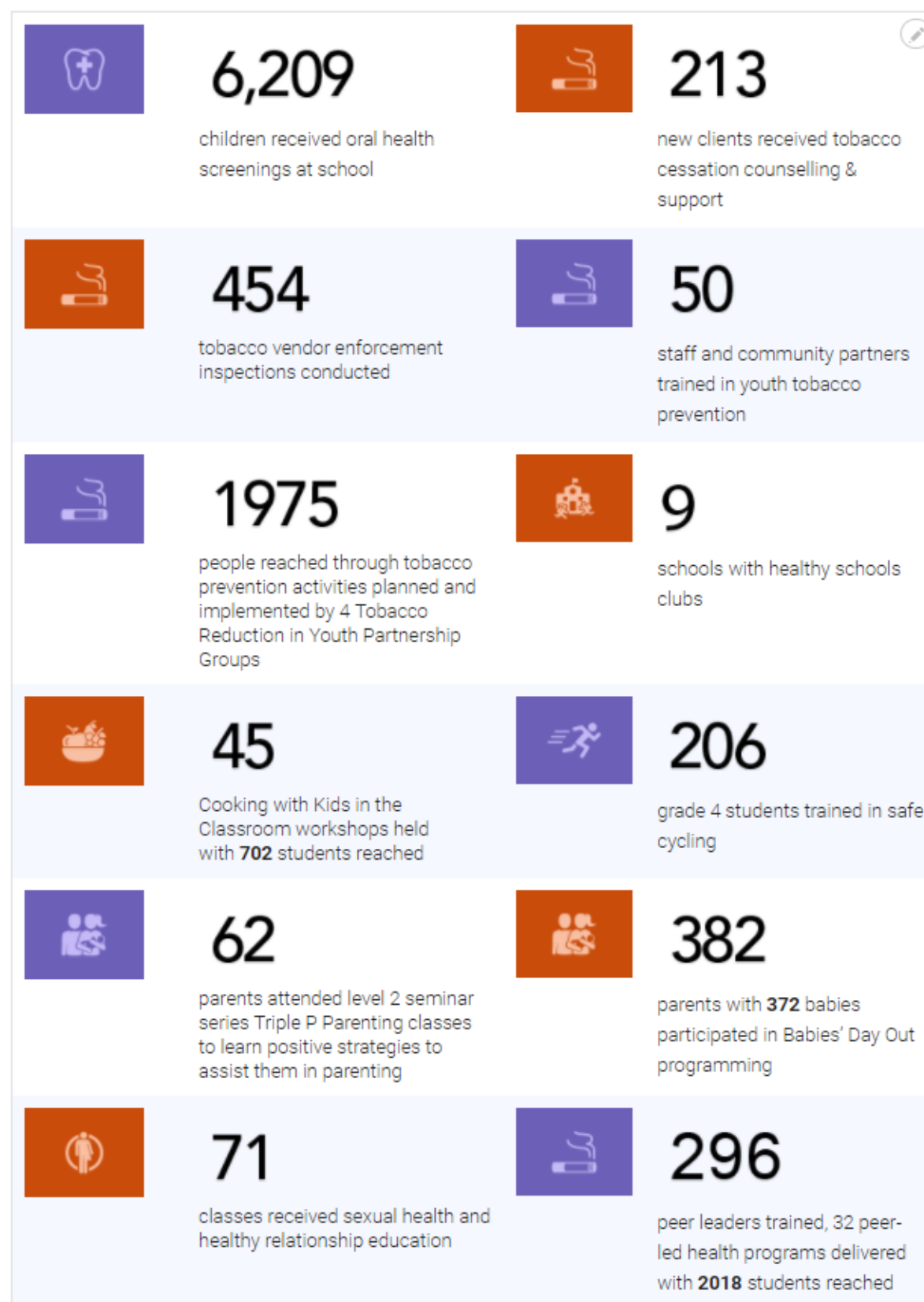
to provide communities within the Superior North Greenstone communities direction for developing programming, services, policies, programs and advocacy activities to improve the health for all children in the region.

The video can be viewed here:

<http://bit.ly/hkcccharter>



## Fast Facts





8

Can You Feel It workshops facilitated by a public health nurse reaching **359** students



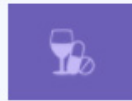
3

high schools participated in the Youth Mental Health & Addictions Champions Project. **39** student champions were trained



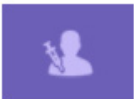
852

children participated in our Early Years Oral Health Fluoride Varnish Program.



505

people participated in Thunder Bay's Recovery Day to celebrate recovery from addiction



108

immunization clinics held within schools



29

institutional outbreaks (including retirement homes) declared and managed



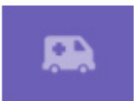
348

animal bites investigated



2905

contacts made by Superior Points harm reduction program



672

clients seen by the street nursing program



118

children participated in [fluoride varnish school program](#).



1595

clients seen by the nurse practitioner



448

public enquiries addressed by public health inspectors



133

annual fridge inspections completed with vaccine users



2009

food premise inspections conducted



536

food handlers trained and certified

## Performance Indicators

Indicator	2016 Target	2016 Performance
% of tobacco vendors in compliance with youth access legislation at the time of last inspection	≥90%	100% (138/138)
% of secondary schools inspected once per year for compliance with section 10 of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA)	100%	100% (15/15)
% tobacco retailers inspected for compliance with section 3 of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA):	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-seasonal retailers</li> </ul>	100%	97.7% (12/131)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• retailers</li> </ul>	100%	100% (7/7)
% tobacco retailers inspected for compliance with display, handling and promotion sections of the Smoke-Free Ontario act (SFOA)	100%	99.3% (149/150)
Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance:	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of schools screened</li> </ul>	100%	98.5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of all JK, SK, and Grade 2 students screened all publicly funded schools</li> </ul>	100%	98.8%
Implementation status of NutriSTEP® Preschool screen	ADVANCED	ADVANCED
Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) Status	DESIGNATED	DESIGNATED*
% of high-risk Small Drinking Water Systems (SDWS) inspected of those due for re-inspection	100%	100% (4/4)
% of suspected rabies exposures reported with investigation initiated within one day of public health notification	100%	100% (349/349)

Indicator	2016 Target	2016 Performance
% of salmonellosis cases where one or more risk factor(s) other than "Unknown" was entered into iPHIS	84%	94.7% (36/38)
% of influenza vaccine wasted that is stored/administered by the public health unit	5%	13.8% (643/4660)
% of refrigerators storing publicly funded vaccines that have received a completed routine annual cold chain inspection	100%	99.2% (132/133)
<b>MONITORING INDICATORS</b>		
% of high-risk food premises inspected once every 4 months while in operation	-	100% (118/118)
% of moderate risk food premises inspected once every 6 months while in operation	-	99.2% (368/371)
% of public spas inspected while in operation	-	100% (16/16)
% of Class A pools inspected while in operation (includes seasonal and non-seasonal) % of personal services settings inspected annually	-	100% (13/13)
% of personal services settings inspected annually	-	100% (203/203)
% of confirmed gonorrhea cases where initiation of follow-up occurred within 2 business days	-	100% (125/125)
% of confirmed invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease (iGAS) cases where initiation of follow-up occurred on the same day as receipt of lab confirmation of a positive case	-	100% (40/40)
% of HPV vaccine wasted that is stored/administered by the public health unit	-	52.0% (65/125)
% of school-aged children who have completed immunizations for hepatitis B	-	57.0% (789/1383)



Indicator	2016 Target	2016 Performance
% of school-aged children who have completed immunizations for HPV	-	42.6% (287/674)
% of school-aged children who have completed immunizations for meningococcus	-	78.4% (1075/1373)

\* Re-designation in progress

## Vision & Mission

### Vision

To be leaders in creating healthy communities and healthy environments.

### Mission

TBDHU is committed to meeting the public health needs of our citizens by delivering accessible programming of the highest standards in protection, prevention and health promotion.

### Core Values

Dedicated | Responsive | Trustworthy | Healthy | Supportive | Fun

## Area Served

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit oversees a geographic area of over approximately 230,000 square kilometres with approximately 146,000 residents.

Our main office is in Thunder Bay. Branch Offices and/or services are located in Geraldton, Marathon, Nipigon, Manitouwadge and Terrace Bay. Visit our [Contact page](#) for a map of our region, with office locations, hours and contact information.

## Programs & Services

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit manages many programs and services that promote health, prevent disease and injury, and protect all residents throughout the district. As a leader in creating healthy communities and

healthy environments, the TBDHU's mission is to meet the public health needs in these three areas by delivering accessible programming of the highest standards.

Healthy Families	Safe Communities	Health & Well-Being
<a href="#">Early Prenatal Classes</a>	<a href="#">Infectious Disease Monitoring</a>	<a href="#">Sexual Health Clinic</a>
<a href="#">Oral Health Services</a>	<a href="#">Public Health Inspections</a>	<a href="#">Tobacco Cessation</a>
<a href="#">Breastfeeding Clinic</a>	<a href="#">Flu Clinics</a>	<a href="#">School and Workplace Health</a>
<a href="#">Fair Start Program</a>	<a href="#">Injury Prevention</a>	<a href="#">Substance Misuse Prevention</a>
<a href="#">Nurse Practitioner Clinic</a>	<a href="#">Emergency Preparedness</a>	<a href="#">Healthy Eating</a>
<a href="#">Parenting Programs</a>	<a href="#">Immunization Clinics</a>	<a href="#">Active Living</a>