



**NORTHERN ONTARIO
SERVICE DELIVERERS
ASSOCIATION**

www.nosda.net

THE NORTHERN GROWTH PLAN

**A POSITION PAPER OF THE
NORTHERN ONTARIO SERVICE DELIVERERS ASSOCIATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (**NOSDA**) is an incorporated body that brings together 11 of Northern Ontario's 12 Municipal Service Managers. All eleven are responsible for the local planning, coordination and delivery of a range of community health and social services that the Province of Ontario divested to them to locally manage. These services represent a significant portion of the social infrastructure of all Northern Ontario's municipalities and also account for a good share of the property taxes that Northern Ontario municipalities dedicate to the social support infrastructure of their municipalities.

NOSDA is primarily composed of nine - unique to Northern Ontario - District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs); and two municipalities (also known as Coordinated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) – the City of Greater Sudbury and the District Municipality of Muskoka.

Northern Ontario's municipal service managers collectively have annual expenditures in excess of \$650,000,000 and together employ over 1,000 people. They thus represent a significant component of Northern Ontario's economy and labour force.

Their intimate understanding of local human services and social infrastructures across all of Northern Ontario explains why **NOSDA**'s member Service Managers believe they have significant contributions to make in the development of a comprehensive Northern Growth Plan.

NOSDA has a proud ten year history: social infrastructure development and support is the core business of its members. They plan and coordinate the Northern Ontario delivery of public services and infrastructure programs that result in measurable gains to the quality of life of Northerners through:

- the provision of financial and other supports to persons having difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force;
- the creation and maintenance of affordable, social housing;
- the provision of quality of early learning and child care services that reassure their parents that their children are in safe, nurturing environments while they busy themselves at work or upgrading their skills;
- the provision of emergency medical services in times of personal crisis;
- the provision of affordable social housing.

NOSDA and its members can provide a vital link between the Northern Growth Plan and the social infrastructure development envisioned for the North, between economic and social infrastructure and between Provincial Ministries and municipalities across the North.

An integrated, effective and efficient social infrastructure is an essential component of local and regional economic and community development, both in terms of addressing labour market requirements and in terms of providing social supports in times of economic

downturn. Renewed economic growth and the reversal of the population decline through the development and implementation of the Northern Growth Plan require sound social infrastructure investments.

It is the belief of **NOSDA** and its member municipal service managers that they have significant contributions to make to the development of a robust and responsive Northern Growth Plan.

It is the belief of its member service managers, that they and their Northern association (**NOSDA**) should be systemically included in the development and the actualisation of the Northern Growth Plan.

The herein Position Paper identifies a number of very specific recommendations that we believe merit serious consideration.

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WHO WE ARE

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together 11 of Northern Ontario's 12 Municipal Service Managers – nine of them are District Social Service Administration Boards(DSSABs) and the other two are municipalities, known as Coordinated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs). All eleven are responsible for the planning, coordination and delivery of community health and social services divested to them by the Province of Ontario. These divested services include Land Ambulance, Social Housing, Child Care and Ontario Works.

NOSDA currently consists of the Algoma District Services Administration Board, the Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board, the Kenora District Services Board, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board, the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board, the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board, the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board, the the District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, the City of Greater Sudbury and District Municipality of Muskoka.

NOSDA member organizations collectively have annual expenditures in excess of \$650,000,000, and together have over 1,000 employees. Thus, they represent a significant component of Northern Ontario's economy and labour force. NOSDA and its member municipal service managers along with their constituent municipalities, as well as with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and its Local Health Integration Networks, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are important community health and social service management and delivery partners. The relationship with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is evolving as Employment Ontario implementation proceeds.

The collective knowledge of NOSDA members of local labour market conditions is based on over ten years experience in direct program delivery, local service system management and continuous input from the municipal politicians who sit on their governing bodies. Their intimate understanding of human services and social infrastructure at the local level across Northern Ontario explains why NOSDA and its representative Municipal Service Managers have significant contributions to make in the development of the Northern Growth Plan.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines insights, and the positions of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (**NOSDA**) in relation to the Ontario Government's *Places to Grow* Initiative and the proposed Northern Growth Plan. Members of **NOSDA** were interviewed and their comments form the basis of this report. In addition, relevant policy and research documents were analyzed and the commentary of members and documentation were then synthesized into this Position Paper. Then, David Court provided an independent review of this paper. The insights he gained through the recently completed Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Review and his extensive experience with the operations of District Social Service Administration Boards (hereinafter also referred to as DSSABs or municipal service managers) were very helpful. Finally, Gary Champagne, Chief Administrative Officer of the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Administration Board, who acted as **NOSDA**'s lead in the preparation of this Paper provided valuable help and guidance throughout the preparation of this report.

Opportunities to address the provincially identified priorities most relevant to **NOSDA** members*, and related recommendations are also identified.

Integrated, effective and efficient social infrastructure is an essential component of local and regional economic and community development, both in terms of addressing labour market requirements and in terms of providing social supports in times of economic downturn. Renewed economic growth and the reversal of the population decline require sound social infrastructure investments.

As such, NOSDA welcomes the opportunity to work closely with the Growth Secretariat, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM), other Ministries and municipal partners as appropriate, to realize the goal of growth by contributing to Northern Ontario's Growth Plan through leveraging the knowledge, resources and infrastructure of NOSDA members.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 What is the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA)?¹

The mission of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (**NOSDA**) is to facilitate the coordinated local planning and delivery of specified community services in Northern Ontario through its member organizations, known as District Social Service Administration Boards. Their role is that of Municipal Service Managers of Ontario Works, Social Housing, Child Care and Land Ambulance. **NOSDA** members work cooperatively to achieve economies of scale by working together to create effective and efficient delivery systems and to control costs through information sharing and joint action. **NOSDA** provides a political forum for reviewing and developing both policies and program delivery issues from a Northern Ontario perspective. **NOSDA members therefore have a direct interest in the development of the Northern Growth Plan.**

2.2 The *Places to Grow* Initiative and the Northern Ontario Growth Plan

The Ontario Government launched the ***Places to Grow*** initiative in 2004, to apply a comprehensive and long-term approach to planning for growth. The **Places to Grow Act, 2005** allows the province to develop Growth Plans in any part of the province. It sets out principles for plan content and a public input processes. The first Growth Plan developed under the auspices of this Act was the Growth Plan completed in 2006 for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Northern Ontario Growth Plan is now being developed, and is the second such Growth Plan in Ontario's history.

The **Places to Grow Act, 2005** clarifies provincial authority over regional and local governments when it comes to implementing '*an integrated and coordinated approach to making decisions about growth across all levels of government to contribute to maximizing the value of public investments*'. As noted in the recent consultation document by the Social Housing Services Corporation entitled **Affordable Housing in Perilous Times(2009)**, the "*requirements of the Growth Plan reign supreme over regional and local Official Plans, which must be amended, if inconsistent with the Growth Plan*". Further, the Growth Plan stipulates that affordable housing is an

¹ 1. For a full discussion of the roles and responsibilities of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Social Service Administration Boards, please see the PROVINCIAL-MUNICIPAL FISCAL AND SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW SERVICE DELIVERY ACCOUNTABILITY TABLE WORKING PAPER, May, 2008

important public service and is social infrastructure, and the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan requires “*upper tier and single tier municipalities to develop a housing strategy...*”. This, of course, has a direct bearing on Municipal Service Managers, as they are responsible for social housing in their respective jurisdictions. The **Places to Grow Act** provides a legislative framework for a collaborative, coordinated, holistic approach to growth in Ontario. Key components of the framework are:

- *Develop a long-range blueprint for action to achieve a healthy, vibrant and sustainable Northern Ontario culture and economy*
- *Promote growth and economic development*
- *Align infrastructure planning and investment*
- *Engage the growing aboriginal population*
- *Develop, retain and attract a skilled workforce*

Numerous consultations have been held to date, and further consultations are planned. The Growth Secretariat and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines who are leading this phase of the Northern Growth Plan’s development will continue to engage the Federal government in furtherance of Plan, and staff will work with and through the Deputies’ Committee, ADMs’ committees and planning and policy directors to help develop and implement recommendations identified in the consultation processes. Technical experts and a number of Municipal representatives have already been consulted; as well as school boards, local planning and local service boards also have been identified as having important roles to play in helping to revitalize Northern Ontario. It is encouraging to note that the District Social Services Administration Boards are specifically recognized as partners who should play a role in efforts to revitalize Northern Ontario.

The entities represented by NOSDA are a vital link between economic and social infrastructure, local industry and labour supply and between Provincial Ministries and municipalities across Northern Ontario. Municipal Service Managers provide public services and infrastructure programs that result in measurable gains to Ontario’s quality of life, sustainability and prosperity through the provision of support of persons having difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force; through the creation and maintenance of affordable, social housing, ensuring quality child care across the North to allow parents to work or upgrade their skills, and to provide emergency health services in times of personal crisis. The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association can and should be a key partner in the development of the Northern Growth Plan.

3.0 CONTEXT

Geography, specifically great distances between population clusters, is a defining characteristic of Northern Ontario. The North has over eighty-five percent of Ontario's land mass. Six and a half percent of its' total population (approximately 800,000) live in Northern Ontario, with over fifty percent of the region's population living in the five largest cities (Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Greater Sudbury, North Bay and Timmins). The other 400,000 persons live within 145 incorporated municipalities, 150 unincorporated municipalities and Townships without Municipal Organization (TWOMO's). 106 out of 134 of Ontario's First Nations are in Northern Ontario. Further, there is a significant seasonal population of cottage/camp owners in Northern Ontario. Over ten percent of the population in the North is Aboriginal, representing about forty percent of all aboriginals in Ontario. Twenty-six percent of Ontario's Francophones live in Northern Ontario.

It is well documented that Canada's population is aging. This is especially evident in the demographic makeup of Northern Ontario. The proportion of senior households is increasing relative to its' overall population. Part of the reason is that younger people are moving out of the North in search of education and employment, while older people tend to stay in their communities, or are coming to Northern communities to retire. People coming to retire in the North is a significant factor in local business health in some communities such as Elliot Lake, and has contributed to growth of property assessment and has offset some of the population loss of other age groups.

Implications of this aging-in-place phenomenon is manifested in the following ways that have repercussions for District Social Service Administration Boards.

- Fewer young children in the area may have an impact on the demand for Child Care/Day Care spaces. However, if the new child development model of early childhood learning was uniformly applied across the North there would be a huge expansion of the formal child care and early learning system, as shown in the Best Start Early Implementation Sites like the one in the Timiskaming DSSAB catchment area,
- Fewer young and working aged adults (e.g. aged 15 to 54 years) can mean more of a tax burden on older adults who may be on fixed incomes. Further, high levels of seniors in communities put pressures on municipal services (e.g. EMS, Housing), which are funded by the municipal service manager. Seniors have a reduced ability to pay the resulting increase in property tax burden due to fixed incomes.

- An aging population may have implications on social housing as persons on fixed incomes may have increasing difficulty maintaining and living in their own homes. However, meeting the housing needs of the seniors in the North could create significant construction employment.
- An aging population has direct implications on Emergency Medical Services as need for medical services increases with age.
- Special needs households (e.g. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients) are also increasing as a proportion of the population due to a lack of occupational and physical mobility. Many of these households need supports to live independently.

Historically, culturally or linguistically appropriate specialized health or social services have usually developed where there have been critical masses of demand. This means that services are diffused throughout the region, and that people with specific health or social service needs often have to travel great distances or sometimes move to access specific services they may need. For example, a recent supportive housing study conducted for the North East Local Health Integration Network indicated that some seniors from small towns and rural areas have to choose Long Term Care as a means of accessing the necessary supports for daily living because of a lack of options where they live. Alternative Levels of Care beds are in short supply across the North, and some hospital stays are longer than necessary because there are no local alternatives. Delivering these services is also relatively more expensive because of distances and the lack of economies of scale.

In the rural areas of the region, there is a higher than national/provincial average dependency on government transfer payments due to a dearth of earning opportunities. There is relatively high mobility of younger families across the region and into and out of the North in search of education and employment. They are adversely affected by externally driven, resource-based cyclical economic downturns, limited economic diversity and job opportunities, an aging -in-place workforce reducing upward occupational mobility, lower literacy, at-risk youth, lower than average family incomes and higher than average low income families and single parents. Poverty rates are higher due to a lack of employment opportunities; disability is more prevalent in Northern Ontario. These determinants of health factors have an impact on the health status of Northern Ontarians: on average the health status of Northern Ontarians is lower than their Southern Ontario counterparts. As a result of these phenomena, northern communities are generally more immediately and severely affected by economic and demographic changes.

This creates great variability and volatility in housing markets and demand for health and social services across Northern Ontario, with clusters of high demand in the larger urban areas and relatively weaker or declining demand in other areas. These factors also create relatively sudden increases in demand for Ontario Works assistance and social housing in areas where employment is in decline when demand declines, as well as 'jolts' in demand for child care in areas experiencing economic 'boom' times. All of these challenging factors are affecting the long-term viability of some depopulating, de-serviced municipalities.

Thus, the development of the Northern Growth Plan to address these challenges and to take advantage of opportunities as they arise is timely and appropriate and will require strong partnerships to address the social infrastructure gaps in order to have the maximum and lasting benefit.

4.0 OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 NOSDA Collaboration on the Northern Growth Plan

According to **NOSDA** members, the Northern Growth Plan being developed needs to be broad and integrated, and reflective of both economic **and** social principles. It should also be a community development process, with a human services component. It must support the development of a skilled, educated Northern Ontario labour force. **NOSDA** and its member DSSABs could help drive local social capital development/community development through fostering strong, healthy communities in conjunction with the Northern Growth Plan team. Social infrastructure development and support through the well-organized planning and delivery of social services is the core business of DSSABs. **NOSDA** and its members can provide a vital link between the Northern Growth Plan and the social development necessary for sustainable economic growth.

NOSDA and its' member municipal service managers are appropriate organizations for the Growth Secretariat and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to work with when formulating the Northern Growth Plan. **NOSDA** and its' member municipal service managers have capacity to do more on a Regional/Pan-Northern Ontario basis. **NOSDA** members articulated that DSSABs should have an increased role in Immigration Support, Skills Training, Early Learning and Child Care, Social Housing and Community Infrastructure planning to develop an effective network of labour market services.

Municipal Service Managers already build community capacity; already bring municipal decision makers together on a regular basis, and are intimately familiar with education and training issues, job and labour retention and attraction issues and are intrinsically involved with social infrastructure in their respective catchment areas. DSSAB's could also be used to help build local socio-economic intelligence gathering. Modest investment to leverage the resources of these organizations would enhance their, and the Province's capacity to address social infrastructure and local labour market issues as the Northern Growth Plan is implemented.

NOSDA members interact through regular face-to-face as well as teleconference meetings, both at the CAO level, and at the program level. This allows for the easy transfer of knowledge and the communication of important information to improve programs, and to 'bridge the gap' in understanding and appreciating the subtleties of program policy between Queen's Park and its interpretation and delivery in Northern Ontario.

In the difficult times being experienced in resource-based communities, **NOSDA** members are having to adapt to the rapidly changing demands of their local labour forces. There is a high level of economic and social policy operationalization happening at the municipal service manager level each and every day. As such, there is an opportunity to lever the resources that are already resident in the local municipal service managers to gather and interpret local socio-economic intelligence to identify and respond to the training and social infrastructure needs of their local populations. This would help inform local and provincial policy-makers more swiftly by providing a better understanding of rapidly changing circumstances in real time. In turn, such socio-economic intelligence-gathering capacity would assist in the development of programs, policies and if necessary pilot or demonstration projects to respond to, and mitigate the effects of local slowdowns and downturns. This type of 'feedback loop' could also inform more senior levels of government in their policy and program development processes by having more rapid understanding of what is working and what is transferable to meet the basic social needs of Ontario's population.

RECOMMENDATION 1: COLLABORATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN GROWTH PLAN

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE PROVINCE INVOLVE NOSDA IN THE NORTHERN GROWTH PLAN'S DEVELOPMENT, GIVEN THEIR IMPORTANCE AS MUNICIPAL SERVICE MANAGERS RESPONSIBLE FOR OVER 1,000 EMPLOYEES AND OVER \$650,000,000 PER YEAR THAT THE PROVINCE AND NORTHERN MUNICIPALITIES INVEST IN THE COORDINATED DELIVERY OF ONTARIO WORKS-RELATED TRAINING, SOCIAL HOUSING, CHILD CARE, EMERGENCY PLANNING, AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES.

4.2 Coordination and Communication

Further, there are currently three significant provincial government initiatives that have been instigated to engage other levels of government as partners to improve service delivery, reduce poverty and promote economic and social 'growth':

- The Northern Growth Plan,
- the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy, and
- the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

All have direct implications for **NOSDA** and its constituent members. Individually, each initiative has merit, but ideally, **NOSDA** would promote the idea that more positive outcomes could be achieved and more appropriate community infrastructure projects developed through better coordination and communication between all three initiatives, proponents of these initiatives and **NOSDA** members.

RECOMMENDATION 2: COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE GROWTH SECRETARIAT, THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND MINES, THE PROVINCIAL-MUNICIPAL FISCAL AND SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION LEADS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY MEET WITH NOSDA TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF VISION AND PURPOSE BETWEEN THESE THREE INITIATIVES AS THEY APPLY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO.

4.3 Increasing Training and Education Opportunities

Employment Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities have important roles in the provision of education and training of the unemployed, as do Municipal Service Managers. Municipal Service Managers focus on the employment and training of the unemployed who are on social assistance (i.e. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW)). Planning for the unemployed whether or not they are on social assistance should be undertaken in an inclusive, coordinated and proactive way. This planning should systemically include Municipal Service Managers, along with Employment Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities across the North, to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Barriers to training and education keep people from the training, education and ultimately, the jobs they need.

In Thunder Bay for example, the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board plays an integral role in child development. Their current child care data indicates that the majority of child care users are attending school or working. This helps address the need for training for people who have barriers to employment. The provision of high quality child care gives parents an opportunity to upgrade, remain in their communities, and helps develop healthy children.

Training rules are restrictive for Ontario Works clients – some of the population in Northern Ontario have difficulty accessing training. In Kirkland Lake for example, colleges are distant: Northern College and College Boreal only offer a few programs at their local campuses that are geared to local labour market conditions (e.g. there is a lack of a local paramedic program). However, one jurisdiction over, the Cochrane DSSAB partnered with Northern College to fill empty seats in several classes, and had several training success stories where the tuition was covered and the DSSAB paid for transportation and books. While there is a need for more pilot projects/demonstration projects; there is a greater need for more program flexibility to meet needs of clients. That said, there is need to work more closely with Training, Colleges and Universities as well as Employment Ontario to help clients and potential clients. There are skills and trade shortages across the North, particularly in the human services, that could be trained and kept employed locally (e.g. culturally appropriate Early Childhood Educators or Personal Support Workers to address the needs of an aging population). Municipal Service Managers could facilitate the development of local qualified trainers to assist in skills training or upgrading, and could facilitate linkages between clients, educational facilities and employers to provide clients with valuable employment experience.

RECOMMENDATION 3: INCREASING TRAINING AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED ONE-STOP EMPLOYMENT PLANNING, TRAINING AND PLACEMENT FOR UNEMPLOYED PERSONS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO CURRENTLY UNDERTAKEN BY EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO AND THE MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE THE GROWTH SECRETARIAT, NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND MINES, AS WELL AS ALL MUNICIPAL SERVICE MANAGERS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO, GIVEN THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING RESPONSIBILITIES THEY ARE PRESENTLY VESTED WITH IN RELATION TO THE UNEMPLOYED WHO ARE ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE.

FURTHER, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT MORE SKILLS TRAINING DEMONSTRATION AND PILOT PROJECTS BE IMPLEMENTED IN COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL DSSABs AND THAT THERE BE MORE TRAINING PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY TO ASSIST CLIENTS, PARTICULARLY ODSP CLIENTS AND POTENTIAL CLIENTS DEVELOP THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO MEET LOCAL LABOUR FORCE NEEDS.

4.4 Retaining and Attracting People and Jobs

There are a number of factors that could help the North attract and retain skilled professionals, tradespeople and workers. The Northern Ontario Medical School is one example of how a strategic piece of infrastructure can attract professionals to an area. In this instance 'It was built, and people came'. Youth employment and re-attracting youth to serve an aging- in-place population is important: there is a crisis and a great need for personal support workers. Local health sectors across Northern Ontario need to grow to address senior/retiree in-migration demands for services. In addition, it was noted that a trade school could attract youth to the Sudbury, Parry Sound and North Bay areas to support employment in tourism, the arts, construction trades, and personal support.

Sustainability is the key to keeping young people and drawing workers to the North. Affordable Housing, appropriate child care, immigration facilitation and integration support services are critical to this sustainability. **NOSDA** and its member DSSABs need to prevent use of the social safety net and to help potential clients before they require DSSAB Help or Ontario Works help; and catch clients that are motivated to get out of the cycle by providing life and employment skills. Municipal Service Managers represent an economy of scale in service delivery that could be augmented through the development of complementary services such as Immigration support and labour market analysis. Successful Immigration and social integration requires strong support services and an optimum environment to retain immigrants in Northern communities: Municipal Service Managers offer good access to multi-cultural child care and could offer effective early training and support of new families. Affordable housing and family supports for families and children are also very important in the retention of immigrants to Northern areas. Strong youth and labour attraction policies and programs foster entrepreneurship, business development and strengthen and advance resource based industries through the development of a stable labour force.

RECOMMENDATION 4: SUPPORT RETENTION AND ATTRACTION PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT NOSDA/DSSABs PARTNER WITH ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RETENTION AND ATTRACTION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS ACROSS NORTHERN ONTARIO TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LOCAL LABOUR CONDITIONS, TO ADDRESS NEEDS AS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE NORTHERN ONTARIO GROWTH PLANNING PROCESS.

4.5 Early Learning and Child Care

NOSDA member organizations are responsible for planning and managing the delivery of child care services at the local level as service system managers. This is developed within the framework of provincial legislation, regulation and policy direction. Collaboration between the provincial government, municipal service managers and municipalities is essential. Working together to ensure that there is an effective children's services system is required in order for each child to get the best possible start in life by making sure that they are ready to learn by the time they start Grade One. **NOSDA** supports the objectives of the Best Start Initiative to increase quality licensed child care and integration of all services for children and their families by working collaboratively with our community partners to make sure that services are seamless and accessible within their individual communities whenever possible. Currently the implementation of this initiative has been implemented in stages across Northern Ontario. The provincial government must extend the Best Start funding beyond 2010. This investment in social capital infrastructure is an essential component of local and regional development. Child Care, while it provides employment is also crucial in supporting expansion of existing or attracting new business. The economic prosperity of Northern Ontario is directly dependent on a sustainable child care system that provides high-quality early learning and care that is flexible and accountable.

Recent reports also underline the critical importance and social value of early childhood development programs and investment in child care. A report recently completed by Richard Florida and Roger Martin of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the Rothman School of Management at the University of Toronto for the Premier of Ontario entitled **Ontario in the Creative Age**(2009) recommends Provincial investment in enriched early childhood education. Available and affordable child care is one of the best investments in human capital development that can be made.

When the Best Start program was initiated by the Province of Ontario, one of the four demonstration projects was established in the District of Timiskaming. This investment is generating the very results the Province expected it would -

on both the Early Childhood development front and on the local economic development front. This demonstration project should now be the model for other Service managers across Northern Ontario.

RECOMMENDATION 5: THAT THE 'BEST START' INITIATIVE BE EXTENDED PAST MARCH 31, 2010

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES, WORKING WITH THE MINISTRY OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND MINES AND MUNICIPAL SERVICE MANAGERS EXTEND AND EXPAND THE 'BEST START' EARLY IMPLEMENTATION SITE MODEL AS DEVELOPED IN THE DISTRICT OF TIMISKAMING, ACROSS ALL OF NORTHERN ONTARIO.

THE FOCUS OF THE ROLLOUT OF THE FULL 'BEST START' DELIVERY MODEL WOULD BE TO CREATE CONSTRUCTION JOBS, EMPLOYMENT IN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE, AND THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ABILITY OF NORTHERN CHILDREN TO ENTER GRADE ONE READY TO LEARN AND ULTIMATELY TO CREATE A RESILIENT YOUNG LABOUR FORCE IN THE NORTH.

4.6 Making Strategic Use of Infrastructure

4.6.1 Social Housing and Building Infrastructure

Social housing is infrastructure. That's the message of the Social Housing Services Corporation. **NOSDA** member organizations are responsible for social housing in their respective catchment areas. Further, as identified in the *Places to Grow* legislation, upper and single tier municipalities need to develop housing strategies. That speaks directly to municipal service managers. Social Housing as infrastructure is discussed in detail in another recent NOSDA paper entitled **Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario** (2009).

In boom areas, there is a lack of affordable housing. In de-populating areas there is a modest surplus of it. However, it was recognized by a number of DSSAB's that there is an underinvestment in social housing in Northern Rural Ontario, and that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as the Federal Government need to get back into the funding side of housing because the local property tax base cannot sustain the significant increases in costs especially once mortgages and debentures are paid off, given the very difficult economic times Northern Ontario has been under for a much longer period than the rest of the province.

It was also recognised there is a lack of affordable housing and no private sector involvement in social housing development in many areas of Northern Ontario, and that this is a significant need.

RECOMMENDATION 6: EXTEND AND EXPAND THE NORTHERN HOME REPAIR PROGRAM

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING EXTEND AND SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND THE EXISTING NORTHERN HOME REPAIR PROGRAM WHICH PROVIDES ESSENTIAL RENOVATIONS TO ENSURE HOMES REMAIN LIVEABLE AND ENERGY EFFICIENT. THE EXPANSION OF THIS FUND COULD BE FACILITATED BY ACCESSING THE NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDING FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. THE ALLOCATION OF THE NORTHERN REPAIR FUNDS WILL BE DETERMINED AS PART OF THE NORTHERN ONTARIO GROWTH PLAN TO ENSURE CONSTRUCTION TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT DURING RESTRUCTURING IN THE FORESTRY SECTOR AND THE PRESENT LULL IN RESOURCE EXTRACTION INDUSTRIES. THE RETROFITTING OF EXISTING HOMES FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY SHOULD BE A FOCUS OF THIS EXPANDED PROGRAM.

4.6.2 Other Building Infrastructure

Buildings that are in jurisdictions (e.g. surplus schools, hospitals etc.) can be converted for use as day care centres, training centres and college satellites. For example, in Sault Ste. Marie, the City now has a central ambulance dispatch in a building where repairs are also made to fire trucks, land ambulances and police trucks. This is a partnership that has creatively used infrastructure to lever resources for partners. In Parry Sound, consideration is being given to using the former hospital as a trade school. Yet the best example is the use of surplus space in the school system under the Best Start program.

Currently, the Ontario Realty Corporation does not include or inform DSSAB's about available surplus buildings and properties. These properties may be of great social infrastructure value, and DSSAB's may be able to leverage their social value through redevelopment or partnerships.

RECOMMENDATION 7: SURPLUS BUILDING AND PROPERTY INVENTORY

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT UNDER THE NORTHERN ONTARIO GROWTH PLAN THAT DSSAB'S BE RECOGNIZED AS 'ELIGIBLE ENTITIES' FOR ACCESS TO THESE SURPLUS BUILDINGS AND PROPERTIES.

FURTHER, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT GRANTS BE MADE AVAILABLE FROM THE NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND TO COMPLETE RENOVATIONS TO MAKE THESE PROPERTIES USEABLE FOR COMMUNITY RENEWAL PURPOSES.

4.6.3 Public Transportation

In most areas across the north, there is no public transit. This lack of public transportation is a huge issue in rural and small urban communities and the lack of inter-urban transit such as Grey Hound buses is a real concern. For example, there are no public transportation links between Highway 17 and Manitoulin Island, leaving car-less young and old alike with difficulties in making necessary medical, social or employment trips. There are many other communities that have similar problems in the North. In Kenora, for example, it was suggested that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care needs to become much more engaged in the 'non-emergent patient transfer' matter. This is a significant issue for northern service managers because of the stress it puts on emergency resources (i.e. not being able to respond to an actual emergency because your resources are tied up transporting non-emergency patients).

This is not a new issue. Reports such as The Freedom to Move is Life Itself (1986), produced by the Ontario Advisory Councils on Seniors and on the Physically Handicapped for the Government of Ontario recommended the creation of transportation 'regions'. More recently, a report commissioned by the North Eastern Ontario Local Health Integration Network entitled A Review of Non-Emergency Health-Related Transportation Services in the Cochrane District (2008) called for the hiring of a District Transportation Coordinator to assist with:

- i. The recruitment and retention of volunteer-drivers across the district for all services; and,*
- ii. The development and implementation of a district wide promotional campaign to increase local awareness of transportation services; and*
- iii. to implement a web-based software application to assist with the booking, scheduling and coordination of clients and volunteer-drivers*

Anything that can be done to ensure that rural communities to have some form of public transportation for necessary employment, health and social services would be beneficial, and should be considered in the context of the Northern Growth Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 8: CONSIDER RURAL AND REMOTE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION UNDER THE NORTHERN GROWTH PLAN

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONS WITH LOW INCOME, SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE REGIONS OF NORTHERN ONTARIO BE CONSIDERED UNDER THE NORTHERN ONTARIO GROWTH PLAN, AS A MEANS OF COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING, IMPROVING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT, AS WELL AS PROVIDING NECESSARY *AGING AT HOME* SUPPORTS AND RELIEVING ALTERNATIVE LEVELS OF CARE PRESSURES ON HOSPITAL BEDS. LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS AND DSSAB'S SHOULD BE CONSULTED WHEN RURAL AND REMOTE TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS ARE BEING DEVELOPED TO ENSURE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FOR BOTH HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES IS INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE.

4.7 Urban Aboriginal Strategy

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) is now implemented in thirteen cities and these thirteen cities represent more than twenty-five percent of Canada's total Aboriginal population. The thirteen cities include: Vancouver, Prince George, Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thompson, Toronto, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay.

The UAS targets three priority areas: improving life skills, promoting job training, skills and entrepreneurship, and supporting Aboriginal women, children and families. The most pressing needs identified by the Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Strategy are food security, affordable housing, youth outreach and after-school programming, life skills training, and financial support for children's recreational and social-engagement activities.

Although there is a wealth of opportunities, Aboriginal people continue to face significant challenges such as access to quality education, a meaningful job, and adequate housing among others. Municipal Service Managers have extensive experience in providing services to off-reserve natives across Northern Ontario, assisting with their full range of programs available, both in times of community crisis, such as providing emergency relief from seasonal floods in the James Bay frontier, to helping individuals find opportunities in communities adjacent to First Nations.

RECOMMENDATION 9: EXPAND THE URBAN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ANY STRATEGY TO ADDRESS POVERTY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO MUST BE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND ADDRESS THE DISPROPORTIONATE NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THAT THE PROVINCE PARTICIPATES IN AN EXPANDED URBAN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO.

4.8 Sensitivity to Language and Culture

As noted in the Context Section, twenty-six percent of Ontario's Francophone population live in Northern Ontario. It is important that **French Language Services Act** entitlements be recognized and valued in the designated communities of Northern Ontario. Further, the bilingual, multi-cultural aspects of Northern Ontario's population should be celebrated and developed to foster international linkages and trade.

RECOMMENDATION 10: DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SOCIAL PROGRAMS

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ANY STRATEGY TO ADDRESS LABOUR FORCE, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MUST BE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND SPECIFICALLY TARGETED TO ADDRESS THE BILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE OF NORTHERN ONTARIO.

5.0 CONCLUSION

NOSDA and its member organizations welcome the opportunity to work with the Growth Secretariat and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines – and all other partners – to help maintain and improve the quality of life of Northerners. The Northern Growth Plan being developed needs to be broad and integrated, and reflective of both social and economic principles. It should also be a community development process, with a human services component. It must support the development of a skilled, educated Northern Ontario labour force.

NOSDA and its member District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) can help drive local social capital development and community development in conjunction with the Northern Growth Plan team. DSSABs have a proud ten year history - social infrastructure development and support is the core business of DSSABs. **NOSDA** members believe that DSSABs should have an increased role in Immigration Support, Skills Training, Child Care, Social Housing and Community Infrastructure planning to develop an effective network of labour market services. **NOSDA** and its members can provide a vital link between the Northern Growth Plan and social infrastructure development.

The recommendations herein mark a starting point for discussions that will lead to improvement to the lives of nearly a million people who live, work and play in the North. The hard work required on the part of all partners to implement these recommendations will lead to hope, opportunity and prosperity for the people of Northern Ontario.

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