

WESTERN ONTARIO
WOWC
WARDENS CAUCUS



**2025 FEDERAL ELECTION
CANDIDATES BRIEFING PACKAGE**

www.wowc.ca

ABOUT THE WOWC

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.

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.

“ The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus Inc. (WOWC) serves as a unified voice for the 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, advocating for their collective interest.



WOWC STATEMENT ON TARIFFS

The WOWC wishes to express its ongoing support for the Government of Canada as it works to navigate the challenges posed by tariffs, inter-provincial trade barriers, and other trade restrictions. The WOWC recognizes that these barriers create significant challenges for industries that are vital to our region's economic stability, job creation, and long-term prosperity.

Our communities in Western Ontario thrive when we work together. Supporting our local producers, manufacturers, and farmers is critical to ensuring continued growth and sustainability. The WOWC will remain a vocal advocate for solutions that protect our industries and communities, as we are committed to working with all levels of government to safeguard our region's economic future.

Western Ontario's economy is closely linked to trade, particularly with the United States, but also within Canada. Western Ontario's exports outside of the region totaled over \$226 billion in 2022. Exports outside the Western Ontario region in the largest industry – manufacturing – totaled \$145 billion in 2022, representing 64% of total regional exports. Tariffs on agriculture and food also present substantial risks to the regional economy.

The WOWC will remain a vocal advocate for solutions that protect our industries and communities and is committed to working with all levels of government to safeguard our region's economic future. As part of this, the WOWC strongly supports efforts to develop and implement procurement policies that alleviate some of the financial and administrative burdens on municipalities.



By collaborating with other levels of government – and in turn, by having the federal government support the WOWC's priorities – we can together work towards policies that streamline procurement, promote local economic development, enhance the efficiency of public investments, and make the region prosper, benefiting all of Ontario and all of Canada.

Western Ontario's strength comes from our ability to adapt and respond as a region – and, through its priorities such as housing, infrastructure, and workforce, strengthening the region's economy. The WOWC remains dedicated to partnering with all stakeholders to achieve our common objectives and to ensure our communities remain strong and resilient.

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

Regarding the Canada Housing and Infrastructure Fund (CHIF), the WOWC is pleased to see the \$6 billion in federal infrastructure funding, which includes \$1 billion for urgent community infrastructure needs such as water and wastewater management; however, there are two important changes required for this funding to properly support small and rural municipalities.



BACKGROUND

The first concern is the three-year freeze on development charges included in the design of the CHIF. An alternative would be to make municipalities whole by adequately and directly compensating municipalities for the foregone revenue associated with the freeze by adding additional funds to the CHIF program.

The second concern is about ensuring fair access to this funding for small and rural communities. Specifically, \$5 billion of the total \$6 billion (under the provincial-transfer stream) includes a 20% dedicated carve out for rural, northern and Indigenous communities. However, for the remaining \$1 billion being offered directly to municipalities for urgent community needs, rural communities will face challenges in competing against larger municipalities.

As we know, small communities face capacity and resource challenges that hinder their ability to effectively apply for government funding programs. To accommodate the realities of small and rural communities, application and reporting processes need to be simple and streamlined. The 20% carve-out should be applied to the entire \$6 billion funding envelope, not just the \$5 billion provincial-transfer stream.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: HOUSING



THE ASK

The WOWC requests changes to the eligibility criteria for the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), if the program continues, specifically around the definition of “large urban” and “small and rural.”



BACKGROUND

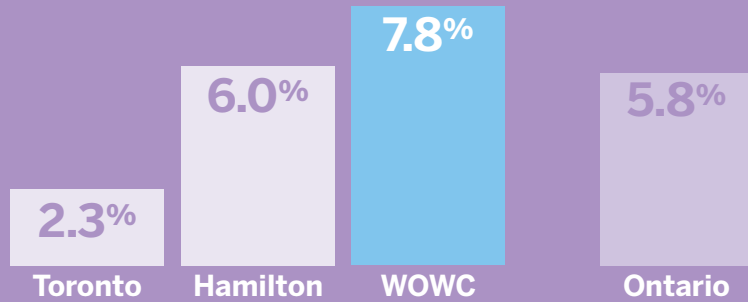
The HAF was intended to remove barriers and support the development of affordable, inclusive, equitable and climate-resilient communities; however, there were concerns expressed by municipalities around the eligibility criteria, namely around the definition of “large urban” and “small and rural.”

To be eligible for the Large/Urban Stream, applicants had to have a population of more than 10,000, whereas to be eligible for the Small/Rural/North/Indigenous Stream, applicants must have a population less than 10,000. In Ontario, this rendered single-tier and upper-tier rural communities (such as the WOWC members) ineligible to apply for the funding under the rural stream, or in competition with many larger urban centres.

The current design of the HAF is not viable for small and rural communities; it can only be sustainable once the “small and rural” threshold is changed from 10,000 to 100,000. Within the WOWC membership, only one of the 117 WOWC municipalities, at the single, upper, and lower tiers, received HAF funding under either stream. Dozens of communities within the WOWC region confirmed having submitted applications but were not successful.

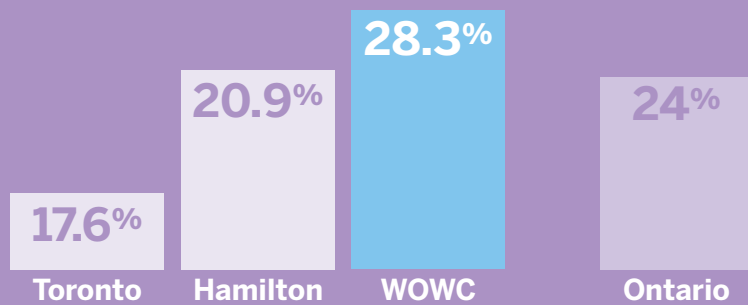
POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



ADDITIONAL HOUSING UNITS

ADDED
2016 TO 2021



POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



“ In **2022** the annual value of building permits in WOWC was **\$8.9 billion** with **\$6.4 billion** allocated to **residential permits**.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: INFRASTRUCTURE



ISSUE

Much as Ontario continues to be the economic driver of Canada, Western Ontario continues to be the economic driver of Ontario. As more investments are being made in this region, WOWC municipalities require the federal government's support on growth-related infrastructure.



THE ASK

The WOWC requires clear communication from the Government of Canada 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.

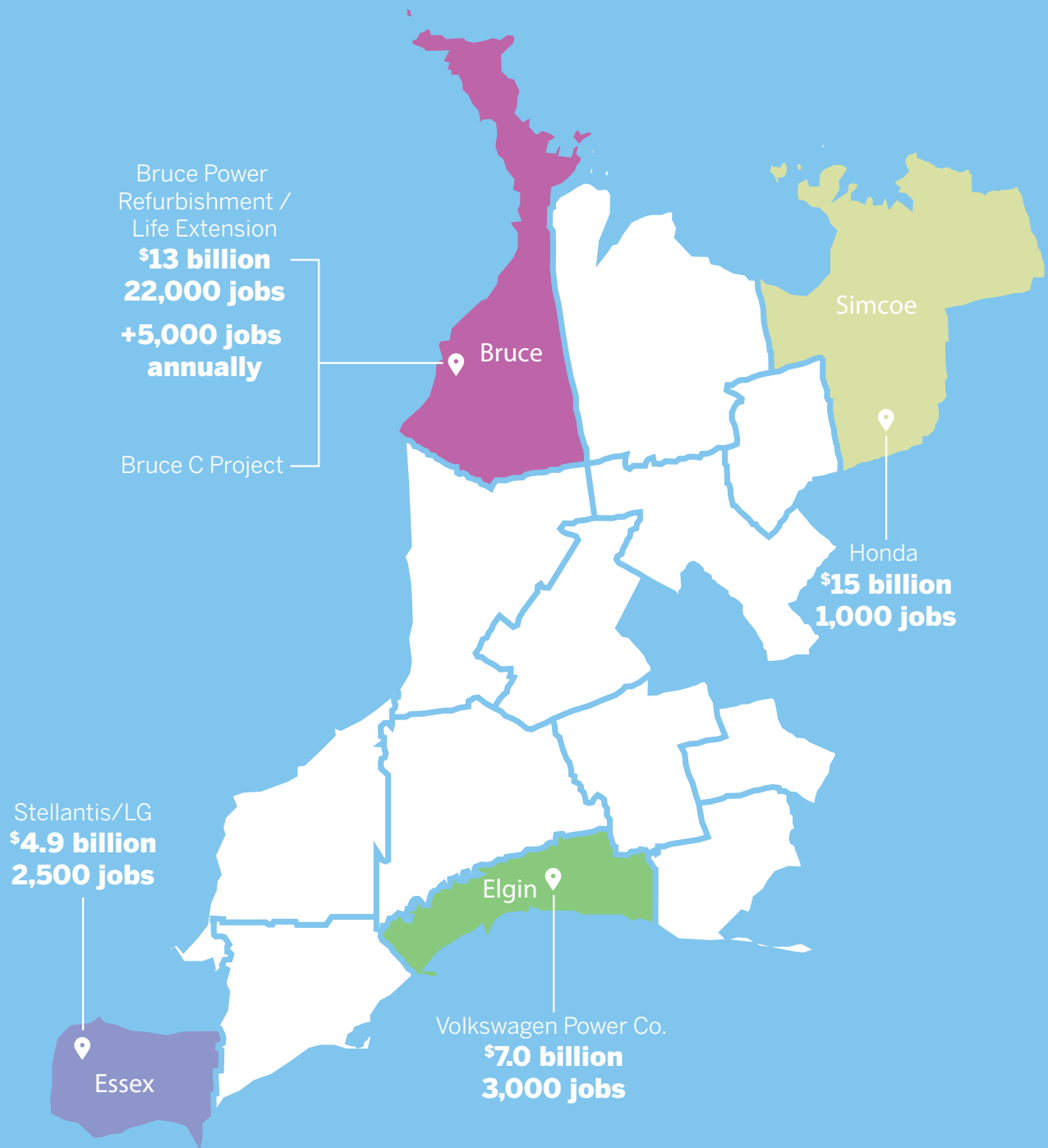


BACKGROUND

The WOWC appreciates and recognizes the significant investments and efforts being made at the federal level to attract investments to Western Ontario. With more than \$40 billion in investment and 30,000+ jobs coming to the region through the Electric Vehicles and Clean Energy sectors, 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.

The WOWC would like to address the impacts of increased electric vehicle production and overall electrification across the region, and the overall impacts of this growth on small and rural communities in the WOWC region, including on infrastructure, housing, and workforce. As more investments are being made in rural Western Ontario, all levels of government must ensure that there is the infrastructure to support the growth.

INVESTMENTS IN WESTERN ONTARIO



TOTAL
\$40 billion | 30,000 jobs

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 federal 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 continues to grow significantly, including increased population and housing, and the projections indicate that this trend will continue through 2030 to 2040. 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.

With multiple economic investments now confirmed for rural Western Ontario in both clean technology facilities and electric-vehicle production facilities, this will add an additional 30,000 jobs to the previously forecasted 214,000 jobs that will need to be filled by 2030.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS



ISSUE

Dedicated funding for small and rural municipalities is a necessity, as these communities are less equipped with fewer resources as compared to urban counterparts to tackle the growing mental health and addictions crisis.



THE ASK

The WOWC requests specific consideration and consultation from the Government of Canada for mental health, addictions and homelessness funding for small and rural municipalities.



BACKGROUND

Small and rural municipalities in rural Western Ontario require an increased and consistent fair share in funding given the specific growing strain in these communities. Regional data confirms that housing wait lists, shelter usage, and social assistance clients have all increased significantly between 2018 and 2023.

There were several announcements made in Budget 2024, including \$500 million over five years for the creation of a new Youth Mental Health Fund, and \$150 million over three years for an Emergency Treatment Fund to help provide rapid responses to emergent, critical needs related to the opioid crisis.

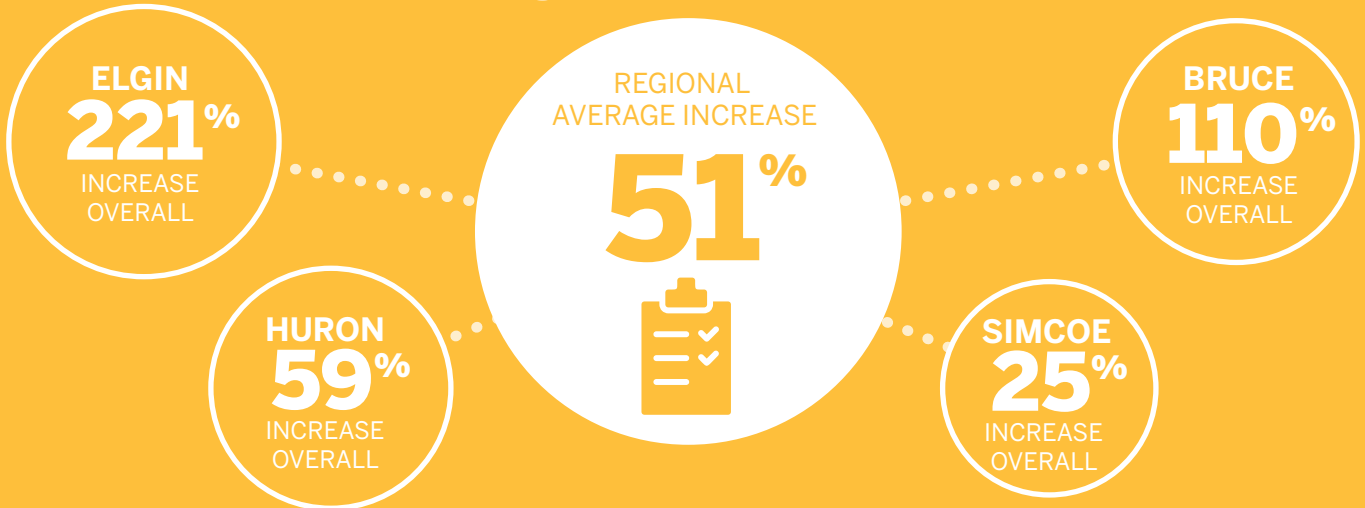
These amounts of funding across the entire country will not go very far, and there are lingering concerns that small and rural municipalities such as those within the WOWC region will have challenges competing against large urban municipalities for these types of funding.

As it stands, the current funding delivered is simply not adequate to meet the growing needs in small and rural areas. Rather than have unhoused populations relocate to urban areas for homelessness supports, the WOWC would like to provide these services in its communities.

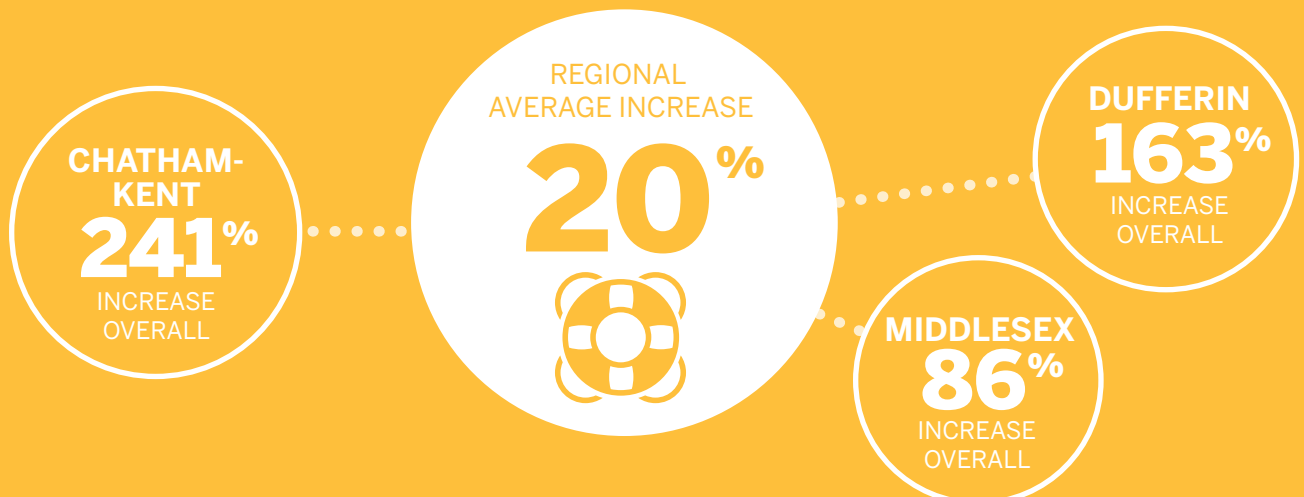
Shelter Usage Over 5 Years



Housing Wait List Over 5 Years



Social Assistance Clients With No Known Address Over 5 Years



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.

WESTERN ONTARIO
WOWC
WARDENS CAUCUS

Mayor Amy Martin

Chair

amy.martin@norfolkcounty.ca

Warden Kevin Marriott

Vice-Chair

kevin.marriott@county-lambton.on.ca

Kate Burns Gallagher

Executive Director

kate@wowc.ca

Justin Bromberg

Manager of Government Relations

justin@wowc.ca

WWW.WOWC.CA