

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Provincial Report Confirms Growing Housing, Mental Health and Addictions Pressures That Are Impacting the Rainy River District

Fort Frances, Ontario – 2026/01/16 – A new report released by the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario finds that homelessness and related mental-health and substance-use pressures in Northern Ontario are rapidly worsening and, without change, will place increasing pressure on health, social, and economic systems. The District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB), a member of NOSDA, acknowledges the findings and highlights that these pressures are already being felt across the Rainy River District.

In the Rainy River District, homelessness, mental health and substance use–related harms and gaps in appropriate supports are placing visible strain on emergency and community systems.

“Rising homelessness is increasing demand on emergency departments, shelters, hospitals, and correctional facilities all of which are high-cost and ill-suited for long-term recovery and stabilization. Without earlier intervention and housing stability, these pressures will continue to intensify,” said Charlene Strain, Chief Executive Officer, CMHA Fort Frances Branch.

Beyond the Rainy River District, the NOSDA/CMHA report, [*Protecting Northern Ontario for 1.3 cents on the dollar: Housing and health integration to support a 34.6 billion economy*](#), notes that opioid-related harms across Northern Ontario have continued to rise over the past decade. The report underscores that housing instability, mental health challenges and substance use are closely interconnected and have significant implications for health systems, emergency response, and local labour markets particularly in rural and northern communities.

The report builds on the January 2025 analysis, [*Municipalities Under Pressure: One Year Later*](#), and shows that under current conditions, homelessness in Northern Ontario is projected to more than double by 2035. This growth would place increasing strain on emergency departments, shelters, correctional systems, and municipal finances, further stretching already limited local capacity.

When comparing different models, this report shows that a targeted investment of about \$435 million in mental health and substance-use supports—roughly 1.3 cents for every dollar generated by Northern Ontario’s economy—can better stabilize homelessness, reduce strain on emergency and institutional services, and help create healthier communities and a more stable workforce.

DRRSB and CMHA-FF support the report's call for sustained, strategic government investment that pairs housing supply expansion with ongoing funding for homelessness prevention, mental health, and addictions supports. The report is clear that capital investment alone will not stabilize homelessness or reduce pressures: progress depends on integrated, long-term funding that reflects the realities of Northern Ontario. Without meaningful investment, human and financial costs will continue to escalate beyond the capacity of local governments and community service providers like the DRRSB to manage alone.

-30-

About NOSDA: The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) represents municipal service managers responsible for housing, homelessness, and social services across Northern Ontario. NOSDA advances evidence-based policy, sustainable funding, and coordinated, housing-led solutions that reflect the unique realities of northern, rural, and remote communities.

About DSSABs: District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) across the north play an essential role in providing critical services that touch the lives of our residents daily. From housing and homelessness prevention to licensed child care and paramedic services, the District of Rainy River Services Board works collaboratively with municipalities and community partners to address shared challenges and build stronger communities.

For more information, please contact:

Fern Dominelli, Executive Director, NOSDA, fern.dominelli@nosda.net

Charlene Strain, Chief Executive Officer, CMHA Fort Frances Branch, cstrain@cmhaff.ca

Heather Latter, Communications Advisor, DRRSB, heather.latter@rrdssab.ca