



“ The WOWC strives for partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with other levels of government.



The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) is a not-for-profit organization representing the interests of the 15 upper- and single-tier municipalities in rural Western Ontario, including 300 communities and 117 municipalities within its geographic boundaries and 1.6 million people to whom the region is home.

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.

All levels of government must together use their expertise and collective knowledge to work through these mutual

priorities. Western Ontario's small and rural municipalities are facing the need to address increasingly complex health and social challenges, such as homelessness, mental health and addictions, and climate change, without the financial tools to solve them. They are also facing unprecedented population and housing growth which will require significant investments in municipal infrastructure.

The WOWC 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 these critical relationships.

Investing in municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities.

With the downloading of provincial areas of responsibility mixed with historic growth pressures and increasing social needs, small and rural municipalities like those in rural Western Ontario have been left with significant fiscal challenges.

Escalating demands on finances have not stopped municipalities from stepping up to address challenges as the government closest to the people. However, the financial tools available to municipalities were never intended to support income redistribution, resulting in growing unmet needs that are undermining Ontario's economic and social prosperity.

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. Governments need to be all in this together – this partnership will ensure collective success for Western Ontario.



300
COMMUNITIES SERVED
ACROSS 15 UPPER-TIER AND
SINGLE-TIER MUNICIPALITIES



250k
**BUSINESSES
OPERATING**



1.6m
PEOPLE REPRESENTED

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 HOUSING



ISSUE

Housing affordability, particularly in rural areas, continues to remain a strong focus within rural Western 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 residents regardless of income level have a safe place to call home.

THE ASK

The WOWC requests that the Province of Ontario reinstate housing services and the cost of land as eligible development charges (DC) costs.



BACKGROUND

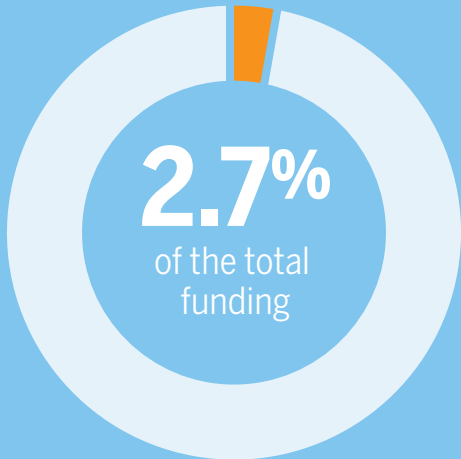
The WOWC appreciates the actions taken in Bill 185, the Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024, including the elimination of the five-year phase-in of development charge rates (introduced under Bill 23) and development-related charge exemptions and discounts for affordable residential units. The WOWC recognizes this renewed approach to collaboration, however, there is still more required to assist the municipal sector.

As AMO has highlighted, there is a need to reinstate both housing services and the cost of land as eligible DC costs.

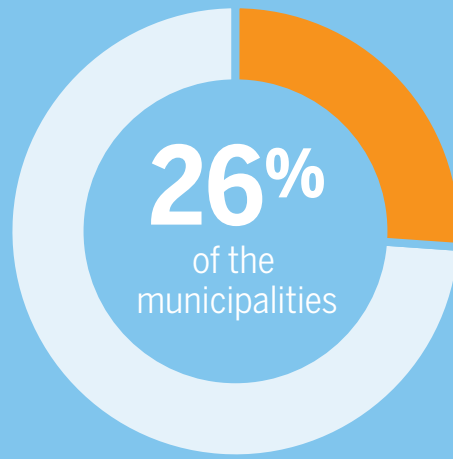
Together, these changes cost municipalities approximately \$4 billion over a 10-year period and will have a material impact on municipalities' ability to invest in community housing.

Minister Calandra announced in December 2023 that consultations would soon take place to “inform potential legislative changes for the government’s upcoming Housing Supply Action Plan that would enhance municipalities’ ability to invest in housing-enabling infrastructure.”

AS OF APRIL 2024, **THREE OF 117 MUNICIPALITIES**
IN RURAL WESTERN ONTARIO HAVE RECEIVED FUNDING
THROUGH THE **BUILDING FASTER FUND.**



Total funding received of
\$3.34M out of \$120M



117 municipalities in
rural Western Ontario
out of 444 in Ontario

THE ASK

The WOWC requests equity for small and rural municipalities regarding housing infrastructure funding, including final details on the Province's commitment to better assist these communities.

BACKGROUND

The WOWC requires information on how its upper- and single-tier municipalities can access the \$1-billion Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, which is intended to support core infrastructure projects that help enable housing for growing and developing communities, such as roads and water infrastructure.

The WOWC also requires a response on how its municipalities can access the 10 per cent (or \$120 million)

of the Building Faster Fund that is being set aside for small, rural, and northern municipalities. This fund is intended to help build housing-enabling infrastructure and prioritize projects that speed up the increase of housing supply.

As of April 2024, three of 117 municipalities in rural Western Ontario have received this funding, for a total of \$3.34 million, or 2.7% of the total funding – although the WOWC represents 26% of the municipalities in the Province.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 INFRASTRUCTURE



ISSUE

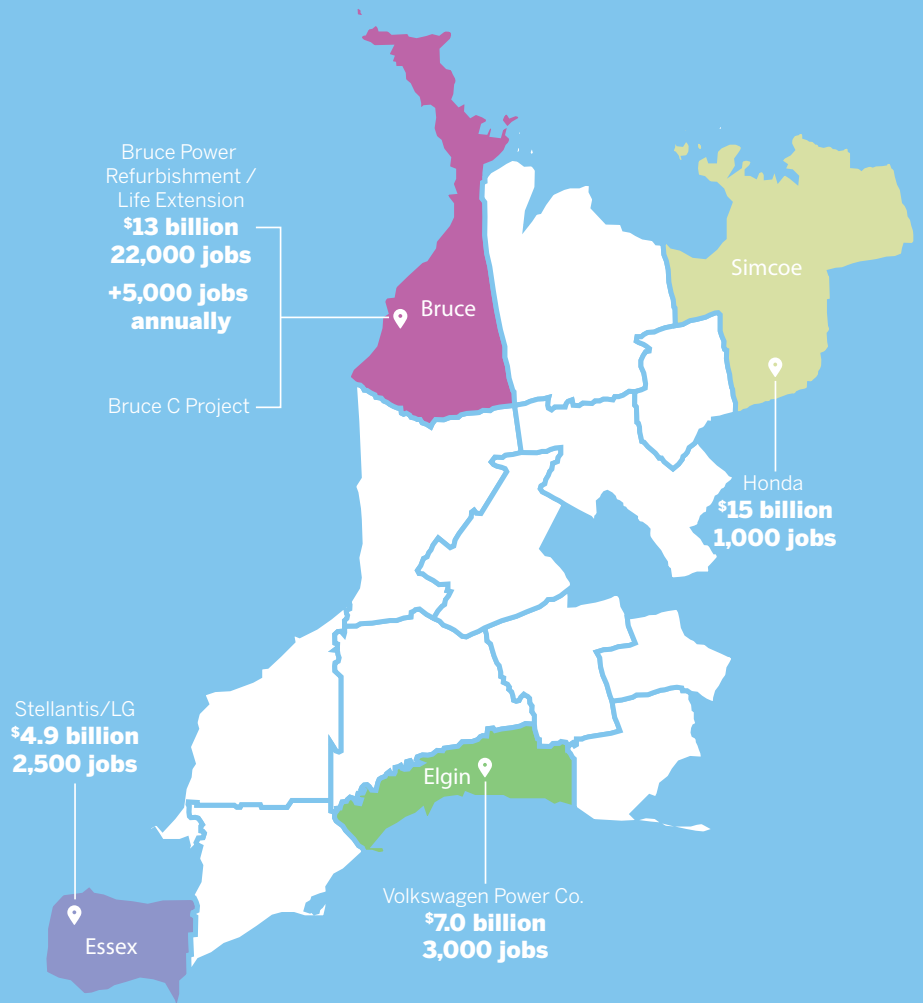
As Western Ontario continues to be the economic driver of the Province, and more investments are being made in our region, we need to ensure that there is the infrastructure to support the growth.

THE ASK

The WOWC requires clear communication from the Province of Ontario on the infrastructure build out in Western Ontario, including clarity from the government on what to expect for utility investments, including hydroelectricity, natural gas, water, and wastewater.

INVESTMENTS IN WESTERN ONTARIO

TOTAL
\$40 billion
30,000 jobs



BACKGROUND

The WOWC appreciates and recognizes the significant investments and efforts being made at the provincial and federal levels to attract investments to Western Ontario. Unfortunately, the impact of the required infrastructure upgrades that are borne by municipalities are not offset by the limited funding provided to the municipal sector.

As a result, local property taxpayers living and working in small and rural municipalities are paying a significant

portion of the bill for the investments being attracted and created.

Much as Ontario is Canada's economic driver, Western Ontario is the Province's economic driver. With that, comes the need for additional housing, workforce, and infrastructure. The region needs assistance from regional champions to advance this message on its behalf.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH



ISSUE

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.

THE ASK

Rural Western Ontario requires provincial funding for rural transportation and childcare, which are both critical factors in helping get people to work. The WOWC requests that the government consult with small and rural municipalities to focus on areas outside of major urban centres and provide more assistance in long-term care and early childhood education.



BACKGROUND

The WOWC region is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, based on estimates by EMSI, and by the Ministry of Finance and its official population projections. 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.

Projected employment in the health care and social assistance sector in Western Ontario by 2030 is estimated at 82,000 jobs. The health care sector – including long-term care and early childhood education – is expected to have 28,000 jobs that need to be filled between by 2030 to meet growth and replacement demand.

Furthermore, while immigration is helpful and appreciated, this issue cannot be solved through immigration alone.

Additional investments in training and upskilling are required for people already living and housed here in the region.

The WOWC appreciates the recent announcement regarding additional considerations and expansion of the sectors included in the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP), including exemptions for nurses and an increased number of eligible occupations.

The WOWC was also pleased to learn of the appointment of a Skilled Trades Special Advisor. Increased worker attraction and retention initiatives will help ensure that employers in all communities – including small and rural ones – remain competitive and attract the right workers for in-demand jobs, notably in health care and early childhood education.

Top 5 In-Demand Sectors



MANUFACTURING



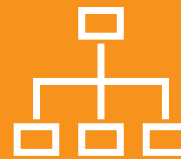
**HEALTH CARE
& SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**



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**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTIONS, & HOMELESSNESS



ISSUE

Funding for our rural communities is a necessity. We are less equipped with fewer resources than our urban counterparts to tackle the growing mental health and addictions crisis.

THE ASK

The WOWC continues to emphasize its request for the Province that a specific portion of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) funding be allocated specifically for small and rural communities.



BACKGROUND

Small and rural municipalities in rural Western Ontario require an increased and consistent fair share in HPP funding given the specific growing strain in these communities. In some cases, research has demonstrated that the funding delivered is simply not adequate to meet the growing needs in rural areas with respect to homelessness.

The WOWC greatly appreciated the opportunity to be involved and considered for the Community Response Pilot Project, and its municipalities look forward to additional opportunities to consult and work directly with the government on finding mutual solutions for the well-being of our communities.

“ The WOWC greatly appreciated the opportunity to be involved and considered for the Community Response Pilot Project.

THE ASK

The WOWC continues to advocate for permanent funding for the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) programs, through annualized funding and permanently-funded mental health officer positions.

BACKGROUND

The MCRT funding provides critical funding support for our police forces to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls. The WOWC has expressed concerns about MCRT funding and the importance of creating permanent funding for this program, especially for small and rural communities, where these teams have had proven success.

Communities and residents 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.

The WOWC appreciates the recent announcement from the Ministry of the Solicitor General regarding the new MCRT Enhancement Grant cycle, which will operate on a three-year period from 2024-25 to 2026-27. This is an important step in the right direction, and the recent comments received by the Solicitor General indicate that the WOWC's advocacy has played a role in this positive change.



“Communities and residents 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.”

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
WOWC
WARDENS CAUCUS

Warden Glen McNeil
Chair
gmcneil@huroncounty.ca

Warden Andy Lennox
Vice-Chair
andyl@wellington.ca

Kate Burns Gallagher
Executive Director
kate@wowc.ca

Justin Bromberg
Manager of Government Relations
justin@wowc.ca

Charlotte Gravlev
Administrative Coordinator
admin@wowc.ca