



photo credit: Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation

“ A strong partnership between our governments will help ensure collective success



photo credit: Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) represents the interests of the 15 upper-tier and single-tier counties in rural Western Ontario, including 300 communities within its geographic boundaries and 1.5 million people to whom the region is home.

In doing so, the WOWC always strives for partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with other levels of government – and embodies these values in its advocacy efforts in the spirit of maintaining and supporting the critical relationship with the Province of Ontario.

Together, both levels of government must use their expertise and collective regional knowledge to work through our mutual priorities. The challenges facing municipalities, particularly small and rural communities, are on the rise – from housing to workforce, and mental health and addictions to homelessness.

Investing in municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities, and the research and data collection conducted by the WOWC demonstrates the importance of this ongoing support for

rural Western Ontario – much like other rural communities across the province.

The WOWC has conducted significant research on its priority issues and is proposing concrete solutions to address the challenges in rural Western Ontario. Being part of the process and the conversation will be crucial as we move forward. This partnership between our governments will help ensure collective success for both Western Ontario and the Province of Ontario as a whole. Governments need to be all in this together.

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300

COMMUNITIES SERVED

ACROSS 15 UPPER-TIER AND
SINGLE-TIER MUNICIPALITIES



250k

**BUSINESSES
OPERATING**



1.5m

PEOPLE REPRESENTED

HOUSING



The lack of housing is a direct hindrance on the region's prosperity and growth, affecting the health and well-being of its residents as well as its economic development potential. Given the current housing and rental market, it is also critical to focus on increasing the supply of attainable and affordable housing of all forms, both for rent and for ownership.

Specifically, the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy has identified that Southwestern Ontario will require 173,000 new housing units by 2041. The WOWC therefore wishes to express its support for the overall stated purpose of the More Homes Built Faster Act, which is to increase the supply of housing and to improve housing affordability in Ontario, and to achieve the government's goal of 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years.

It has been several months since the Government of Ontario committed to make municipalities “whole” regarding a loss of development charge revenue, and the WOWC reiterates its request for a definition from the Province regarding this commitment.

Specifically, in Minister Clark's letter to AMO, the province committed to “ensuring that municipalities are kept whole for any impact to their ability to fund housing enabling infrastructure because of Bill 23.”



Regarding the Building Homes Faster Act, the WOWC would respectfully request numbers from the Province, regarding how many new homes are expected in each County.

Background numbers and targets have been set for our urban counterparts and our rural Counties require the same direction, specifically:

- Numbers of new housing units to be achieved in each of our rural communities
- Supports for the necessary infrastructure upgrades that extend beyond our municipalities' targeted growth

Three of our member municipalities were included in the Province's recent call, in June 2023, for Municipal Housing Pledges to set a municipal housing target to 2031:

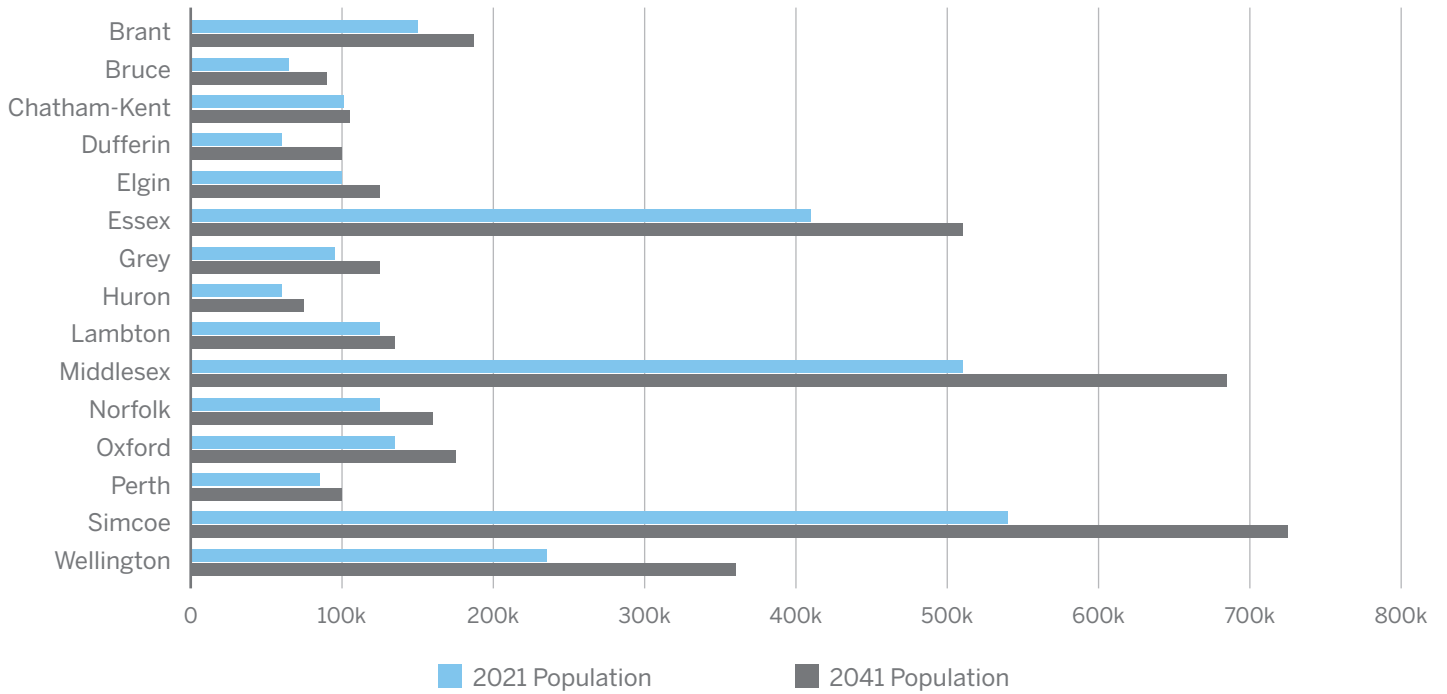
the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Norfolk County, and Haldimand County. Unlike previously, where the targets were set, the Province has asked each municipality to set its own locally appropriate housing target.

These municipalities are currently reviewing the report and each Council will determine the next best steps. Rural Western Ontario is committed to being a part of the housing solution, and helping Ontario achieve its goals by 2031.

The Province must ensure that rural municipalities are adequately consulted and invited to the table for any and all such discussions and consultations – just like their urban counterparts. The rural voice needs to be heard, and rural housing needs are very different and distinct than in large cities. The WOWC would appreciate having the same access to consult the Province as our large urban counterparts.

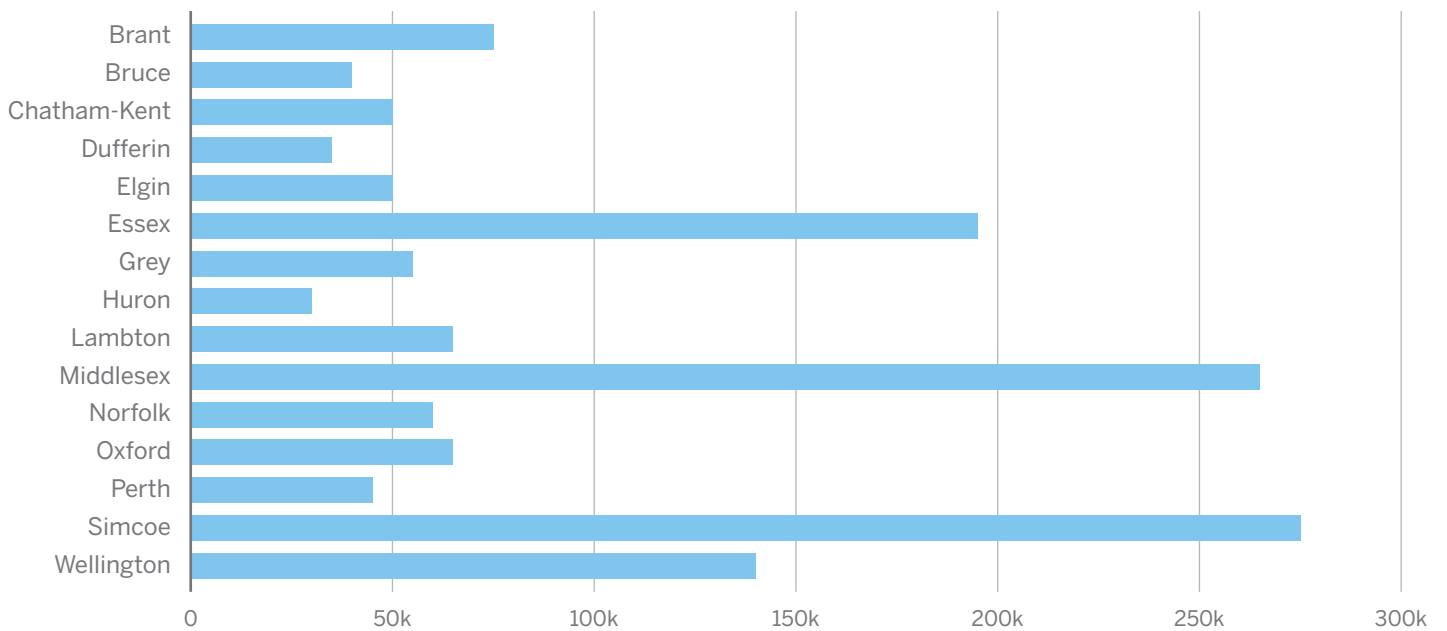
WOWC Municipalities Population Growth (2021-2041)

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance. (2021). Population projections by age and sex for the 49 census divisions. These population projections include the separated cities.



Anticipated Households by Municipality (2041)

Source: Mellor Murray/Prime Strategy & Planning calculations using Ontario Ministry of Finance Projections 2021, and Statistics Canada Census data.



WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH



There has been an ongoing focus for the WOWC over the past few years on workforce retention and expansion. This has been highlighted in the collaborative regional work through the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy. There are several actions in the Strategy that can be implemented, provided there is sufficient funding.

Regarding the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP), the WOWC recognizes the additional \$25 million over three years to attract more skilled workers, including in-demand professionals in the skilled trades. We also appreciate that the OINP will continue to be tailored to meet the needs of Western Ontario by including in-demand jobs for our region – but more can certainly be done.

Of the top five in-demand occupations in our region over the next decade, two are currently incorporated in the OINP (managers in agriculture/horticulture and assisting occupations in support of health services).

The other three are needed to fill the many vacancies in our region, and include:

- Motor vehicle and transit drivers
- Cleaners
- Retail salespersons

These sectors are all strategically important to the economy. If these jobs cannot be filled, this will reduce private sector economic activity in the region, as well as the taxes required by municipalities to sustainability fund public services.

Over the next decade, total employment across the WOWC region is expected to rise by over 51,000, a growth rate of 8%. Based on the age profile of the workforce, there could be 162,700 people potentially exiting the workforce due to their age, over the next decade. Combined, workforce demand will therefore be an estimated 213,900 employees.

The WOWC requests that the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program include the in-demand occupations in Western Ontario for motor vehicle and transit drivers, cleaners, and retail salespersons.



The WOWC has also reiterated the region’s need for a faster and easier transition for Temporary Foreign Workers to become permanent residents. The WOWC has asked for the federal government to work closely with the Province of Ontario to achieve this goal – and is prepared to support both levels of government to move this forward.

The WOWC region is home to 58% of the provincial total of temporary foreign workers. Adjusted for population size, there are 11 times as many temporary foreign workers in the WOWC region than the rest of Ontario. The economy in the WOWC region is quite reliant on temporary workers. Nearly 4% of all workers in 2020 were temporary foreign workers.

Without a substantial influx of new workers, the local population in the WOWC region will not be able to supply workforce demand through 2030 or 2040. Assuming no young people left the region, the workforce supply gap through 2030 is over 84,000.

Of the handful of businesses recruiting international employees, the most common source of recruits were international students with a work permit, followed by express entry candidates and temporary foreign workers.

However, we will not be able to solve the problem only through immigration, so the WOWC also recommends training for people already living here in the region.

Top 5 In-Demand Sectors



MANUFACTURING



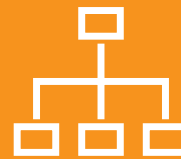
**HEALTH CARE
& SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**



CONSTRUCTION



RETAIL TRADE



**ADMINISTRATION
& SUPPORT**

Forecast Additional Jobs by Sector, 2030

*WOWC region includes replacement and growth demand. Source: EMSI



29,922

MANUFACTURING



28,265

**HEALTH CARE
& SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**



21,304

CONSTRUCTION



20,286

RETAIL TRADE



12,355

**ADMINISTRATION
& SUPPORT**

HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS



The WOWC would like to recognize the Province's investment in the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) and the increase in funding through the 2023 budget. At the same time, homelessness continues to increase in small and rural communities, and Service Managers across rural Western Ontario are struggling to respond to the growing need for homelessness resources.

Rural communities require an increased fair share in HPP funding given the specific growing strain for rural communities, and the WOWC is requesting that funding be allocated specifically for rural communities.

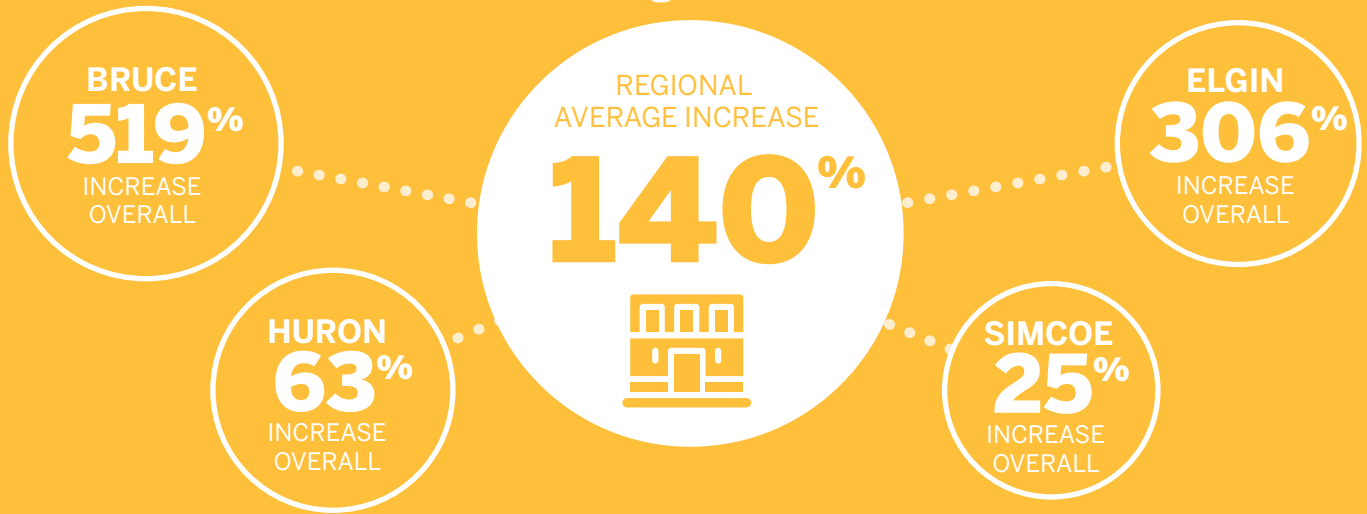
Our communities are less equipped, with fewer resources, yet are seeing significant increases in services required for homelessness, often related to mental health and addictions.

The WOWC has collected data from rural regional Service Managers from 2018 to 2022, which demonstrates a steady increase in homelessness-related services required. Although these are similar issues to what large urban cities are reporting, it is worth noting that the rural/small/remote challenge makes it harder, as these communities are not resourced in the same way larger areas are.

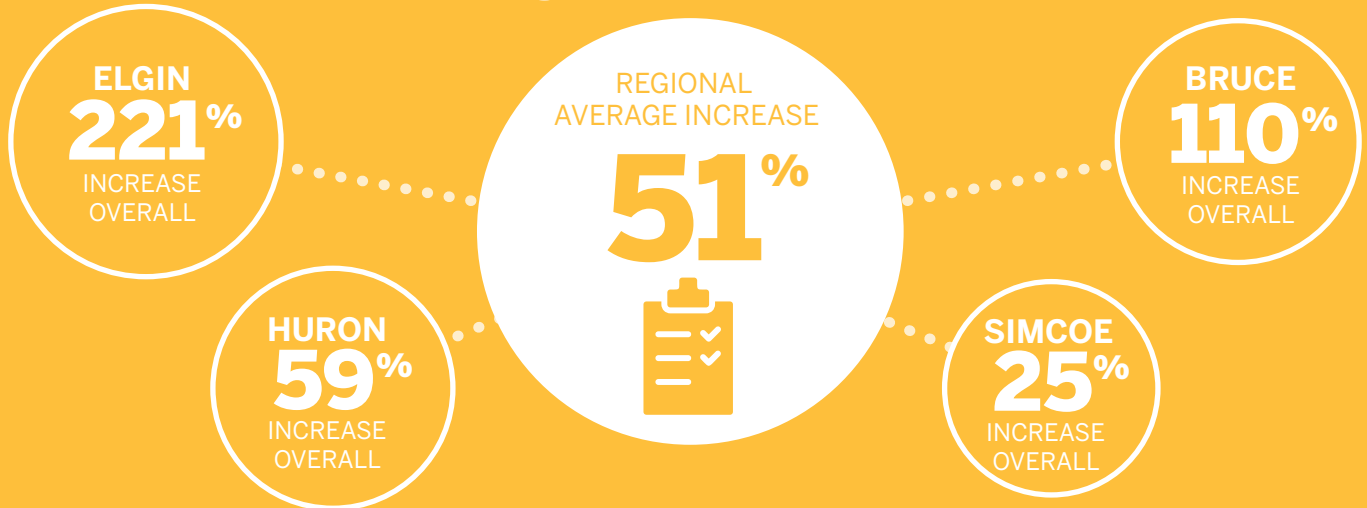
The WOWC wishes to reiterate to the Province that smaller areas do not benefit from economies of scale and require more money to meet the same service standards as larger areas. This is also the case when working with other health-sector colleagues.

The data on homelessness across rural Western Ontario demonstrates a steady increase in the use of services between 2018 and 2022, and these numbers will continue to increase. The WOWC's communities would like to offer to be a pilot for any new projects, should the Province be willing to fund such initiatives.

Shelter Usage Over 5 Years



Housing Wait List Over 5 Years



Social Assistance Clients With No Known Address Over 5 Years

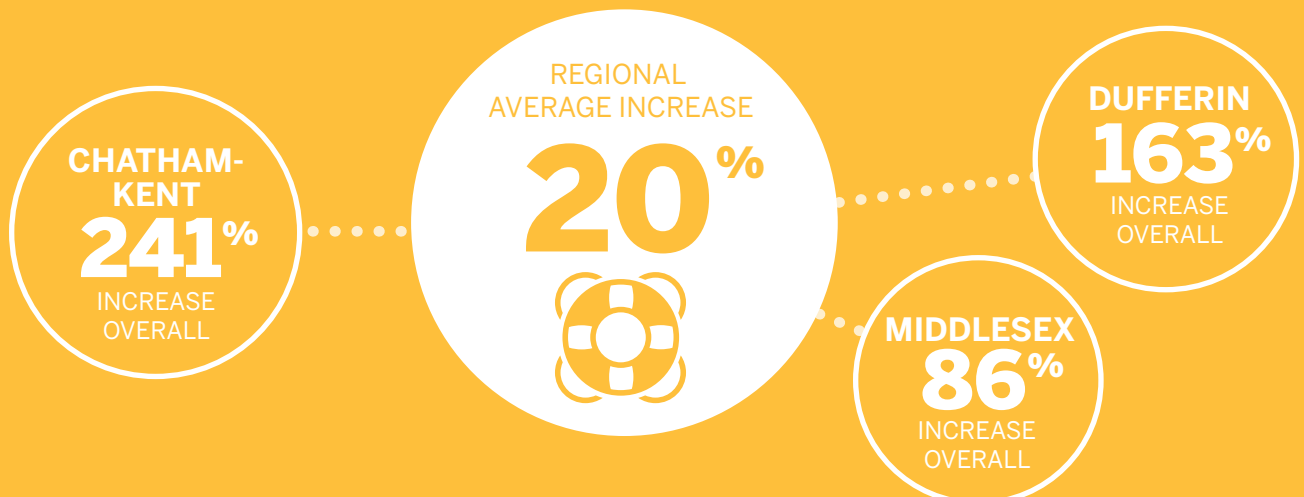




Photo credit: Middlesex OPP Detachment

“ Multiple stakeholders have recommended that these programs should be made permanent

The WOWC would also like to reiterate its support and request to the provincial government for permanent funding of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) program across Ontario.

This is a critical support for our police forces to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls.

Communities in rural Western Ontario have felt the direct benefits from the pairing of specially trained police officers and mental-health professionals to respond to 911 emergency calls involving mental health or addictions. This funding had been delivered from the Province to various police forces and their partners through case-by-case, application-based grant funding.

It has been recommended by multiple stakeholders, including the OPP, that these programs should be made permanent – through annualized funding. The WOWC would like to know which communities received funding in 2023-24, and if the Province is considering expanding this funding on a permanent basis.

Federal, Provincial and municipal partners must continue to work together on priorities, from workforce and housing challenges to social services and health care improvements. Investing in these municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities.

WESTERN ONTARIO
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