



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

Toolkit



Thunder Bay Police Service invites police services across Canada to participate in the Tree of Hope project to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit (MMIWG2S) individuals.

The widespread participation of police services in the Tree of Hope project underscores a collective commitment to raising awareness and honoring the memory of MMIWG2S. Add your police service's voice to this meaningful and impactful initiative.

This toolkit provides police services with practical advice and clear instructions to ensure events:

- are organized with cultural respect and sensitivity.
- foster awareness and understanding within both the public and law enforcement communities.
- promote a collaborative approach to addressing MMIWG2S.

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In Canada, there are reported numbers of 1,200 and as many as 5,000 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Tree of Hope shines for them.



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MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Overview



The Tree of Hope project is a poignant initiative that began in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 2019, to honour and raise awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit individuals (MMIWG2S). First hosted by the Thunder Bay Police Service, the project involves cultural ceremony and the of illuminating trees with red lights representing a missing or murdered Indigenous person.

Thunder Bay Police Officer Sharlene Bourdeau initiated the project to raise awareness of MMIWG2S and to reassure their loved ones that they are not forgotten. Constable Bourdeau, now retired, is a member of the Pays Plat First Nation and served 31 years with the Thunder Bay Police Service. Constable Bourdeau specifically wanted the initiative to highlight the role police have in overseeing cases associated with MMIWG2S, to help bridge the gap between Indigenous communities and police.

The Tree of Hope is intended to be a police-led project. Police services can engage as appropriate local, regional, national Indigenous communities, groups and organizations.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

Objectives



The **Tree of Hope Project** is a symbolic and tangible initiative for Police Services dedicated to combating violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2-Spirited individuals. Paying tribute to the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals who have gone missing or been murdered, and acknowledging the ongoing trauma experienced by their families and communities addresses the following key objectives of the Tree of Hope project.

1. **Honoring Victims and Survivors** as the primary purpose.
2. **Raising Awareness** about the issue and scale of the MMIWG2S tragedy and the need for systemic change to address violence against these groups.
3. **Promoting Cultural Healing** by providing a space for communities to reflect on the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, systemic violence, and injustice.
4. **Support for Justice and Action** by amplifying Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
5. **Community Collaboration** by working together with Indigenous communities.
6. **Promote Dialogue** by encouraging conversations about the history, context, and importance of the MMIWG2S issue.
7. **Creating Lasting Impact** by sharing and strengthening a symbol of hope and resilience.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Impact



"It was an honour to have the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Cindy Woodhouse participate. When she recognized our service for 'doing this hard work and heart work', it was a moment of great pride."

- Chief Darcy Fleury
Thunder Bay Police Service

Since it was introduced in 2019 at the Thunder Bay Police Service, the Tree of Hope project has expanded. Dozens of Ontario police services have participated in the initiative.

In 2024, the Thunder Bay Police Service brought the Tree of Hope to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, with the support of federal Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu, and remarks by Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse. This promoted national attention to the issue of MMIWG2S.

The project has also inspired similar ceremonies in other regions. In 2023, the Treaty Three Police Service (T3PS) participated by lighting trees at both their General Headquarters in Kenora and their South Detachment on Agency One Lands. This act was part of a broader commitment to raise awareness about the MMIWG2S crisis.

MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

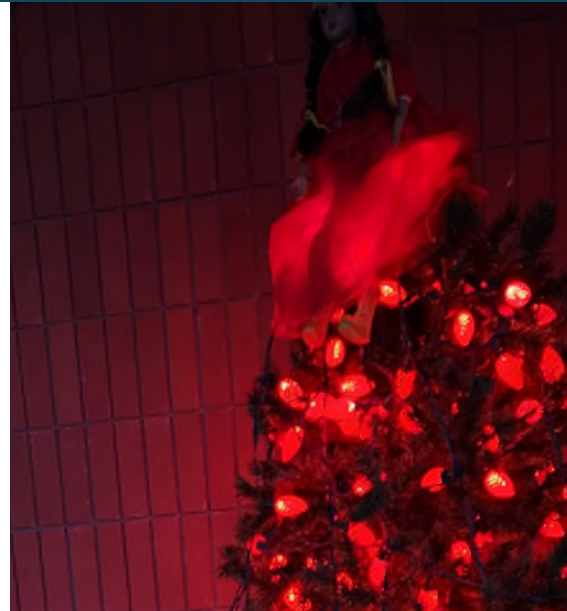
Key Considerations



Weather. Consider providing shelter and/or space for warming up.

Food. Consider providing culturally appropriate warm beverages such as tea, as well as small snacks.

Photography and videography. Engage participants to determine the appropriateness of recording during cultural elements of the event. Advise media and guests as to which portions may or may not be photographed or recorded.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

Contact

The Tree of Hope Project was initiated by now retired Thunder Bay Police Service Constable Sharlene Bourdeau. She may be contacted to provide advice to your service regarding planning a Tree of Hope event.

Sharlene Bourdeau
sharlenebourdeau@gmail.com

Questions for the Thunder Bay Police Service can be directed to news@thunderbaypolice.ca



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

Who to Involve



The following are suggestions for individuals, groups, and organizations to involve for an event that is respectful, meaningful, and grounded in the lived experiences of those most impacted by MMIWG2S.

It is imperative to involve a community member who has been personally impacted by the MMIWG2S crisis as a survivor or family member of a victim. This person must be supported in a good and culturally appropriate way to share their story as part of the Tree of Hope event. Remember to approach this person in a culturally appropriate manner, such as by offering tobacco, and to give this person the time and resources they need, such as a support person with them as they speak.

Working in partnership with local Indigenous organizations and Knowledge Keepers will help shape an event that honors truth, fosters healing, and supports ongoing calls for justice.

Speakers:

In addition to the Chief of your police service, speakers may include:

- Elder
- Chief of Traditional Territory
- Survivors and/or family members of victims
- Ontario Native Women's Association as advocates for MMIWG2S
- Other local and regional Indigenous leaders, partners and/or associations as appropriate
- City Mayor
- Consider a member of your police service who works with victims and/or families

Lighting of the Tree:

- The event coordinator, in consultation with an Elder, should determine who to invite to light the Tree of Hope. This may include family members of a victim and/or a survivor.
- This may or may not involve a speaking role, depending on the comfort level and preference of the person/people.
- The lighting of the Tree of Hope is the act of plugging in or turning on the lights at 7:00pm.

Invitations:

- Survivors and family members of victims
- Community Elders
- Leaders of key organizations working to address MMIWG2S:
 - Political Territory Organizations
 - Advocacy Groups
 - Service Providers
 - Grass Roots organizations
- Members of your police service
- Partner law enforcement services
- Local and regional Members of Provincial Parliament
- City Councillors

MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Event Elements



Sample Agenda: See appendix.

Cultural Inclusivity:

Creating an inclusive and respectful event begins with recognizing and honoring the diverse cultures and communities represented, especially the Indigenous Peoples whose lands on which the event will take place. Guidance on embedding cultural inclusivity into every stage of event planning and delivery must be sought through active and meaningful collaboration. Local and/or regional Indigenous Elders, community leaders and members should be invited to provide guidance to ensure that all customs, teachings, and protocols are observed appropriately and respectfully. Invitations may involve offering of tobacco. Meaningful engagement and partnership will not only enrich the event experience but also uphold the principles of equity, reconciliation, and mutual respect.

The following are some elements to consider for the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope lighting ceremony.

Sacred Fire: A Firekeeper coordinates all elements and determines location, set-up, start time, medicines, and safety protocols.

Smudge: An Elder conducts or assigns a designate to conduct the ceremony. The smudge occurs just prior to the official start-time of the event.

Opening Prayer: A respected Elder is offered tobacco to provide a prayer to begin the event in a good way.

Drumming: A local women's hand drumming group is invited to drum during the event. The drum group chooses four songs, one to honour each direction. Note that the drummers may require a table on which to keep their drums and personal bundles.

Eagle Staff: The local/regional Chief(s) should be consulted for guidance on inviting Eagle Staff Carrier(s) to attend.

Honoraria: Consult local leaders of Indigenous organizations for appropriate rates, gifting and protocols for Elders, Drummers, Fire Keeper, Eagle Staff Carriers and others.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope

The Tree of Hope



The tree may be real or artificial. If there are live trees on the police headquarters property, consider using one as the Tree of Hope.

Display near the Tree of Hope a sign that explains its purpose and the importance of raising awareness of MMIWG2S. This allows people to recognize the significance of the Tree of Hope well after the lighting ceremony.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Timeline of Preparation



The Tree of Hope lighting ceremony is held on the **first Sunday after Remembrance Day**. The lighting should occur at 19:00 to align with other police services.

Three - Four Months Before the Event

1. **Identify an Event Lead**
 - Consider forming a planning team to oversee the event, including members from law enforcement, Indigenous communities, advocacy groups and other relevant partners.
 - Define roles and responsibilities for each team member.
2. **Engage with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers**
 - Collaborate with Indigenous elders, community leaders, and spiritual guides to ensure cultural protocols and ceremonies are respected.
 - Involve community members in the planning process to make sure the ceremony is authentic and culturally sensitive.
3. **Choose a Location**
 - Confirm a space at the police service's headquarters that is accessible, safe, and able to accommodate the expected number of attendees.
4. **Budget**
 - Establish a budget for the event, including costs for honoraria, gifts, lighting, supplies, and refreshments.
 - If required, seek support through donations, sponsorships, or grants. For example, a local hardware store may donate lights for the Tree of Hope.
5. **Purchase Essential Supplies**
 - Buy or order an artificial tree and red tree lights (1,000 – 4,000 depending on size of tree).
 - Purchase early to avoid seasonal depletion of products.

Two Months Before the Event

- 1. Confirm Ceremony Participants**
 - In a culturally appropriate manner and with the guidance of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, invite people to provide prayers, remarks, and drumming.
- 2. Arrange Staffing**
 - Ensure people are scheduled to provide appropriate security, assistance with event set-up, etc.

One Month Before the Event

- 3. Prepare the Agenda**
 - Plan the structure of the ceremony (e.g., prayers, drumming, remarks, symbolic lighting of the tree).
 - Include time for reflections, sharing of stories, and opportunities for attendees to engage with the event's theme.
- 4. Finalize Partnerships and Sponsorships**
 - Confirm sponsorships and partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community groups to support the event.
 - Work with local media to promote the event, secure event coverage and amplify the event's message.
- 5. Publicity and Invitations**
 - Begin promoting the event internally and through social media, local news, and community outreach.
 - Send invitations to key partners, dignitaries, and community members.

Two Weeks Before the Event

- 1. Confirm Speakers, Participants, and Special Guests**
 - Confirm attendance and participation from Elders, speakers, drummers, and any special guests involved in the ceremony.
 - Coordinate with and support speakers to ensure their remarks are distinct and align with the event's purpose.
- 2. Finalize Event Logistics**
 - Organize any necessary AV equipment (microphones, lighting, sound systems) and venue set up requirements.
 - Make arrangements specific to your event. For example, if using an especially tall tree, special equipment may be required to hang lights on it.
 - Arrange for the production of any necessary signage, including information about MMIWG2S and the Tree of Hope.
- 3. Share the Agenda**
 - Provide to participants the agenda and any informational materials related to the ceremony and MMIWG2S awareness.
- 4. Order event catering**
 - If event is to be held outdoors, ensure food and beverages are appropriate.



One Week Before the Event

1. **Finalize Media Coverage**
 - Secure local media coverage to raise awareness of the event.
 - Prepare media releases and media kits and provide key contacts for journalists.
2. **Distribute Invitations and Event Information**
 - Confirm RSVP details and send final event reminders to participants and guests.

Week of the Event

1. **Event Setup and Decoration**
 - Begin decorating the venue and setting up the tree, lighting, and any signage or displays.
 - Ensure all equipment is functioning.
2. **Check Event Materials**
 - Ensure all materials (e.g., information, posters) are ready for distribution.
3. **Review Event Flow and Timing**
 - Reconfirm the event agenda with all participants and ensure that timing is being adhered to.

Day of the Event

1. **Final Setup**
 - Arrive early to finalize event setup and ensure all equipment is ready for use (e.g., sound system, lighting).
 - Set up tables, welcome guests, and direct participants as they arrive.
2. **Coordinate with Volunteers and Staff**
 - Brief volunteers and staff on their roles for the ceremony, ensuring that everyone is prepared and understands the flow of the event.
3. **Conduct the Ceremony**
 - Follow the event agenda, ensuring that all speakers and activities stay on time and that the ceremony remains respectful and focused on the objectives.
4. **Document the Ceremony**
 - Take photos/video for later sharing and reflection.
5. **Post-Event Follow-up**
 - Issue media release.
 - Thank participants, volunteers, and sponsors.
 - Gather feedback from attendees to improve future events.
 - Share event highlights to social media, website, etc.
 - The red lights serve as a poignant tribute to the enduring memory of MMIWG2S individuals. Keep them on throughout January. Some services choose to keep the Tree of Hope lit until spring.



MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Appendices



Sample Media Release

Tree of Hope honours Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited+ persons

DATE. City - A Tree of Hope now shines at (location). Today's tree lighting ceremony builds awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited+ persons (MMIWG2S).

In 2019, the Thunder Bay Police Service began the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Project to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited people. It has since been adopted by other police services throughout Ontario.

(Name of police service) introduced a MMIWG2S Tree of Hope for the first time today. "(Comment on commitment, inspiration, etc.)," said Chief XXX, (name of police service).

In Canada, there are reported numbers of 1,200 and as many as 5,000 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The Tree of Hope shines for them.

The red lights on the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope pay tribute to those lost. For the families of victims who continue to suffer from loss, the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope is a reminder that they are not alone, and that their loved ones are remembered.

"Quote from survivor or family member of victim."

The hope behind this initiative is to build awareness of unsolved MMIWG2S cases and the issues impacting this segment of our population. Awareness empowers people to come forward with information to help make the community safer.

This project is a reminder that ideas driven by passion and commitment can make a difference, increase awareness, provoke change, and bring a community together.

SAMPLE QUOTE

"As police officers we have a responsibility to be the voices of the Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people who have suffered at the hands of others. Our pledge is to hold each of them in our hearts as we continue to work in a good way to protect our community and advance Truth and Reconciliation for the safety and well-being of marginalized people."

- Darcy Fleury
Chief of Thunder Bay Police Service

Sample Speaking notes for MC and Chief of Police

MC:

- Thank you for joining us for this very special tree lighting ceremony.
- This ceremony is an opportunity for us to stand together on the traditional lands of the (name of First Nation), (name of Treaty) and I thank them for their careful stewardship of this land.
- Introduce Elder (name) to start us off in a good way.
- (ELDER OPENING PRAYER)
- Thank Elder.
- Welcome all guests.
- Recognize dignitaries:
 - Chief of First Nation
 - Federal/provincial representatives
 - Mayor and/or City Councillors
 - Representatives of partner organizations
 - Police Service Board Members
- Introduce Chief of Police.

Chief of Police:

- In 2019, Thunder Bay Police Service retired Constable Sharlene Bourdeau began a mission and created the Tree of Hope project.
- She saw the need to raise awareness for the murdered and missing Indigenous woman and girls in Canada.
- She brought together community partners to light the first Tree of Hope at the Thunder Bay Police Service Headquarters.
- Thanks to her vision and efforts, these lights shine every year not only in Thunder Bay but at police services throughout Ontario.
- (Name of police service) is proud to join in lighting a Tree of Hope to create awareness and show support for grieving families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and members of the Two Spirited Community.
- We know there are between 12 hundred and five thousand cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada.
- These victims are daughters, sisters, mothers, aunties, and friends.
- The (1200) lights on this Tree of Hope will shine for them.
- As police officers we have a responsibility to be the voices of the Indigenous women who have suffered at the hands of others.
- Our pledge is to hold each of the murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2 spirited in our hearts.
- We continue to work in a good way to protect our community and advance Truth and Reconciliation for the safety and well-being of marginalized people.
- The Tree of Hope is part of our journey to advancing Truth and Reconciliation.
- I am grateful to the partners and service members for sharing this commitment.



Sample Speaking notes for MC and Chief of Police (Continued)

MC:

- Introduce the Drum Group.
 - Drum Group – 2 Songs
- Thank the Drum Group.
- Introduce Speakers.
 - Elder
 - First Nation Chief – Remarks
 - Federal/provincial representatives - Remarks
 - Mayor – Remarks
 - Partner Organization Leaders – Remarks
 - Police Service Board - Remarks
- Thank speakers.
- Invite Drum Group to continue the ceremony.
 - Drum Group – 2 Songs
- Introduce person to light Tree of Hope – Survivor or Family Member
 - Shares Story
- Lighting of Tree of Hope.
- Conclude formal portion of event.
- Invite guests to enjoy refreshments.
- Invite media to interview speakers.



Minister of Indigenous Services of Canada Patty Hajdu, retired Thunder Bay Police Service Constable Sharlene Bourdeau, and Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse at the Tree of Hope Lighting on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, in December 2024.

Sample Agenda

MMIWG2S Tree of Hope Lighting Ceremony Location

The Tree of Hope lighting ceremony is held on the **first Sunday after Remembrance Day**. The lighting should occur at **19:00** to align with other police services.

What	Who	Key Points
4:30 - Smudge of space	Elder	Completed prior to welcoming remarks
5:00 - Welcome (2 minutes)	MC	Land Acknowledgement
Acknowledge Dignitaries (2 minutes)	MC	Include Elders, Drummers, police service leaders, political partners, others as appropriate
Opening Prayer (4 minutes)	Elder	
Introduce Drummers	MC	
Drummers (7 minutes)	Drum Group	Two songs
Police perspective and Tree of Hope background (4 minutes)	Police Service Chief	Police role in MMIWG2S, local significance
Remarks & perspective (2 minutes)	Elder	Significance of MMIWG2S Tree of Hope
Remarks/personal experience (5 minutes)	Survivor and/or family member of victim	
Remarks/impact of MMIWG2S	Chief of First Nation traditional territory	
Remarks/MMIWG2S (3 minutes)	Other local and/or regional Indigenous leaders and partners as appropriate	Impacts, resources, acknowledgement of losses, vision for future
Remarks/MMIWG2S commitment (3 minutes)	Political partners	Highlights and commitments re: MMIWG local, regional, provincial, national as appropriate
Remarks/Police Association (2 minutes)	Association President	Member perspective/support
Drummers (7 minutes)	Drum Group	Two songs
7:00 - Lighting of the Tree of Hope. Photos with speakers (4 minutes)	Selected representative(s)	
Invite guests to connect over refreshments and share reflections, stories	MC	
Close event	MC	Thank speakers, guests. Invite all to enjoy refreshments



TREE *of* HOPE



MMIWG2S



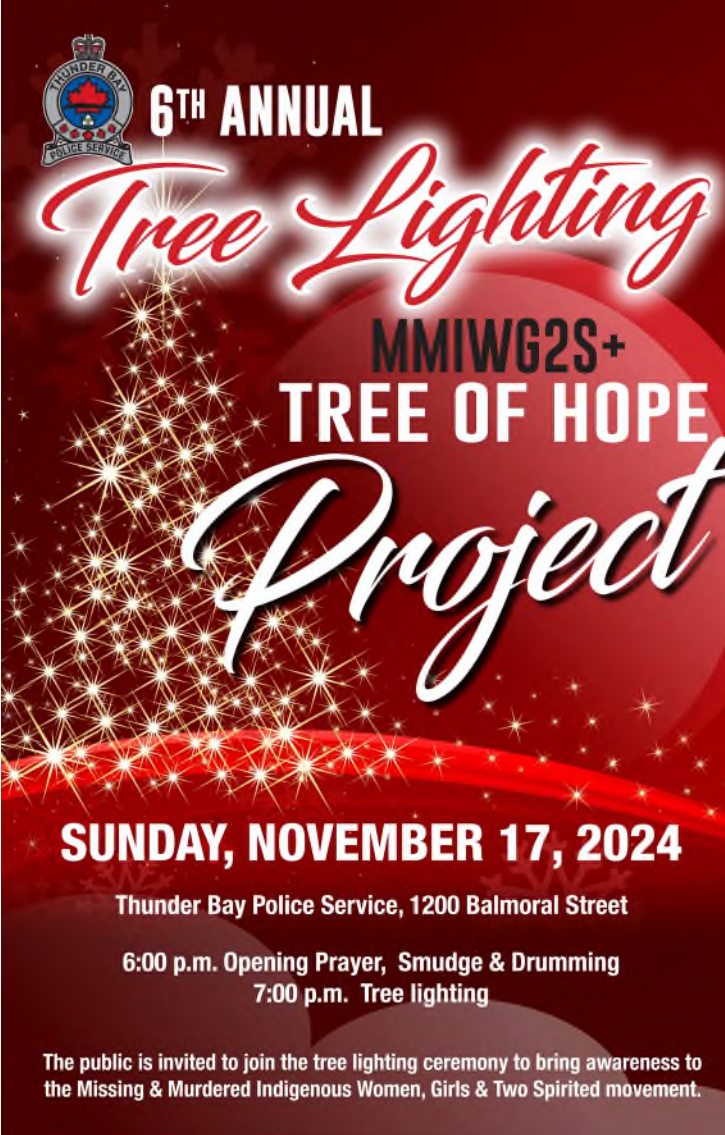
In 2019, the Thunder Bay Police Service began the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope project to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-2 Spirited people (MMIWG2S). It has since been adopted by other police services throughout Ontario.

In Canada, there are reported numbers in the range of 1200 and as many as 5000 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The MMIWG2S Tree of Hope shines for them.


The red lights on the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope pay tribute to those lost. For the families of victims who continue to suffer from loss, the MMIWG2S Tree of Hope is a reminder that they are not alone, and that their loved ones are remembered.

The hope behind this project is to build awareness of unsolved MMIWG2S cases and the issues impacting this segment of our population. Awareness empowers people to come forward with information to help make the community safer.

This project is a reminder that ideas driven by passion and commitment can make a difference, increase awareness, provoke change, and bring a community together.



The poster features a dark red background with a large, glowing tree silhouette made of white stars. The text is primarily in white and red. At the top left is the Thunder Bay Police Service crest. The main title is '6TH ANNUAL Tree Lighting MMIWG2S+ TREE OF HOPE Project'. The date 'SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2024' is prominently displayed. Below the date, the location 'Thunder Bay Police Service, 1200 Balmoral Street' is listed. The schedule includes '6:00 p.m. Opening Prayer, Smudge & Drumming' and '7:00 p.m. Tree lighting'. At the bottom, a paragraph invites the public to join the ceremony to bring awareness to the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls & Two Spirited movement.

 **6TH ANNUAL**
Tree Lighting
MMIWG2S+
TREE OF HOPE
Project

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2024

Thunder Bay Police Service, 1200 Balmoral Street

6:00 p.m. Opening Prayer, Smudge & Drumming
7:00 p.m. Tree lighting

The public is invited to join the tree lighting ceremony to bring awareness to the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls & Two Spirited movement.



About TBPS



We acknowledge that Thunder Bay is built on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek, which includes the Ojibwa of Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. We also acknowledge the contributions of the Métis peoples.

The Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) is a single tier municipal Police Service that serves the City of Thunder Bay and the Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge, an area of 678 square kilometers. The recorded population is approximately 117,000. Thunder Bay has the highest municipal population in Northwestern Ontario, and the second highest in all of Northern Ontario.

The TBPS team includes 255 Sworn and 140 civilian (2025 budget) members who are dedicated to serving the community.

Thunder Bay is rich in history and diversity, with a large Indigenous community and a growing number of new Canadians. It is home to Lakehead University, Confederation College, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University, Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute and other educational institutions, as well as the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Thunder Bay is a relatively remote community with a major shipping port and proximity to the Manitoba border and the US Border Crossing. Thunder Bay is an important service hub for smaller cities, towns and First Nations communities in the region. Various experts and reports suggest the 'true' population is closer to 150,000. This has a direct impact on the types and frequency of crimes driving calls for service by TBPS.

Because of the quality and dedication of our Members, TBPS continues to have the highest clearance rates in all of Canada. This accomplishment is even more impressive in the context of crime severity in our community. The Crime Severity Index combines both how often crimes happen and how severe they are. Our community has a higher than provincial and national average for crime severity. Clearance rates refer to the percentage of reported crimes that are successfully solved, usually through an arrest or charges. TBPS clearance rates indicate how effectively our dedicated members are addressing serious crimes.

www.thunderbaypolice.ca

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