

2023 Annual Report



'Sky Light'. Photo credit by Doug Gibbons.

TBDHU.COM



Thunder Bay District
Health Unit

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Land and Territorial Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that the Thunder Bay District Health Unit operates on the traditional lands of First Nations within the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850, Treaty 9, and Treaty 3 areas. This land is the homeland of the Anishinaabe, who have cared for it since time immemorial. We also acknowledge the contribution the Métis have had in these areas.

Message from the Board of Health Chair

This report showcases the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's (TBDHU) accomplishments in fulfilling the provincial public health standards amidst COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts. In many ways, there is no "normal" to return to, but a new context for public health to adapt to in an increasingly complex, "post" pandemic world.

The inter-agency relationships built and strengthened during the pandemic response are vital to public health going forward. These partnerships must be nurtured and maintained to ensure we can continue to be proactive and respond to the diverse communities served by TBDHU across the district. These connections are evident in the highlights featured in this report, describing just a few of the efforts underway to serve our communities. This includes work to improve access to dental care for older adults, bring infectious disease testing to underserved communities, strengthen opioid response, renew commitment to truth and reconciliation, and prepare for emergencies and environmental health threats tied to climate change. This work is only possible in partnership.



As Board of Health Chair, I want to sincerely thank Dr. DeMille and all the staff at TBDHU for their hard work and dedication navigating evolving public health challenges and priorities while continuing to serve communities in creative and impactful ways. I also wish to express appreciation to the many students, community partners, and municipalities who work alongside TBDHU to support a vast array of programs and services. Strong partnerships and collaboration across communities and sectors are fundamental to the work of public health in achieving our vision of healthy lives together.

It is my honour to present the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's 2023 Annual Report.

Don Smith

Message from the Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer



We are indeed stepping into a new “post” pandemic public health landscape. In 2023, the need to continue addressing COVID-19 was matched by the need to return to routine fundamental public health priorities. This necessitated a critical assessment of how those priorities have evolved since pre-pandemic times and what adjustments were needed to adapt our programs and services accordingly. Addressing health inequities is a main focus of TBDHU’s work and this is demonstrated in the highlights showcased in the 2023 annual report. Key highlights include supporting local priorities such as emergency preparedness, street outreach, climate change, older adults, truth and reconciliation, and opioid-related harms.

TBDHU efforts continue to demonstrate innovative leadership, flexibility, and unwavering dedication across the organization—from staff in all roles to the leadership of our Board—to adapt and respond to the real-time local public health needs and challenges across the Thunder Bay District. I am proud of the dedication our staff showed in 2023, and the new perspectives and outlooks gained that will shape the years ahead. Now more than ever, we are stronger and better able to embody our vision, mission, and values to support the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities across the district.

I also want to acknowledge that our successes would not be possible without the strong partnerships with community agencies, service providers, health professionals, and municipalities. Partnerships are essential to the success of public health because they bring together diverse strengths and voices across communities to solve complex health challenges. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the individuals, families, and communities across the District of Thunder Bay. Your trust in public health is never taken for granted, and we continually strive to provide the highest quality programs and services to support the best health outcomes possible for everyone.

It is my pleasure to present TBDHU’s 2023 Annual Report.

Dr. Janet DeMille

About Public Health

Public Health seeks to improve the health of an entire population while reducing health inequities so that everyone has equal opportunities to achieve their full health potential. Public health takes a proactive and upstream approach to health by addressing the needs of a population. We do this through health interventions focused on promotion, prevention, and protection.

The work of public health is diverse and targets multiple levels, including:

- » Working at the **individual and family level** to improve health and wellbeing while reducing disparities
- » Working at the **community and setting level**, where we work with specific groups to create healthy environments and improve wellness.
- » Working at a **system level** where we strategically collaborate across sectors to address complex public health issues.

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU) delivers many programs and services that promote health, prevent disease and injury, and protect the health of all residents throughout the district. As a leader in creating healthy communities and healthy environments, TBDHU's mission is to meet the public health needs by delivering accessible programming of the highest standards. Our dedicated team of public health professionals that lead and support this work is diverse and includes nurses, dental staff, public health inspectors, family home visitors, dietitians, nutritionists, outreach workers, planning and evaluation staff, epidemiologists, and finance, information systems, and communications staff. We collaborate closely with community partners to address health needs and deliver high quality public health programs and services.

TBDHU PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE

Healthy Growth and Development

- » Oral Health
- » Healthy Babies, Healthy Children
- » Lactation Services
- » Family Health
- » School Health

Chronic Disease, Substance Use, and Injury Prevention

- » Physical Activity
- » Nutrition
- » Workplace Health
- » Injury Prevention
- » Tobacco, Vapour, Smoke, Alcohol
- » Harm Reduction

Immunization

Emergency Preparedness

Infectious Disease Prevention and Control

- » Case and Contact Management
- » Outbreak Management
- » Infection Prevention and Control
- » Sexual Health
- » Outreach Services

Environmental Health

- » Food Safety
- » Safe Water
- » Healthy Environments
- » Land Development

Population Health Assessment

Health Equity, including Truth and Reconciliation

Effective Public Health Practice

About the Thunder Bay District Health Unit

AREA AND COMMUNITIES SERVED

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit covers a large geographic area of over 230,000+ square kilometres with approximately 153,000 residents. Our main office is in Thunder Bay with branch offices in Geraldton, Marathon, Red Rock, and Terrace Bay.

The following municipalities fall within the Thunder Bay District Health Unit catchment area:

- Conmee
- Dorion
- Gillies
- Greenstone
- Manitouwadge
- Marathon
- Neebing
- Nipigon
- O'Connor
- Oliver Paipoonge
- Red Rock
- Schreiber
- Shuniah
- Terrace Bay
- Thunder Bay

There are also 26 First Nation communities in the TBDHU geography.

- Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek (Lake Nipigon)
- Long Lake 58
- Aroland
- Namaygoosisagagun (Collins)
- Biigtigong Nishnaabeg (Pic River)
- Neskantaga (Landsdowne House)
- Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek (Rocky Bay)
- Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg (Pic Mobert)
- Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (Sand Point)
- Nezaadiikaang (Lac des Milles Lacs)
- Eabametoong (Fort Hope)
- Nibinamik (Summer Beaver)
- Fort Severn
- Pawgwasheeng (Pays Plat)
- Fort William
- Red Rock (Lake Helen)
- Ginoogaming (Long Lake 77)
- Wapekeka (Angling Lake)
- Kasabonika Lake
- Wawakapewin (Long Dog Lake)
- Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek (Gull Bay)
- Webequie
- Kingfisher Lake
- Whitesand
- Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (Big Trout Lake)
- Wunnumin Lake

TBDHU also provides services to many communities and locations in the Thunder Bay District unorganized area.

2023 BOARD OF HEALTH

Name	Municipality/Provincial Representative (Bold indicates appointing municipality)
Grant Arnold	Conmee and O'Connor
Lucy Belanger	Provincial Appointee
Cindy Brand	Dorion, Red Rock and Nipigon
Kasey Etreni	Thunder Bay
Paul Malashewski	Schreiber and Terrace Bay
James McPherson – Vice Chair	Greenstone
Allan Mihalcin	Provincial Appointee
Donna Peacock	Oliver Paipoonge
Mark Thibert	Needing and Gillies
Kristine Thompson	Thunder Bay
Jim Moffat	Manitouwadge
Don Smith – Chair	Shuniah
Todd Wheeler	Marathon
Ken Boshcoff	Thunder Bay

VISION, MISSION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Our Vision: Healthy lives together.



Our Mission: We improve, promote, and protect the health and well-being of the population in the District of Thunder Bay by delivering high quality public health programs and services with our partners.



Our Guiding Principles

Excellence: Our population deserves the highest quality programming and the best health outcomes possible. We believe that all of our work should be evidence-informed. We demonstrate responsibility, accountability, transparency, and sound stewardship of resources. We are innovative, modelling and supporting healthy changes within our communities, our population, our organization, and our staff.

Commitment: We are passionate and dedicated to improving the lives of people in our communities. We adhere to the highest standards of professionalism, and integrity, as we strive to achieve the best possible health outcomes for the populations and communities that we serve.

Inclusion: We believe in dignity and respect for all. We work collaboratively with a diverse network of colleagues, partners and clients to achieve a community wide approach to improve health and well-being. We continuously seek out opportunities to form and strengthen meaningful working relationships, and to be responsive to population and community needs.

STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITIES

Our strategic plan priorities from our current (2017-2020) strategic plan include the following:

Communities and People First: Serve the public health needs of the Thunder Bay District's diverse communities and people.

Mental Wellness: Promote and support mental health and well-being in our community.

Indigenous People: Work with Indigenous people and organizations to improve health outcomes and reduce inequities.

Organizational Effectiveness: Improve how we work and learn together.

2023 Highlights

STRENGTHENING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Emergency management is an important function of public health, and it is important for TBDHU to be ready to respond to new and emerging events. As part of TBDHU’s commitment to enhancing emergency preparedness, staff from a number of programs collaborated in local, regional, and provincial preparedness initiatives in 2023.

Staff participated in annual emergency exercises across various district municipalities, including a large-scale exercise organized by the City of Thunder Bay. These exercises served as a vital platform for teams at TBDHU to engage with local partners to address pressing health concerns. Exercise scenario topics with municipalities spanned a range of critical issues, such as opioid poisonings, wildfires, and the health challenges posed by extreme heat events.

TBDHU was actively engaged in refining and testing two local key emergency plans in 2023. Planning and table top exercises took place as part of the Opioid Surveillance and Response Task Force to test the Thunder Bay and District Emergency Response Plan on Opioid Poisonings. In addition, as a member of the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, TBDHU partnered to develop and test the Thunder Bay Emergency Food Plan.



Finally, in collaboration with Ontario Health North and the Northwestern Health Unit, a fall respiratory season tabletop exercise was hosted with local health system partners. This proactive approach allowed partners to discuss strategies for effectively responding to respiratory health challenges, ensuring that our community remains resilient in the face of environmental health threats.

Ongoing efforts led and supported by TBDHU including the ones highlighted in this report have adopted a continual improvement approach to strengthen TBDHU and partner capacity to protect and promote the well-being of our residents and demonstrate our dedication to a healthier, safer environment for all.

STREET OUTREACH TESTING EVENTS

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit's Street Outreach Team is a key part of the organization's commitment to remove barriers to public health access for underserved communities and individuals. Embracing a philosophy of harm reduction, the Street Outreach Team operates like a mobile health unit, bringing services such as sexual health care and infectious disease testing directly to clients who are un(der)housed and/or street-involved.

The team held 12 pop-up testing events in 2023 targeting individuals at high-risk. These events have become a key tool in supporting case identification and contact management for a variety of sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections (STBBIs) among individuals who are experiencing homelessness, are underhoused, or otherwise street-involved in the city of Thunder Bay. This underserved population bears a disproportionate burden of infectious diseases in the district.

Pop-up testing events are based on a philosophy of meeting people where they are at. Each month the Street Outreach Team is hosted by a community partner or local service organization who provides space for the team to connect with individuals and provide testing services. These convenient and collaborative events also serve as referral pathways to additional services



Superior Points Harm Reduction team (left to right): Rick Thompson, Karen Greenfield, Lori Kuzminski and Ronda Mackie

including harm reduction programs, primary care and treatment; supporting access for individual who often face the most barriers.

This successful model will be leveraged in 2024 to support the Syphilis Point-of-Care Rapid Testing and Immediate Treatment Locally Driven Collaborative Project which will evaluate the use of a combination HIV and Syphilis point-of-care test to support faster follow-up and treatment for reactive results.

CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSHOPS

There is a growing recognition of the significance of climate change within the context of public health. Climate change has been called “the single biggest health threat facing humanity and the livability of the planet,” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). The need to address climate change is also acknowledged in Ontario’s public health mandate. In September 2023, TBDHU in partnership with the City of Thunder Bay, hosted a Climate Change Workshop that included multi-sectoral community partners. The workshop began with a presentation by Climate Risk Institute, an academically affiliated not-for-profit corporation in Northern Ontario that provides services related to climate risk assessment and adaptation planning. Climate Risk Institute provided workshop participants with a comprehensive overview of climate change and its anticipated local impacts.

Group discussions were facilitated following the presentation where participants used a rating tool to evaluate the potential impacts of each climate hazard on our region. Participants determined that forest fire smoke, gradual warming, and extreme heat are the most impactful local health hazards from climate change. Additionally, participants assessed the implications of each climate hazard on vulnerable populations within the region – identifying groups that may be disproportionately affected by the climate risks.

The workshop was an important step in considering the climate change impacts that will most directly impact our region, requiring local planning and response, including from public health.

Workshop Climate Risk Scenarios

- Heat Events**
 - Extreme Heat
 - Gradual Warming
 - Drought
- Extreme Weather Events**
 - Reduced Weather Pattern Consistency
 - Ice Storm
 - Snow Storm/Blizzard
 - Regional Weather Emergencies
- Intense Rainstorm and Flooding**
- Forest Fires**
 - Direct Impacts
 - Smoke
- Universal Events**
 - Global Events
 - Cumulative Events

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2022). Executive summary: Mobilizing Public Health Action on Climate Change in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2022/summary.html> October 1, 2024.

DENTAL CLINIC FOR OLDER ADULTS

As part of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), TBDHU is now serving hundreds of people at its public health dental clinic. The clinic makes important dental care services accessible to eligible clients aged 65 and over.

This state-of-the-art clinic has been several years in the making. TBDHU undertook planning and renovations to accommodate an onsite dental clinic beginning in the spring of 2020. The clinic would support ongoing partnerships TBDHU has with six community dental providers in Thunder Bay and District communities to provide care to seniors eligible for the OSDCP.

The TBDHU Public Health Dental Clinic opened its doors in September of 2022, providing preventive and restorative dental services as well as referrals to community denturist and specialist care. The clinical team strives to provide person-centered and trauma-informed care. Staff are conscious and respectful of the barriers to care and other challenges faced by our senior population.



Since opening, the dental clinic has provided 1,297 appointments, and as of December 31, 2023, 751 seniors living with a low income across Thunder Bay District have received no-cost service through the OSDCP, improving their oral health and ultimately their overall health and wellbeing.

Client testimonials

“

Without this program I would not have dental care as I could not afford a dentist.

“

This is a wonderful program. Oral health is so important for total health. Thank you very much.

“

Getting my teeth looked after at the public health unit was the nicest experience I have ever had at a dentist. Everyone there was very respectful and sincerely kind to me. The work that was done was awesome. Many thanks.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION WORKING GROUP

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit has renewed focus towards Truth and Reconciliation by improving the cultural safety of the organization. In May of 2023, all TBDHU staff gathered to listen and learn from Elder Robert Fenton and traditional knowledge keeper Sandi Boucher. Throughout the year, the internal Truth and Reconciliation Working Group shared information internally on National Indigenous Peoples Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and Treaties Recognition Week. Externally, TBDHU honoured and amplified the voices of Indigenous groups and organizations during these days and weeks of recognition. An organizational approach to land acknowledgements

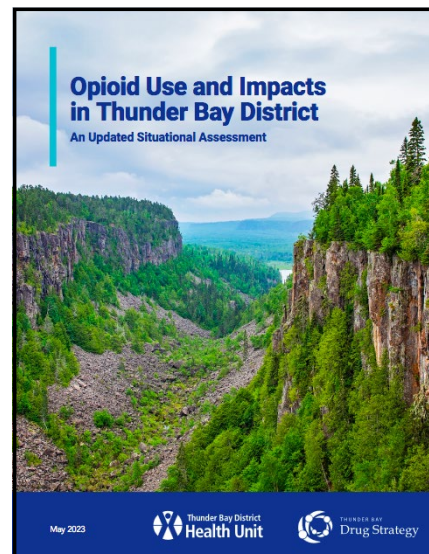
was shared through a guideline and accompanying interactive webinar.

Meaningful relationships, collaborative partnerships, and working in the spirit of trust, respect, and reciprocity with Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations is important to TBDHU. Indigenous People is a priority pillar in the 2017-2020 TBDHU Strategic Plan, and the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group will continue to create opportunities for staff learning, supporting culturally safer spaces and practice, and strengthening engagement efforts with Indigenous communities and organizations.

LOCAL OPIOID SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Opioid-related poisonings and deaths have increased at an exponential rate over the past several years, and the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the situation across Canada. The Thunder Bay District experiences some of the highest burdens of opioid-related harms in Ontario.

Together with members of the Thunder Bay Opioid Surveillance and Response Task Force, TBDHU coordinated the development of a 2023 Situational Assessment of Opioid Use and Impacts in the Thunder Bay District. This report, which provides an update to data previously reported in 2018, describes the scope of opioid use, the burden of opioid-related harms, and available opioid-related services in the Thunder Bay District. This report also provides a comparison of the burden of opioid-related harms in the Thunder Bay District prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report will help TBDHU and community partners plan and implement initiatives that aim to reduce the harms associated with opioid use.



To view the report, visit www.tbdhu.com/resource/opioid-use-and-impacts-thunder-bay-district

Fast Facts for 2023



471

Older adults (65+) who received dental care through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program



438

People reached at Babies' Day Out sites



4,102

Participants in the Healthy Kids HOME program



15,046

Students who received fruits and vegetables through the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program



22,281

Kilometres actively travelled during the Active Commute Challenge



5,909

Students reached with Healthy Relationship programming



261

Clients who accessed smoking cessation services through the Take Control Smoking Cessation Clinic (89 of these were new clients)



124

Tobacco and e-cigarette vendor enforcement inspections conducted



8,200

Food handlers trained and certified



2,365

Food premise inspections conducted



329

Animal bites investigated



4,230

Reportable disease cases investigated



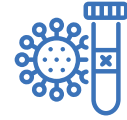
3,330

Clients who attended sexual health clinic



2,987

Visits to the Street Outreach van



110

Clients tested for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections through testing events



10,219

Naloxone kits distributed directly through Superior Points Harm reduction



905

People trained in the Use of Naloxone by Superior Points Harm Reduction



129

Institutional outbreaks declared and managed



217

On-site infection prevention and control (IPAC) preparedness and outbreak support visits to congregate living settings by IPAC Hub program



48,095

Vaccines administered at TBDHU office clinics (excluding Flu vaccines)



110

School-based immunization clinics



17,773

Telephone client inquiries received through main reception








4,248

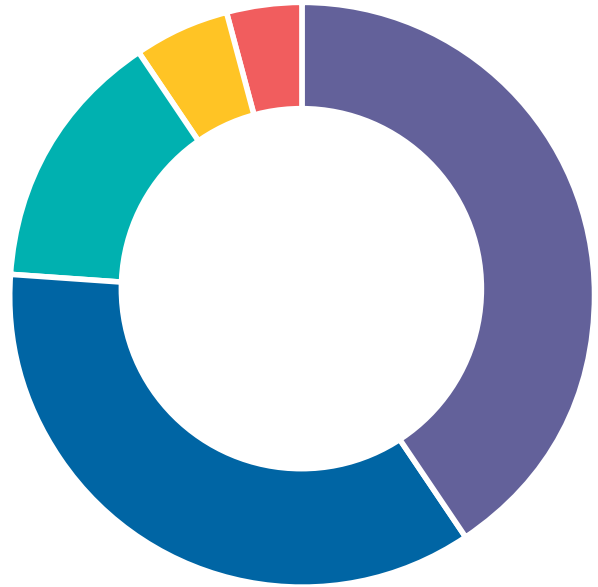
In-person and walk-in inquiries received at main reception

Financials

TOTAL REVENUES 2023

\$24,008,775

	Provincial Funding for Cost Shared, Mandated Programs	\$9,786,564
	Provincial and Other 100% Funded Programs	\$8,501,383
	Municipal Levy	\$3,475,449
	Generated/Other	\$1,296,479
	Unincorporated Grants	\$948,900



MUNICIPAL FUNDING FOR COST-SHARED MANDATED PROGRAMS

