

STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

Working Together for Success



STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

BETTER HEALTH

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS



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Ontario's Rural Plan

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Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

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STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

Your government has a plan for rural Ontario that will deliver real results.

Our plan builds on rural Ontario's strengths — committed people, diverse economic opportunities, unrivalled natural resources, a solid sense of community. Our plan will help communities achieve more prosperity, more job opportunities, improved health care and education, better decisions about land use, better protection of the environment, a higher quality of life.

Your government will lead the way in ensuring that rural Ontario's communities thrive.

That local strategies for boosting the economy get a chance to become reality.

That more health-care professionals and services are available.

That people are well educated.

That young people can find, close to home, what they need for the future — skills training, access to higher education, apprenticeship programs and well-paying work — so they can make great lives for themselves in rural communities.

Your government is committed to making sure rural Ontario has the right tools to prosper.

Rural Ontario is key to the health and vitality of our province. Our rural communities contribute to a high quality of life for all of us. And the success Ontario enjoys today as the economic engine of the country owes much to the strengths of our rich agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing sectors. In fact, many auto parts manufacturers and their suppliers are located in rural Ontario.

No two rural communities are the same. They can be small centres next door to major cities ... or towns and villages ... or First Nations communities ... or remote locations in the North. Rural communities are unique and diverse. For example, in northern Ontario, the rural plan and the Northern Prosperity Plan complement one another to spur growth, create jobs and foster a better quality of life in northern communities.

Your government is delivering a rural plan because we value rural Ontario. We are listening to our rural communities.

We asked the people who live in rural Ontario to tell us what that life means to them. What needs to change. How to change it.

We heard back from local citizens, farmers, community and business leaders, educators, First Nations representatives, health-care and environmental professionals and many others.

Rural Ontarians told us how much they care about good health care, safe water and greenspaces, decent jobs, community and family ties, quality of life. They talked about ways to boost economic development, the best strategies for addressing fiscal pressures and infrastructure needs, the importance of healthy communities and a clean and healthy environment.

STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

We get the message. The people of rural Ontario know their communities' priorities better than anyone else. And they play a key role in carrying out the rural plan by forging partnerships across communities.

Our plan has three priorities for rural Ontario:

- Strong People, Strong Economy
- Better Health
- Success for Students

These will be our building blocks as we deliver the results rural Ontarians want and deserve.

Your government will do its part in building a strong rural Ontario. We welcome the challenge.

At the same time, we have to manage our fiscal challenge.

This government inherited a structural deficit of \$5.5 billion. We are determined to balance the budget over the course of our mandate. It takes 13 cents of every dollar the provincial government receives to pay interest on the province's \$126 billion debt. That amount will rise if we continue to add to that debt or fail to tackle the annual deficit.

We won't let that happen.

So making real progress in rural Ontario has to be a team effort. We have to do this work together. Together with communities, municipalities, businesses and citizens working in partnership, we can ensure a bright future for rural Ontario while staying fiscally responsible.

We invite you to join your government in this challenge — and make the vision of a stronger rural Ontario a reality.

Strong, Healthy, Prosperous

This is your government's vision for rural Ontario

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

Our plan will build on the core strength of rural and small town Ontario — people. Capitalizing on this talent, knowledge, skill and entrepreneurial spirit will lead to vibrant local economies.

Rural Ontario will enjoy more prosperity and a better quality of life when local economies achieve their full potential.

Many businesses in rural Ontario are locally owned and operated. That makes it especially important for rural communities to have the knowledge, skills and capacity to compete in a global marketplace. Rural Ontario is also starting to reap the economic benefits of restoring downtown areas and waterfronts and redeveloping brownfields.

Economies are strong, healthy and sustainable when the workforce is skilled and productive, when people can choose from a range of well-paying jobs, and when communities attract investors, tourists and new residents.

Well-maintained infrastructure is critical to economic prosperity, future growth, public safety and a high quality of life. It is also costly. Our key public infrastructure is aging. Many roads, bridges, water systems and public buildings such as hospitals, schools and arenas need repair and upgrading.

Our plan will achieve strong local economies through a variety of strategies:

- Investing in local community and economic development projects.
- Supporting community revitalization.
- Promoting local leadership.
- Encouraging diverse economies.
- Partnering with municipalities to repair and maintain local roads and bridges.
- Introducing new, innovative financing tools to help municipalities finance critical infrastructure projects.
- Supporting municipal staff by providing training opportunities to boost their strategic planning skills.
- Investing in skills development.

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

What We've Done

- ✓ Invested \$5.2 million in 13 Rural Economic Development (RED) projects.
- ✓ Announced the Northern Prosperity Plan to attract investment, promote economic development and create jobs in northern Ontario.
- ✓ Developed an Ontario Tourism Strategy to maximize the potential of tourism as an economic driver for communities.
- ✓ Strengthened Ontario's agricultural sector by providing up to \$30 million in aid to cattle farmers affected by BSE.
- ✓ Provided \$10 million through the Ontario Cull Animal Strategy to increase slaughter capacity and develop markets.
- ✓ Released a discussion paper and completed consultations on a proposed growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- ✓ Signed a Letter of Intent with the federal government to fund public infrastructure in small urban centres and rural municipalities through the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF).
- ✓ Provided funding for job creation, economic development and community infrastructure through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.
- ✓ Repaired and improved arts, culture, sports and recreation infrastructure with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- ✓ Invested \$15 million in municipal roads that connect to provincial highways.
- ✓ Released "*Building a Better Tomorrow*", a guide for municipalities to assist them in planning, financing, building, and managing public infrastructure assets.
- ✓ Enabled more than 8,500 young people to find summer jobs in rural Ontario.
- ✓ Encouraged businesses to hire and train more apprentices in skilled trades through the proposed Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit.
- ✓ Announced new funding for an additional 7,000 apprenticeship positions.
- ✓ Provided low-interest, longer-term loans to 90 municipalities to renew and build critical public infrastructure through the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority (OSIFA).

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

Local Economic Development

GOAL

- Local economies that are diversified, innovative and support well-paying, high-quality jobs.

STRATEGIES

- Maximize the potential of tourism as an economic driver for communities.
- Support community revitalization across the province through the Rural Economic Development (RED) funding program.
- Promote economic development in northern and Aboriginal communities through the Northern Prosperity Plan and the Building Aboriginal Economies Strategy.
- Encourage sustainable resource-based industries including economically viable agriculture, mining and forestry sectors.
- Implement an ethanol program that will result in cleaner fuels, and expand opportunities for the agricultural sector.
- Promote sustainable resource use by supporting eco-tourism, agri-tourism and trail development.

Strong Local Leadership

GOAL

- The capacity to develop vibrant local economies through strong leadership.

STRATEGIES

- Deliver workshops on rural tourism, downtown revitalization and brownfields development.
- Work with small rural businesses to increase their expertise in business development.
- Provide tools and resources to support local economic development.
- Partner with stakeholder organizations to deliver business and community development initiatives.
- Build the capacity of the voluntary sector through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- Build community partnerships with law enforcement officials to develop local crime prevention strategies.
- Provide support and training to municipal staff to enhance their ability to do strategic planning.
- Support municipal staff in effectively managing capital assets.

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

A Skilled Workforce

GOAL

- Skilled workers able to take advantage of diverse employment opportunities.

STRATEGIES

- Invest in skills development through the Rural Economic Development (RED) funding program.
- Expand training opportunities for rural youth through employer incentives.

Modernized Infrastructure

GOAL

- Adequate and well-maintained infrastructure.

STRATEGIES

- Improve water quality and upgrade sewage treatment and waste management infrastructure through the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF).
- Improve local roads and bridges through COMRIF and the Connecting Links Program.
- Improve northern highways.
- Repair and improve arts, culture, sports and recreation infrastructure through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- Provide municipalities with innovative financing tools such as low-interest loans to help fund infrastructure projects.

BETTER HEALTH

Your government recognizes that healthy communities are vital to a high quality of life.

Residents in a healthy community have access to health care and can choose from a variety of recreational and cultural opportunities. There is a sense of belonging and pride, safety and security in the community. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged and an active voluntary sector contributes to community well-being.

Your government's rural plan will improve health care for rural Ontarians. We will work with the health-care community to provide more accessible health-care services. That includes improving access to family doctors, nurse practitioners and home care services. We will work to ensure that people can build a higher quality of life.

Protecting the natural environment is central to good health. It helps to ensure public health and safety, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

Clean water, fresh air, healthy ecosystems and attractive landscapes are key priorities for rural Ontario and for all Ontarians. These assets help define our province. They also provide jobs for rural residents through tourism, recreation, agriculture and other resource-based industries.

Your government's rural plan will work to protect our environment and ensure that natural resources are conserved and used in a sustainable way.

Our plan will achieve better health through a variety of strategies:

- Attracting more health-care professionals to rural Ontario.
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles that prevent illness.
- Promoting sound land-use planning that balances ecosystem health, social well-being and economic activity.
- Ensuring safe drinking water by helping communities upgrade water and waste water treatment systems.
- Supporting alternative energy to improve air quality.

BETTER HEALTH

What We've Done

- ✓ Invested in the International Medical Graduates program, which will require more than 100 graduates to set up practice in underserved areas.
- ✓ Invested \$5.7 million in telemedicine technology to deliver health-care services to more northern Ontario communities.
- ✓ Established the Northern Ontario School of Medicine to help keep doctors in the North.
- ✓ Conducted consultations on planning reforms and a review of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) to improve land-use planning decisions.
- ✓ Passed legislation to fast-track brownfields clean-up.
- ✓ Established an Agricultural Advisory Team to provide advice on land use and planning issues regarding agriculture.
- ✓ Introduced the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act to protect greenspace.
- ✓ Started mapping Ontario's agricultural resources, including identifying unique specialty crop areas.
- ✓ Invested \$1.6 million through the Rural Economic Development (RED) program to reduce greenhouse gases and generate green power.
- ✓ Established an Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality and Testing Standards to address concerns raised by rural municipalities and private operators regarding Regulation 170/03.
- ✓ Invested approximately \$39 million to help ensure that water and waste water treatment systems are supplying safe drinking water.

Better Access to Health Care

GOAL

- Improved access to health-care services.

STRATEGIES

- Work with communities to develop creative approaches to attract more health-care professionals to rural areas.
- Increase the number of community-based initiatives that improve health-care services, through the Rural Economic Development (RED) funding program.
- Increase access to primary health care by enrolling more Ontarians in family health teams.

BETTER HEALTH

Healthy Living

GOAL

- Communities that promote healthy living and protect public health and the environment.

STRATEGIES

- Develop strategies for reducing tobacco use, preventing obesity and increasing physical activity.
- Provide education and outreach on government regulations to help rural communities meet drinking water standards.
- Set targets on waste diversion rates.
- Support water power and wind power development and other alternative energy opportunities.

Sound Land-Use Planning

GOAL

- The capacity to make planning decisions that balance ecosystem health, social well-being and economic activity.

STRATEGIES

- Encourage progressive brownfields redevelopment.
- Launch planning reforms and a revised Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).
- Strengthen the province's agricultural sector by acting on advice from the Agricultural Advisory Team.

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

Students in rural communities — like all Ontario students — are entitled to a quality education. When all of our young people have access to a good education in local schools, our rural communities grow stronger.

Setting this educational foundation results in a highly skilled workforce, able to compete in a global economy. It means that today's young people — and tomorrow's — will grow up to contribute to building strong rural communities.

The role of the school in a rural community is even larger than providing essential education. The heart of the community is often the local school — the place where people get together to take courses, take part in community activities and stay active and involved. In some rural areas the school is the only public institution.

Schools help shape community identity and contribute to a high quality of life. The presence of a local school can attract young families to live, work and raise their children in that community.

Your government knows that rural schools are facing special challenges, including class sizes, staffing, programming and crumbling schools.

We are committed to meeting those challenges successfully. We are investing in rural schools, making sure more doors stay open for community needs. We will ensure that rural students have an equal opportunity for a quality education and that skills training is available to help them build good futures.

Our plan will achieve success for students through a variety of strategies:

- Better funding for rural schools.
- Increasing access to educational opportunities.

What We've Done

- ✓ Invested \$31 million to strengthen programs, services and staffing in rural schools.
- ✓ Provided \$20 million to school boards to keep schools open for community programs.
- ✓ Established the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.
- ✓ Announced \$2 million in funding for 214 libraries in small communities.
- ✓ Reduced class sizes in the early grades.
- ✓ Established a \$2 billion infrastructure fund to repair crumbling schools.

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

Quality Education

GOAL

- Quality education close to home.

STRATEGIES

- Improve school transportation funding to consider rural needs.
- Make funding for education more responsive to the needs of rural schools.
- Cap class sizes at 20 students for JK to Grade 3.
- Establish an e-learning strategy to make more courses available to students in rural and isolated areas.
- Increase access to schools for community groups.

BUILDING A SUCCESS STORY TOGETHER

The rural plan is going to make the most of the many strengths of rural Ontario — dynamic people, an enviable lifestyle, greenspace, plentiful natural resources, cultural and recreational opportunities — that enrich the quality of life for all of us.

This is a long-term commitment to real change. It will take time. The province's fiscal challenge is considerable and your government has to handle it effectively to clear the way for future prosperity.

The fiscal challenge is not the only challenge. Rural Ontario faces significant issues that will not be solved overnight. Telecommunication infrastructure, for example, is unavailable in some rural communities. That's a barrier to economic growth. We will continue to work with the federal government, municipalities, and other public and private sector partners on this and other significant issues.

In fact, partnerships will be the key to rural Ontario's success. The work ahead has to be a shared effort because government action alone is not enough. The best way to guarantee results is to work together.

You'll be hearing more soon about the progress your government is making on the rural plan. We'll be working across ministries and across governments to find the right solutions.

Rural Ontario is about to grow even stronger and better. Join us — you can help make it happen.

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