



NOMA/FONOM/NOSDA - Multi-Ministry Notes
Monday August 21, 2023, 8:15-9:00am (EST)
Windsor Club Room, 2nd floor of the DoubleTree by Hilton - London

Attendees:

Mayor Wendy Landry of Shuniah, President of NOMA
Councillor Danny Whalen of Temiskaming Shores, President of FONOM
Councillor Michelle Boileau of Timmins, Chair of NOSDA
Mayor Fred Mota of Red Lake, Executive Vice President of NOMA
Mayor Ken Boshcoff of Thunder Bay, NOMA Executive Board Member
Mayor Rick Dumas of Marathon, NOMA Executive Board Member
Mark Figliomeni, CAO/Clerk of Red Rock, NOMA Board Member
Councillor Mark King of the City of North Bay, FONOM Board Member
Tammy MacKenzie CAO at District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board
Donna Stewart, CAO of the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board
Debbie Ewald, Board Member Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board
Andrea Strawson, Executive Director of NOMA
Mac Bain, Executive Director of FONOM
Fern Dominelli, Executive Director of NOSDA

Employment Services System

We are here to discuss an essential initiative that is underway in the Province of Ontario - the transformation of our employment services system in Northern Ontario. This transformation is driven by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, with the aim of creating a more efficient, streamlined, and outcome-focused system that better serves the needs of job seekers, businesses, and local communities.

The foundation of this transformation lies in the integration of employment services from social assistance into Employment Ontario. By doing so, we hope to reduce fragmentation, eliminate duplication, and, most importantly, improve the quality of service provided to our clients. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development has designated 2 geographical regions in the North, being Northeastern Ontario and Northwestern Ontario.

The 789,519 people (2021 census) who live in Northern Ontario are spread across a land mass of 806,708 square kilometers, we have 0.98 people per square kilometer. By comparison, the City of Toronto has a land mass of 630.2 square kilometers with a population of 2,794,356 (2021 census) or 4,434 people per square kilometer.

NOSDA members are concerned that the two Northern regions are too large and vast a geographic area for only two Service System Managers. I am proud to share that the

Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) wholeheartedly supports this integration. NOSDA has been actively collaborating with colleges in Northern Ontario to develop a comprehensive employment service system. This collaborative approach leverages the expertise and resources of educational institutions, ensuring that we address the unique needs of job seekers and employers in our region. One key area in establishing Service System Managers in Northern Ontario will be the creation of employment performance zones. Basically, in order for a Service System Manager to receive their funding, they must achieve specific employment related targets negotiated with the Ministry.

Now it may be easier for a Service System Manager to achieve their targets in large urban centres in Northern Ontario, but the real challenge will be establishing performance zones where targets must be achieved within a sprawling geographic area. We are talking areas with unsophisticated transportation systems, minimal broadband connectivity, limited employment opportunities, lower education rates, etc. As you can imagine, achieving targets in rural and remote parts of Northern Ontario will require comprehensive planning and many meaningful partnerships.

This is where we believe CMSM's and DSSAB's can play a vital role in the success of the employment transformation. We are already well-established across the North and understand the uniqueness of our northern communities.

To ensure the success of this transformation, we present two key recommendations:

Engaging CMSMs and DSSABs: We believe it is crucial to involve Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) as full partners in determining and finalizing the employment performance zones. By doing so, we can ensure that the services and employment planning in Northern Ontario are precisely aligned with our region's unique requirements. This collaborative effort will foster better coordination and understanding, leading to more effective and tailored service delivery.

Expanding Services in Rural and Remote Areas: It is of utmost importance that we cater to the needs of job seekers and employers in our rural and remote areas. To achieve this, we recommend incentivizing our Service System Managers to expand their services to every corner of Northern Ontario. We must ensure that individuals in these regions have access to essential in-person resources to support their entry or re-entry into the local labour markets. While online services can complement these provisions, we must not do away with the invaluable 'human touch' in these regions.

In conclusion, it is critical that the transformation of our employment services system in Northern Ontario is achieved in partnership with us Northerners. By integrating services, collaborating with colleges, engaging CMSMs and DSSABs, and incentivizing Service System Managers, we can significantly enhance client service, improve accountability, and achieve better outcomes for both job seekers and employers. We urge the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development to take the necessary steps to implement these recommendations. Let us work together to ensure a brighter future for our communities and workforce, and to support sustainable development in the region.

Centre of Excellence & Northern Ontario School of Medicine

We would like to know the Ministry of Health's response to our recommendation in January regarding creating an advisory table for our 11 districts that would have direct dialogue with the Regional and Clinical Leads of the Ontario Centre of Excellence.

Also, our Organizations would like to speak to the urgent financial need of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. They require a permanent increase in annual base funding of \$4.0 million before the end of this fiscal year. We want a commitment from the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier Sylvia Jones, Minister of Colleges, and Universities Jill Dunlop, MPPs Greg Rickford, Vic Fedeli, George Pirie, Ross Romano, and Kevin Holland that they act now to is the annual base increased by 4 million, not wait until March.

Analysis

In January, we recommended the creation of an advisory table for each of the eleven districts in the North instead of a separate Northern Centre of Excellence. That would ensure a local strategic vision for a district's priority areas. These tables would have direct and continuous dialogue with the Regional and Clinical Leads of the Ontario Centre of Excellence.

This Government believes Ontario has different Health and Housing challenges than other Provinces in the Federation. Our three organizations believe we have different needs than the heavily populated Southern Ontario. We also acknowledge and know it to be true that Dryden and Temiskaming Shores have different needs and challenges. Therefore, Northern Ontario should be viewed as a One-Window Approach.

Our members lobbied for the creation of the Northern School of Medicine. Our members were thrilled when in 2022, this Government proclaimed NOSM a standalone university, becoming Canada's only independent medical university. Also, increasing the number of medical Doctors and Postgraduates spots was very well received.

The Northern School of Medicine has achieved its Vision by providing Innovative education and research for a healthier North. They have graduates that are our family physicians and specialists. But Northern Ontario still requires over 350 more physicians to serve those who don't have a family Doctor this morning.

The Northern School of Medicine Board has a zero-deficit policy, considering recent history is prudent. Therefore, an increase in annual base funding is required to allow for continuity and growing enrollment. This base funding increase is needed today to make the Northern School of Medicine what you and Northerners need to address our healthcare challenges.

Homelessness, Mental Health, & Addictions Series Upcoming Publication

In 2021, Northern Policy Institute partnered with the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, and the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association to analyze the state of homelessness, mental health, and addictions in Northern Ontario. The first report, titled “*More than Just a Number: Addressing the Homelessness, Addiction, and Mental Health Crisis in the North*,” established a baseline around homelessness, mental health, and substance use disorders in Northern Ontario and recommended eight strategies for government and community practitioners to address these issues.

The second report, “*Homelessness, Mental Health, and Substance Use in Northern Ontario, Revisited*,” provided concrete steps decision-makers and community practitioners can take to implement three of those recommendations in Northern Ontario: 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 third report aims to expand on another three of the eight strategies recommended by the first piece: provide long-term funding for capital repairs on community housing units, support new and existing Housing First programs, and establish mandated mobile crisis intervention teams (MCIT) in municipalities throughout Northern Ontario. This report will be provided to government at ROMA 2024.

The steps identified in this report will be informed not only by the analysis of the initial paper’s findings highlighting that current efforts are not enough to address the worsening homelessness, addiction, and mental health crisis in Northern Ontario, but also by real-world case studies and best practices that will be gathered from literature and community members in Northern Ontario. From this information, this third report will be a guide tool that can inform decision-makers and community practitioners.

The health care crisis experienced across Northern Ontario is alarming. Municipalities are struggling to effectively fund public health care and retain adequate physicians and nurses to provide care to our residents. According to NOSM we need 364 physicians (211 family doctors and 153 medical specialists) in the North. Despite this need, as of April 1, 2023, your government reduced the number of Ministry of Health allocated physician spots on the Rural Northern Physician Group Agreement for multiple medical centres including Red Lake & Atikokan Hospitals among others. We need to retain funding for these health care professionals to avoid further exasperating the health care deficit.

Mental health, addiction, and homelessness cases are on the rise and municipalities are in desperate need of solutions. Municipalities across the North are experiencing serious financial pressures, most notably from inflation and funding inequities. Municipalities in Northern Ontario need financial relief and our organizations ask the province to restore the previous public health funding ratio of 75%/25% for all cost-shared programs and to assume 100% funding once again for those programs identified as such in the public health budget for 2018-2019. Additionally, we ask that you 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.