

Thunder Bay

Filling service gaps goal of new sexual health clinic



New clinic will offer services such as transgender health care and HIV prevention medication

[Amy Hadley](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 01, 2018 8:00 AM ET | Last Updated: October 1, 2018



Dr. Bella Zawada and head nurse Aldona Valiunas at the new sexual health clinic in Thunder Bay, Ont. (Amy Hadley/CBC)

A Thunder Bay, Ont. doctor says she hopes to fill some healthcare gaps in the city, through her new sexual health clinic.

Umbrella Medical Clinic will offer everything from transgender health care, to emergency contraception and HIV prevention, said Dr. Annabella Zawada, who opened the clinic in September.

"It sort of dawned on me that I really enjoy sexual health ... and at the same time I realized that services in town are somewhat limited, or difficult to access," said Zawada.

"One is obviously access to transgender health care in town," she said. "But also things like getting timely contraception, including emergency contraception and IUD insertions. Not all family doctors do that regularly, and if you're waiting for a specialist in town, they're also extremely busy, and that might mean a delay in getting what you need."

Other things that can be hard to access include pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP) a medication that reduces the risk of HIV infection that many doctors in the province still don't provide, she said, as well as Mifegymiso, commonly known as the abortion pill.

High rates of sexually transmitted disease

Beyond improving access to services, Zawada said she also hopes to improve awareness and combat misinformation about sexual health in the region.

"Unfortunately northwestern Ontario has quite high incidences of sexually transmitted disease and those include things like chlamydia, gonorrhea, but also blood-borne infections like HIV and syphilis," she said, adding that one of her goals is to educate people about treatment and prevention, while breaking down the stigma around sexual health.



A dental dam can be used to prevent contracting sexually transmitted infections orally.

"Generally, as a society, we still kind of whisper about it," she said. "And often people don't bring up issues until they're severe ... and I'd like to change that."

The clinic is open to everyone, she said.

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