

## **Ontario Connecting Children and Youth in Northwestern Ontario to Care Close to Home**

*Nearly \$2 million boost in funding to expand pediatric services*

### **NEWS**

January 25, 2024

THUNDER BAY — The Ontario government is investing nearly \$2 million to increase access to pediatric services for children and youth in Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario so they have the care they need, when they need it. This is part of the province's [investment of an additional \\$330 million](#) each year in pediatric health services at hospitals and community-based health care facilities across Ontario.

“Our government is making record investments in the health and well-being of our children,” said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. “The pediatric funding provided to services in Thunder Bay will have a tremendous impact on children and their families, ensuring they receive faster access to care when they need it.”

The nearly \$2 million in additional funding will support programs and services at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (\$1 million), George Jeffrey Children's Centre (\$856,000), and Children's Centre Thunder Bay (\$103,700). The funding will be used to:

- Establish a specialized newborn transport team of health care professionals at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre serving remote communities to ensure medically-safe transfers to critical services.
- Increase access to children's rehabilitation services, including speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy at George Jeffrey Children's Centre and Children's Centre Thunder Bay.
- Provide Children's Centre Thunder Bay the ability to support pediatric mental health and addictions by processing referrals more efficiently to better match children and youth to services, targeted prevention and outreach and occupational therapy consultation.

“Our government is continuing to ensure children and youth in every corner of the province have quick and convenient access to high-quality and convenient care, closer to home,” said Robin Martin, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health. “This investment in Thunder Bay will make it easier and faster for young people and their families to connect to the care they need for years to come.”

This consistent and stable annual funding increase will ensure hospitals and children's rehabilitation providers in Thunder Bay have the people, resources and technology to improve access to pediatric care and prevent backlogs. Over 100 high-priority initiatives are being quickly implemented across Ontario to ensure children and youth in every corner of the province can connect to emergency care, surgeries, ambulatory services, diagnostic imaging, and mental health services.

“Ontario is putting children and youth first by ensuring they receive the care they need when they need it,” said Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. “Our

government's significant investment in pediatric care will reduce waitlists, improve access to clinical assessments, early intervention, and children's rehabilitation services, such as speech-language pathology, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy. This means less time waiting for services, quicker recovery, and better quality of life for children and their families in Northwestern Ontario and across the province.”

Through [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#), the Ontario government is providing significant financial support to hospitals and communities to improve how they deliver pediatric care – ensuring Ontarians of all ages can access care easier, faster, and closer to home in their communities.

### **Quick Facts:**

- Supporting the mental health and well-being of people in Ontario is a key priority for this government. That is why we are providing a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions (MHA) system that offers high-quality, evidence-based services and supports where and when they need them.
- In 2020, the government released Roadmap to Wellness, our plan to build a world-class mental health and addictions system.
- In addition to investing in existing services, Roadmap to Wellness investments are supporting the introduction of new innovative programs to begin to address wait lists and times and ensure access to timely and appropriate services.
- For example, Ontario recently expanded [One Stop Talk](#), a virtual walk-in mental health counselling service for children, youth and families. Once fully implemented, it will provide immediate, low barrier access to brief counselling services through a single virtual access point from anywhere in the province.

### **Quotes:**

As always, we are incredibly appreciative for this funding that will further our care for the paediatric population. The funds will enhance access to advanced paediatric care services, thereby improving patient outcomes and help bring more timely and equitable access to care in the North.

- Dr. Rhonda Crocker Ellacott  
CEO, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre

All of us at George Jeffrey Children's Centre are grateful for Ontario's historic investment in children's developmental, physical, and mental health and well-being. Across this community we are committed to ensuring kids with disabilities and developmental differences receive quality, family-centred care. With this investment, we'll be able to reach more kids and families at the right time, close to home.

- Tina Bennett  
CEO, George Jeffrey Children's Centre

Given the importance of timely early intervention with a focus on reducing wait times in Pre-school Speech, Children's Centre Thunder Bay is thrilled to be receiving this new annualized investment. Please know that this money will be used to support our most vulnerable children with much needed therapies, so that they can be more ready for and successful in their educational journey.

- Diane Walker  
CEO, Children's Center Thunder Bay

I am pleased to see our government's ongoing financial support for the field of pediatric care. This funding will play a crucial role in enhancing the Pediatric department at the Thunder Bay Regional Hospital, fostering growth at the Children's Centre of Thunder Bay, and furthering the compassionate services provided at the George Jeffrey Children's Centre.

- Kevin Holland  
MPP for Thunder Bay - Atikokan

#### **Additional Resources:**

- [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#)
- [Ontario Connecting Children and Youth to Care Close to Home](#)
- [Ontario Expanding Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in Every Corner of the Province](#)
- [Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System](#)

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