

## **WESTERN ONTARIO WARDENS' CAUCUS PRIORITIES**

As it has been since its inception, the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) is a strong partner and supporter of the provincial government. This relationship will be critical in the years ahead, as the ability for municipalities to balance budgets and continue to meet service levels remains under pressure – affecting everything from workforce development to infrastructure, long-term care to social services.

The WOWC is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.5 million residents. The organization aims to enhance the prosperity and overall well-being of rural and small urban communities across the region, by working collectively with upper levels of government.

Over the past two years, the WOWC developed a comprehensive Western Ontario Workforce Strategy, which has identified impacts and a need for provincial investment in manufacturing, housing affordability,

health care, agriculture, post-secondary education, and small business. The WOWC is prepared to invest in the implementation of the Strategy and is requesting the Province's financial support.

The WOWC recently adopted its strategic approach for advocacy in 2022 and early 2023 and identified a series of key priorities for the coming year. This information is intended for candidates in the upcoming Ontario election, to continue building on the excellent collaboration between the Province of Ontario and the member municipalities of Southwestern Ontario.



## THE WOWC'S KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR ARE AS FOLLOWS:

### AFFORDABLE AND ATTAINABLE HOUSING

Housing affordability, particularly in rural areas, continues to remain a strong focus within Southwestern Ontario. Given the current housing and rental market, it is crucial to focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing, of all forms, so that all Ontarians regardless of income level have a safe place to call home.

This is particularly true in rural areas and is a growing and worrisome trend as the pandemic has continued to evolve, driving more residents away from urban areas and into rural communities.

**173,000**  
NEW HOUSING UNITS  
REQUIRED BY 2041



Homelessness is also a growing issue in rural areas across Southwestern Ontario and requires a solution from a municipal-provincial perspective.

As confirmed by the Workforce Strategy, the Western Ontario region requires 173,000 new housing units by 2041. The WOWC's strategy for attainable housing consists of five primary areas: model policies, developer interactions, a resource centre, rental programs, and overall program promotion/marketing.



### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As also identified in the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy, there will be an estimated 214,000 jobs to be filled across the region between 2022 and 2030.

The WOWC's member municipalities are committed to working together to ensure there is sufficient workforce today and tomorrow to achieve the region's economic potential and support key industry sectors.

The WOWC also recognizes the power of regional collaboration, as its members face many of the

same challenges: attracting more newcomers, educating youth about career opportunities in their own backyard, and recalibrating post-secondary education to meet emerging demand.

**214,000**  
JOBS TO BE FILLED  
BY 2030



## BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND ADVOCACY

The WOWC recognizes that broadband has become an essential service and that universal access to high-speed internet plays a fundamental role



in securing the future prosperity of small urban and rural communities in Southwestern Ontario. Residents in our underserved communities are at an economic and social disadvantage when compared to their urban counterparts.

The WOWC is committed to improving access to high-speed internet services across the region, through Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT), and in partnership with the governments of Ontario and Canada.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Southwestern Ontario is facing ever-growing numbers of opioid overdoses and the strains of mental health and addictions on our rural communities. The WOWC is committed to encouraging coordination and collaboration between all stakeholders to improve the health outcomes of our most vulnerable.

As always, the WOWC requests that the Province continue collaborating with the member municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, and to use the WOWC's municipal expertise and collaborative regional power to benefit the residents and businesses across our communities.

Being part of the process and the conversation will be crucial as we move forward, and the strong

partnership between our governments will help ensure collective success for both Southwestern Ontario and the Province of Ontario as a whole.



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