

## Media Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 19, 2023**

### **WOWC Unveils 2023-24 Priorities to MPs and MPPs**

**Southwestern Ontario** – Members of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) met virtually with their regional Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) on Friday, April 14, 2023, to unveil the WOWC's priorities for 2023-24 as well as to present and discuss strategic approaches and mutual opportunities for collaboration and advocacy over the coming year.

The Caucus has identified the following key priorities for the coming year:

- Housing
- Workforce to Support Economic Growth
- Mental Health, Addictions and Homelessness

"The WOWC members have conducted extensive research and significant discussions over the past few months, and as a result have decided on a renewed and strengthened focus on these priorities for 2023 and early 2024," stated WOWC Chair Glen McNeil. "These three issues have consistently been identified as the primary concerns for small and rural municipalities in Western Ontario. The Caucus is therefore staying the course, given its significant familiarity and successful advocacy efforts with these matters over the past few years."

Multiple federal MPs and provincial MPPs were present on Friday to receive an exclusive presentation of the WOWC's 2023-2024 priorities, which were adopted unanimously by the Caucus last month following a strategic session to examine the most important advocacy issues and the path to achieving results. WOWC members stressed the importance of having the support of regional MPs and MPPs to further advocate on Parliament Hill and at Queen's Park for these priorities.

"The WOWC members, along with the MPs and MPPs, agreed wholeheartedly on the importance and urgency of collaborating together on these critical issues, and speaking with one united voice on behalf of the 1.5 million residents we collectively represent," added Chair McNeil.

Specific areas of focus within the three priorities are as follows:

## **Housing**

The WOWC continues to focus on increasing the supply of housing, of all forms, so that all residents in rural Western Ontario, regardless of income level, have a safe place to call home. The WOWC commends both upper levels of government on the significant investments that have been made, but will continue to request action and clarity on:

- The commitment from the Province of Ontario to keep municipalities “whole” regarding the loss of municipal development charge revenue, and the impact to their ability to fund housing-enabling infrastructure, as a result of the *Building Homes Faster Act*
- The anticipated targets regarding the number of new homes expected to be built in rural areas, similar to the targets set for urban municipalities across Ontario – as well as specific provincial supports for necessary infrastructure upgrades
- Additional details and support on the federal Housing Accelerator Fund, including specific funding and clarity on the definition of small and rural municipalities

## **Workforce to Support Economic Growth**

The WOWC is committed to ensuring sufficient workforce today and tomorrow to achieve the region’s economic potential and support key industry sectors. As confirmed by the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy, there will be an estimated 214,000 jobs to be filled across the region between now and 2030. WOWC members addressed:

- Recognition for the additional funding provided for the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP), while ensuring that the highest in-demand sectors requiring employment in rural Western Ontario are assisted by this program
- The region’s need for a faster and easier transition for Temporary Foreign Workers to become permanent residents
- Additional training supports for skilled trades, for residents already living in the region

## **Mental Health, Addictions, and Homelessness**

As these related issues continue to profoundly impact communities across Ontario and Canada, small and rural municipalities are seeing unprecedented strains on vulnerable populations and the health care network as a whole – yet have fewer resources as compared to urban areas to tackle the growing mental health, addictions, and homelessness crisis. The WOWC stressed the importance of:

- Specific and increased funding envelopes for small and rural communities to tackle these issues, e.g. the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)
- Permanent funding for the Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT) operating in small and rural municipalities across the region
- More focus, action and support for small and rural communities from the federal government

“The WOWC looks forward to continuing this important work through its significant research and ongoing collaboration with regional stakeholders, including directly with MPs and MPPs,” concluded WOWC Vice-Chair Wade Mills. “With our collective regional power, and the commitment from our federal and provincial partners, we can advocate and collaborate on these key priorities at multiple levels and find much-needed solutions for our residents and our communities.”

### **About**

The ***Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (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 WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research, analysis and education. For more information, visit [www.wowc.ca](http://www.wowc.ca).

A full report is available here: [https://wowc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/priorities\\_2023\\_final.pdf](https://wowc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/priorities_2023_final.pdf)

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