

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2026

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The Honourable Donna Skelly
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Madam,

Your Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ernie Hardeman'.

The Honourable Ernie Hardeman
Chair of the Committee

Queen's Park
March 2026

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
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1st Session, 44th Parliament

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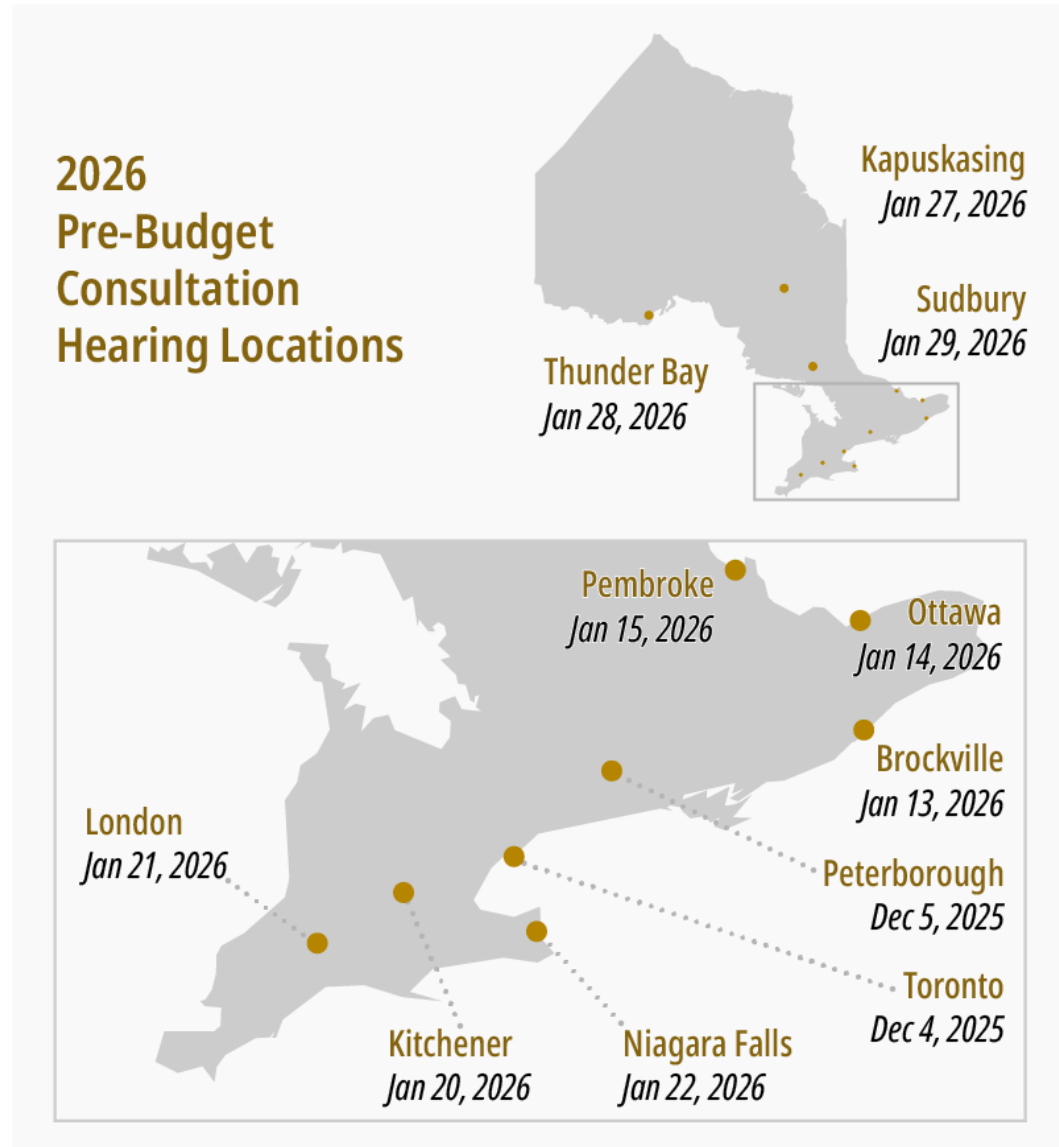
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INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted its pre-Budget hearings between December 2025 and January 2026, visiting 11 locations across the province.



The pre-Budget consultation provides an opportunity for citizens, stakeholders, and local government partners to discuss their social, economic, and program-related priorities and concerns with elected representatives, and to make recommendations to provincial ministries. Those the Committee heard from provided a diverse range of perspectives from across the province, representing different demographics, regions and sectors. They presented in person, virtually, and provided written submissions to the Committee.

The Committee...

Heard **189** presentations

Received over **300** digital and physical documents

Conducted roughly **65** total hours of hearings



The report is organized by ministry, although several themes and topics were common across many sectors. The Committee heard that inflation and affordability challenges continue to affect individuals in their daily lives, as well as the organizations that serve them, and sectors employing workers across Ontario. Housing affordability, homelessness, and the challenges faced by municipalities, housing providers, and developers in bringing units to market were common themes in the cities the Committee visited.

Many witnesses from different sectors described workforce stability and retention issues, requesting support such as improvements to wages and working conditions, and administrative changes to simplify delivery of services and reduce burden on service providers, including through the adoption of new technologies. Businesses also highlighted sector impacts from tariffs and trade relationship challenges.

This report is an overview of the main recommendations received by the Committee during the pre-Budget consultation. Comments are abbreviated and arguments summarized; witnesses may not be explicitly named. For the full account of witness testimony, including responses to Committee questions, see the *Hansard* of the Committee's proceedings. Committee recommendations, and a list of the witnesses and organizations and individuals submitting written briefs, appear at the end of the report.

The Committee thanks all witnesses who shared their experiences and recommendations.

COMMENTS BY MINISTRY

Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness

Alcohol

The Ontario Craft Cider Association called for the Province to establish cider as its own category in Ontario's beverage alcohol framework. The Association indicated this change would improve visibility, fairness, and consumer clarity as retail modernization expands. The Ontario Craft Brewers recommended reducing taxes on beer produced by craft brewers in Ontario, suggesting this change could free up the capital necessary to make craft breweries more efficient, productive, and ready to compete in the new marketplace.

The Ontario Craft Cider Association requested changes to the Small Cidery Program, which provides grants to Ontario cideries, including issuing program payments on a monthly rather than semi-annual basis and that the funding cap be removed. The Grape Growers of Ontario told the Committee that investment in "Ontario-grown" has positively impacted their industry. The organization expressed support for further infrastructure investments at wineries, including in processing and tank capacity.

Developing the Agri-Food Sector

Witnesses spoke about investment and program reforms to help to grow the agri-food sector and lessen its dependence on access to the U.S. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture noted that a significant amount of Ontario's agricultural output is exported to the U.S. for processing into food products. The organization called for the establishment of a fund to offer capital cost-share grants to attract new investment in food processing plants.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario called for provincial investment in a loan guarantee program for breeder cattle, which they argued would support new and young farmers entering the industry, and reduce dependence on importing breeder cattle from the U.S.

Risk Management

Ontario's Risk Management Program partially insures producers in certain commodity groups against losses due to changes to commodity prices and production costs. In 2025, the Government announced increased annual funding for the program to be fully phased in by the 2027 program year. Some witnesses, including the Beef Farmers of Ontario, called for an accelerated phase-in so that the new funding would be fully realized in 2026.

Veterinarian Services

Several witnesses noted an increasingly acute shortage of animal veterinary services, particularly in northern and remote regions of the province. Speaking specifically to challenges in accessing large animal veterinary services, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture called for increased funding to the Veterinary Assistant Program, which provides financial assistance to large animal veterinarians, as well as for incentives to be provided to veterinarians to serve in remote regions. The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society called for the Province to fund companion and shelter veterinary medicine services in underserved areas, by reallocating unspent funds budgeted for the Veterinary Incentive Program.

Workforce Development

Several witnesses discussed the importance of developing the agricultural workforce. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture called for a dedicated agri-food workforce strategy to recruit and retrain skilled farm workers and ease labour shortages in the sector. Sustain Ontario

discussed the importance of investment in training and land access to support new entrants to farming, including Indigenous food producers and harvesters, young people who do not have access to a family farm, Ontarians looking for a second career, and new Canadians.

Attorney General

Courts and Tribunals

Philanthropy of the Soul recommended investments to support a pilot project in Peterborough for an “Integrated Family Stabilization and Mental Health Innovation Initiative” intended to de-escalate family conflict, facilitate coordination of required health treatment, and support mandatory mediation for family court cases.

Representatives from the London Family Court Clinic described the need for establishing a remote testimony suite within Beacon House, a child and youth advocacy centre, to allow children to participate in court proceedings without having to enter the physical courthouse and requested support for the project.

The Renfrew County Real Estate Board was among multiple real estate boards that asked the Province to strengthen and expand mediation services at the Landlord and Tenant Board, which could provide a faster and lower conflict pathway for resolving disputes.

Mothers for Mental Health Care Reform Ontario wrote to the Committee recommending immediate action to support jail diversion programs in order to improve the safety and well-being of persons with severe mental illness in the justice system.

Tobacco and Vaping

DashVapes asked for a review of the proportionality and impact of the provincial portion of excise duty for vape products, including the effects of the coordinated framework on illicit market growth, the economic viability of legitimate manufacturers and retailers, and enforcement mechanisms and strategies to address the expanding illicit supply chain.

The Committee heard that the recent tobacco class action lawsuit settlement provides a timely opportunity to improve public health in Ontario. Heart and Stroke was among witnesses that recommended allocating a portion of the settlement funds toward initiatives that reduce tobacco, vape, and nicotine use.¹ Examples of proposed activities included expanded enforcement and compliance activities, increased funding for cessation programs, and investment in a provincial public awareness campaign about the harm of nicotine use. Similarly, the Canadian Cancer Society recommended the Province direct funding from the tobacco class action settlement fund into strengthening the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy, including enforcement and cessation programming, and further recommended raising the minimum age for purchasing tobacco and vaping products to 21.

The Committee also heard recommendations from a tobacco organization, which included basing any necessary increases to tobacco taxation on a predictable model based on inflation, in addition to recommending continuing investment in illegal tobacco enforcement.² Rothmans, Benson and Hedges described their recommendation around encouraging the recycling of

¹ The Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario echoed this recommendation and also suggested including cessation pathways through Ontario Health. In 2025, a Canada-wide tobacco lawsuit settlement was implemented. Under the settlement, provinces and territories will receive \$24.7 billion over time, with a specific amount determined for each province/territory. Ontario will receive \$7.3 billion over time.

² Imperial Tobacco Canada.

vaping products through an exemption in the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017* that would permit communication about recycling programs; they also asked the Province to create a non-combusted alternatives product category in the *Tobacco Tax Act* to incentivize adult smokers to switch to what the witness described as less harmful smoke-free tobacco products.

Children, Community and Social Services

Children, Youth and Family Services

Family services agencies provide a variety of supports in the community, including professional counselling and social supports. The Community Counselling and Resource Centre recommended investing in family service agencies to reduce pressures on higher-cost “downstream” systems and fill service gaps. The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration outlined their “culturally integrative model” of service which they stated helps stabilize families that may be at risk of violence to prevent escalation into emergency and enforcement-based responses. The witness recommended establishing multi-year funding for community-based, culturally integrative navigation hubs, starting in high-need regions such as London. The Timmins Family Counselling Center described how a relatively small investment in community-based counselling agencies could reduce pressure on hospital, policing, justice system, and child welfare services.

Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region recommended investing in kinship and customary care to support 168 children and youth with complex mental health and developmental needs, and thereby reduce reliance on more costly externally operated placements that remove children from families and communities.

FIREFLY requested investment in Children's Treatment Centres and highlighted “growing gaps” in access to developmental services for children and youth in Northwestern Ontario where the witness reported higher rates of poverty, substance use, and barriers to accessing health care due to geography.

Big Brothers Big Sisters informed the Committee about the one-to-one and group mentoring programs they provide at no cost to families. They requested that their funding be maintained and cautioned that their programs would be at risk without continued provincial investment.

Developmental and Intervenor Services

Organizations in developmental services provide community and residential programs for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, along with respite for caregivers. Several of these organizations receiving transfer payments from the provincial government asked for increases in funding to address rising costs and increasing demand for services.³ Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs stated that additional funding is required to continue to provide safe and supportive housing, maintain adequate staffing levels, and facilitate meaningful community participation for individuals with developmental disabilities. OPSEU Local 172, representing front-line developmental services workers employed at Ingersoll Support Services, made similar requests and further recommended funding for wage improvements, training initiatives, and retention strategies for front-line developmental services workers. A social worker in the developmental disability field described the impact of funding challenges on both clients and staff. Another worker in the sector also described employee burnout and urged

³ For example, Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region; and the Community Living branches of Durham North; Fort Erie; Oshawa Clarington; and Toronto.

the government to dedicate a portion of new funding specifically for wage increases to improve workforce retention.

Other witnesses made recommendations for specific programs, including:

- providing time limited, bridge funding to enable The PADDLE Program (Providing Adults with Developmental Disabilities Lifelong Experiences) to continue operating and supporting adults with developmental disabilities (The PADDLE Program);
- allocating dedicated funding to the Ontario Autism Program to reduce administrative requirements and increase the proportion of funds flowing to core services (Ontario Autism Coalition); and
- funding Surrey Place to provide tools and guidelines to support better access to health services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or autism (Surrey Place).

DeafBlind Ontario Services made recommendations to the Committee on behalf of Canadian Hearing Services, Canadian Helen Keller Centre, CNIB Deafblind Community Services, and Lions McInnes House. These intervenor services organizations support people who have a combined loss of both hearing and vision. They recommended investing in intervenor training and wage increases to address workforce retention issues.

Gender-based and Intimate Partner Violence Services

Organizations involved in providing support and services to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of gender-based and intimate partner violence addressed the Committee regarding challenges in their work. The Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre described an increase in sexual violence within intimate partner relationships and growing waitlists for their services. The Centre commented that experiences on the front lines supported intimate partner violence as endemic in Ontario. They asked for increased core funding and dedicated resources for community-based sexual violence supports for children and youth. The Kingston Interval House requested increased core funding indexed to inflation to address rising costs. The Committee heard that long-term investments that reflect actual operating costs would help stabilize the sector and reduce crisis-driven spending. Similarly, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses recommended indexing base funding for Violence Against Women (VAW) emergency shelters to offset inflation and the rising costs of delivering 24-hour essential emergency services. These witnesses also highlighted staff burnout and workforce retention challenges, due in part to competition from higher paying sectors.

Non-profit Sector

Stakeholders representing Ontario's non-profit sector highlighted the essential role their organizations play in the social and economic life of the province. Impact Halton Coalition requested long-term, flexible provincial core funding to allow non-profits to allocate funding as needed.⁴ Both the Ontario Nonprofit Network and Pillar Nonprofit Network urged increased investment in the sector and recommended creating a "home in government" for non-profits by

⁴ The witness stated that reliance on project-based funding can result in service disruptions to clients and makes it difficult for non-profits to compete for talent.

appointing an associate minister to provide a direct line of communication with the Ontario government to address unique issues and opportunities facing the entire sector.⁵

Social Assistance

As with previous budget consultations, social assistance was an area of concern raised by witnesses. A representative from Poverty Free Thunder Bay described individuals on social assistance being forced to choose between paying rent and buying groceries; the witness also spoke about her experience as a participant in Ontario's Basic Income Pilot project. Several witnesses recommended significantly increasing rates under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) and indexing them annually to account for increases in the cost of living.⁶ Individuals also wrote to the Committee and shared personal experiences supporting family members whose needs are not fully met by existing programs. Referencing advocacy efforts of Feed Ontario, the Ottawa Food Bank suggested increasing the OW earned income exemption, arguing that allowing people to keep more of their earned income would reduce disincentives to accepting additional work hours.⁷ Every Canadian Counts proposed a publicly funded National Disability Insurance Plan that they said could be modeled on a national program in Australia.

Social Services

211 Ontario is a helpline that connects people across the province to social services, programs, and community supports. 211 Ontario and the United Ways of Ontario jointly recommended investments in the provincial 211 Service Navigation System to help Ontarians connect to health, housing, income, employment, training, and mental health services.

Student Nutrition Programs

Several witnesses spoke about the importance of universally accessible healthy school food programs.⁸ Witnesses called for increased investment in the Student Nutrition Program (SNP) and First Nations Student Nutrition Program (FNSNP).⁹ The Food Action Network of Northwestern Ontario emphasized the need for such programs as food insecurity continues to rise across the province, particularly in Northern Ontario.

Citizenship and Multiculturalism

The Committee heard several recommendations related to the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism's role in promoting anti-racism, economic inclusion, and cultural heritage. B'nai Brith Canada expressed concern regarding rising levels of anti-Semitism. To address this, they proposed dedicating funding to increase awareness and understanding of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of "anti-Semitism" among secondary and post-secondary students in the province. The Filipino-Canadian Civic Action Network also raised concerns about safety within their community, with specific reference to the attack on the Lapu-Lapu Day festival in Vancouver. To address this concern, they recommended increasing funding for Filipino Canadian cultural events to promote safety and visibility for these celebrations. CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals focused on reducing barriers that prevent Black youth

⁵ They specifically identified the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade as a location for this appointment.

⁶ For example, Anglican Diocese of Toronto; Food Action Network of Northwestern Ontario; Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition; ODSP Action Coalition; United Way East Ontario; and United Way Greater Toronto.

⁷ The Income Security Advocacy Centre made similar recommendations.

⁸ For example, The Food Sharing Project.

⁹ For example, Ottawa Network for Education.

from accessing meaningful employment and career development opportunities and asked for increased investment in Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan, with multi-year and predictable funding.

Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security

Funding and Support for Students

Multiple organizations recommended the removal of interest on Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) loans. The Committee heard that this removal of interest would provide students and graduates with financial relief during their transition into the workforce and provide support for learners "in the midst of an affordability crisis."¹⁰ Also related to support for students, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance recommended that the provincial government increase the maximum credit value under the Co-operative Education Tax Credit and provide for a higher maximum for small businesses.

Post-Secondary Institution Funding, Programs and Services

College, university, faculty, and student representatives asked for increased funding for post-secondary education. The Council of Ontario Universities described financial impacts on their sector, including the effects of funding freezes as well as loss of revenue from reduced international student enrolment. These impacts, as well as a forecast shortage of places for domestic students, led the Council of Ontario Universities to recommend increased operating funding for universities to expand enrolment capacity, strengthen research and innovation, and support economic development. This request for additional operating funding was echoed by Brock University, which recommended increased university allocations for in-demand programs, such as STEM, nursing, and teachers' education.¹¹

Multiple colleges outlined a structural deficit that could be addressed by increasing operating grants and college tuition adjustments, without which, programs and campus closures could continue, student opportunities would shrink, fewer students would graduate, and Ontario would "lose critical workforce capacity." Funding to create spaces for 20,000 graduates per year to align with needs identified in a recent study conducted by Colleges Ontario was also requested.¹²

Student groups, faculty organizations, and individuals requested investments to ensure Ontario's per-student funding matches the national average education funding model.¹³ Canadian Federation of Students — Ontario recommended that Ontario maintain a "tuition freeze" on domestic students' tuition. Ontario Student Voices recommended targeted funding to incentivize local work placement opportunities by offering wage subsidies for hiring post-secondary students in work-integrated learning placements.

Funding for post-secondary French education was also a topic of concern for witnesses. Collège La Cité requested that the Province adopt a funding formula based on measurable data,

¹⁰ For example, University Students' Council at Western University; and Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario.

¹¹ STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, an interdisciplinary, umbrella term for fields focused on innovation, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

¹² For example, Algonquin College; Fanshawe College; and Fleming College. The Ontario Public Service Employees Union echoed calls for higher levels of college funding and recommended that the Province redirect funding for training centres provided through the Skills Development Fund back to the public college training system.

¹³ For example, Canadian Federation of Students — Ontario; and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations.

rather than historical precedents, to ensure compliance with obligations under the *French Language Services Act* (referencing the current model for school boards as an example). Table de concertation postesecondaire francophone recommended that the Province review the funding envelope for post-secondary institutions and include immediate investments in French language and bilingual institutions. They wanted this review to reflect the specific realities of Francophone and bilingual institutions, many of which are northern, small, and regional in nature.

Requests for greater funding for specific institutions, typically located in northern or rural areas, were also heard by the Committee.¹⁴

Rideau Hall Foundation, a charity, recommended continued funding for the Queen Elizabeth Scholars post-secondary international exchange program. They suggested that provincial investment would leverage further private and institutional financial support.

University Pension Plan Ontario wrote to the Committee requesting regulatory amendments to create a targeted exemption from the wind-up-liability cap on transferable assets for pension plan conversions involving public universities. Described benefits of such a change included reduced uncertainty and lessened friction in university sector pension plan conversions. The witness also recommended temporarily waiving Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund assessment fees in specific instances.

Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

Attracting Investment and Job Creation

Several witnesses made recommendations that centred on attracting investment and companies to the province. Invest Ottawa asked Ontario to modernize and scale the province's entrepreneurship networks to help companies manage changing economic and industry dynamics such as the acceleration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and to strengthen Ontario's ability to attract "high-value companies."

The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada recommended introducing an investment attraction framework that is long-term, technology-neutral, and outcomes-based to help the Province compete for world-scale investment. The witness was concerned large chemistry, plastics, and recycling projects have drifted to jurisdictions with more favourable policy environments, competitive incentives, and streamlined permitting processes.

Support for small businesses, including in rural communities, was also important for some witnesses. For example, acorn30, a strategic marketing agency, asked for a newly enhanced version of the Digital Main Street platform to help brick-and-mortar businesses improve digital literacy. The witness further recommended targeted grants or tax credits for small businesses adopting AI and other digital tools to support productivity. Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas suggested creating incentives or programs that enable commercial property owners and Business Improvement Areas to support small business incubators (which provide assistance to early-stage companies) and start-up spaces through the use of vacant or underutilized commercial spaces.

¹⁴ For example, Trent University.

Specific Initiatives

Several witnesses also brought forward concerns from their respective sectors and proposed measures for economic development.

Specific initiatives that witnesses highlighted are captured below (though some have been addressed in other sections of this report under the ministries they align with):

- consider dedicated funding support for modernization investments in the domestic cement-and-concrete-manufacturing sector (Cement Association of Canada);
- expand targeted industrial investment programs for aerospace, defence, rail, and advanced manufacturing supply chains; support domestic production capacity to reduce exposure to global supply-chain disruptions; align provincial infrastructure and procurement policies with industrial development objectives (IAM Union Canada); and
- create incentives to increase private sector investment in the life sciences sector (e.g., an Angel investor tax credit and engagement with pension funds); establish a Life Sciences Fund; provide funding to advance the careers of women and support women-led businesses in the life sciences sector (Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization).

Technology

Some witnesses delivered recommendations relating to the development of technology, intellectual property, and the use of AI. Dominion Dynamics, a Canadian defence technology startup, called for the creation of a “fast lane” for testing and contracting new technology, emphasized the importance of protecting Ontario-created intellectual property for the province’s “defence industrial cluster,” and requested an investment in its Auranet nodes.¹⁵

The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada proposed several measures for the Committee’s consideration including engaging multinational companies to position the Province as a leading chemical and plastics manufacturing hub, promoting incentives for the adoption of innovative plastics recycling technologies and infrastructure, and chemistry-sector investments to strengthen supply chains for defence, aerospace, automotive, electric vehicles (EV), and critical minerals.

Quantum Valley Ideas Lab urged the Committee to consider continued support for Ontario’s Critical Technology Initiatives, which assists not-for-profit organizations to further the development, commercialization, and adoption of technology (e.g., cybersecurity, robotics) by Ontario companies.

One individual asked for support for a regionally delivered AI literacy and responsible adoption pilot program for small and mid-sized enterprises over an initial two-year period.

Education

Child Care

The Committee heard commentary related to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system and child care in general. The YMCA of Southwestern Ontario recommended a commitment to a long-term CWELCC agreement with a funding formula built

¹⁵ Auranet nodes are a network of sensors sharing data in real time that can be used for law enforcement application—e.g., at airstrips and critical infrastructure sites.

on full cost recovery to provide predictability for operators, families, and municipalities.¹⁶ The Pembroke Co-operative Nursery School highlighted continuing workforce challenges with early childhood educators leaving licensed child care programs for higher-paying positions in school boards or other sectors. They recommended funding for a “comprehensive” wage grid, with benefits including pension plans for child care workers to address staffing attrition.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

The Committee heard from many education stakeholders concerned with the level and structure of funding for schools.¹⁷ The Renfrew County District School Board suggested that the Province should work collectively with boards to review and revise the present funding model, particularly for small boards. An individual recommended that the Province implement the recommendations from *Shortchanging Ontario's Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario* published by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario in 2017.

Witnesses also had suggestions for specific areas that they believed required targeted allocations. The Ontario School Library Association urged the establishment of a defined sub-allocation for school libraries with funding for staffing. Some organizations proposed funding for specific programs serving particular communities or areas of need, including:

- renewing and expanding the Ontario Career Lab to provide structured, high-impact career coaching to grade nine and ten students (Halton Industry Education Council); and
- funding the Connected North program to deliver a range of virtual educational, cultural, and mental wellbeing resources for students living in northern and remote communities (TakingITGlobal).

The chair of the Algoma District School Board recommended Ontario undertake a review and revision of the Native Languages curriculum, expressing its importance for Indigenous students and their economic and social potential.¹⁸

The Committee also heard from witnesses regarding the French-language school system and the availability of French and French Immersion programs in schools. Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario drew attention to a shortage of Francophone teachers and asked the Province to take measures to address this shortage. Witnesses also recommended:

- increasing financial support for the *Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario* (CEPEO) and the *Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est* (CECCE), to enable them to build more French-language schools in the West of Ottawa (Maison de la francophonie d'Ottawa); and
- amending the *Education Act* to guarantee access to French Immersion by requiring English-language school boards to offer French Immersion programs, and the right for students to attend established French Immersion programs (Canadian Parents for French — Ontario).

¹⁶ The YMCA of Greater Toronto made similar recommendations.

¹⁷ For example, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Renfrew Catholic Teachers; and Sudbury Secondary Catholic Teachers.

¹⁸ The Ontario Public Schools Boards' Association made similar recommendations focused on Indigenous language revitalization.

Consortium Centre Jules-Léger is a provincial and demonstration school providing specialized education, school residential services, and preschool services to Francophone students who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, blind or with low vision, deafblind, or with learning disabilities, and their families. The Centre asked for a revised funding model that covers essential costs related to the delivery of services, while also reducing reliance on one-time adjustments and temporary funding envelopes.

Other witnesses drew attention to perceived gaps in funding. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association asked the Province to provide financial support for federal increases to statutory Canada Pension Plan and employment insurance contributions, which boards are currently "paying out of pocket." The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association asked for funding to cover costs associated with current levels of sick leave and absenteeism. The witness highlighted that absenteeism affects the instructional environment and student safety, particularly when occasional teachers and support staff are unavailable.

Many witnesses made recommendations for prioritized investments in supports for students with special needs.¹⁹ A school board trustee with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board explained that almost all school boards face deficits in special education and struggle to meet the needs of students. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation highlighted how funding for education assistants, child and youth workers, social workers, speech-language supports and in-school mental health professionals can help prevent staff burnout, students falling behind, and violence in the classroom—reported by their members as an increasing concern.

Another common issue discussed was class sizes. Many witnesses from the local teachers' associations asked the Province to commit to lowering class sizes.²⁰ The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario specifically called for a cap of 24 students in grades 4 to 8, a cap of 26 students in kindergarten, and a commitment that every kindergarten classroom be staffed by a teacher and a designated early childhood educator.

Many witnesses such as the Carleton Village School Advisory Council recommended investments to address the school repair backlog and to support building upgrades.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

The Committee heard from several witnesses regarding initiatives, including emergency preparedness grants. Parks and Recreation Ontario proposed that funding for the grants be increased over a three-year period, that grant amounts be increased, and that a dedicated stream for parks and recreation grants be created. The Food Action Network of Northwestern Ontario recommended that the Ministry re-expand non-profit eligibility under the Community Emergency Preparedness Grant. It also recommended that a dedicated emergency food planning and response fund be established.

The Committee was also presented with other recommendations related to emergency preparedness and response more broadly. ATCO Structures Canada highlighted recent emergencies, particularly wildfires and evacuations, and argued that modular solutions provide a range of scalable options for evacuee housing, emergency operations, and front-line responder accommodations to strengthen Ontario's capacity for emergency response. Pets

¹⁹ For example, Ontario Parents for Education Support; and the following Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association units: Northeastern; Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington.

²⁰ For example, the following Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association units: Eastern Ontario; Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers; Ottawa; Waterloo; and Thunder Bay Secondary.

Canada recommended that pets be included in provincial emergency planning frameworks, which the group argued would improve evacuation compliance and reduce risks to first responders and residents.

Energy and Mines

Energy Efficiency Programs, Consumption, and Price Stability

Electricity consumption and pricing concerns were raised by a few witnesses. The Atmospheric Fund highlighted the province's population growth and the acceleration of electrification and recommended that new homes be automatically enrolled in the Peak Perks program with an easy opt-out.²¹ They suggested such energy efficiency programs should also be extended to new and existing multi-unit buildings.

An individual cautioned the Committee against funding AI servers and centres, warning of a "perilous path" to excessive water use and high electricity demand.

Underscoring the challenges of electricity cost pressures and market volatility for large industrial consumers, the Association of Major Power Consumers suggested refinements to the Interruptible Rate Program.²²

Energy Sources

Several witness recommendations related to the province's nuclear energy industry. The Town of Deep River, which described itself as the "Canadian birthplace of nuclear energy," commended efforts to invest in and grow nuclear energy in Ontario as baseload power and suggested 'doubling-down' on nuclear investments by adopting CANDU nuclear technology for future grid-scale projects and promoting CANDU internationally.²³ To help large industrial consumers cope with the emerging period of elevated electricity market prices, the Association of Major Power Consumers asked for a time-limited, targeted industrial rate mitigation mechanism, potentially using the Northern Energy Advantage Program model, to bridge the period between nuclear refurbishment and the new nuclear facilities development underway.²⁴

The Committee heard proposed measures to encourage solar power use from Modular Energy Solution, a manufacturer of modular housing units. The witness recommended establishing an incentive for Ontario-made solar panels to foster rooftop solar panel adoption (e.g., in new home construction); and, changing the Save on Energy programs for solar power to allow for net metering, with the rebated amount lowered for solar panels not made in Ontario.

RNG Coalition, representing stakeholders in the renewable natural gas industry, called for the establishment of a non-binding target for renewable natural gas (i.e., biomethane cleaned to

²¹ The Independent Electricity System Operator's (IESO) Peak Perks program offers financial incentives for residential electricity customers willing to reduce air conditioning at peak times through eligible smart thermostats connected to a central air conditioning system or heat pump unit.

²² The Interruptible Rate Program offers large electricity customers a Global Adjustment charge (which covers the cost of building new electricity infrastructure and the cost of conservation program delivery, among other things) at a reduced rate in exchange for reducing consumption when called upon by the IESO.

²³ CANDU refers to Canada Deuterium Uranium. Canada's 17 operable CANDU reactors (i.e., nuclear power reactors) use deuterium oxide (heavy water) as a moderator and coolant and rely on natural (not enriched) uranium as a fuel.

²⁴ Nuclear refurbishments are underway at several sites including the Bruce and Pickering Nuclear Generating Stations. The refurbishment at the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station was announced complete on February 2, 2026.

meet natural gas pipeline standards) blending in the gas system by 2030, while providing regulated utilities latitude to meet this target.

Mining

Several witnesses expressed concerns over the permitting process that applies to mining projects in Ontario and asked for a streamlined approach. PTX Metals, a mineral exploration company, told the Committee that the current permitting systems still create “unnecessary friction” due to consultation requirements, environmental studies, and seasonal access challenges in remote regions. The Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce suggested consolidating regulatory processes by expanding the One Project, One Process principle to all mining projects with a centralized digital platform and a fixed two-year decision timeline.²⁵

The Committee also heard about expenses involved in Indigenous consultation for mining exploration, including frequent flights to remote communities. PTX Metals suggested that the New Relationship Fund be built into a meaningful process to fund consultation between First Nations and project proponents while enabling First Nations’ resource capacity development and skills training.²⁶ The Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce recommended creating a single, authoritative consultation list and making community partnership costs eligible for mining tax treatment.

Regarding Indigenous consultation more broadly, the Committee heard from the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Region 3 who requested annual funding for MNO consultation services. These services would include processing and triaging notifications, conducting and supporting the assessment of potential impacts on Métis rights, coordinating information exchanges, and facilitating community participation. The witness also recommended that the Province finalize a consultation protocol that clearly sets out how the Crown engages rights-bearing Métis communities. These were linked to timely and orderly participation of the MNO and prevention of late-surfacing issues and avoidable delays that could impact timing and delivery of projects under the new “1P1P” (One Project, One Process) system.

Infrastructure was also a key consideration for some witnesses. For instance, the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce wished to see a long-term northern infrastructure and workforce strategy, modelled on Quebec’s Plan Nord, to attract talent to pursue mining careers.

Some chambers of commerce recommended a new exploration tax credit (stackable with federal flow-through shares) and other risk-sharing tools to reduce critical minerals price volatility, and indexing the Northern Energy Advantage Program (NEAP) to inflation.²⁷

Taxes and Credits

Witnesses advocated for the removal of certain taxes that apply to the energy sector. For instance, the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario urged the Committee to consider removing the carbon tax applicable to natural gas electricity generation to provide industrial consumers relief over a five-year horizon from mounting cost pressures. Hydro One

²⁵ The One Project, One Process framework was created under the *Mining Act* to apply an integrated approach to the permitting, authorization and approval processes for Minister-designated projects. A mine authorization and permitting delivery team would provide support for these projects to obtain permits, authorizations and approvals.

²⁶ Notably, the New Relationship Fund falls within the scope of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation.

²⁷ For example, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce. NEAP provides a rebate of two cents per kilowatt hour for program participants (e.g., large industrial electricity consumers). Rebates are capped based on average consumption levels from 2017 to 2020.

Networks recommended waiving the proposed “departure tax” paid by municipally owned utilities, for all investments including all acquisitions.²⁸

Witnesses also recommended establishing specific tax credits. Hydro One Networks supported advocacy for federal investment tax credits for select intra-provincial transmission projects, with priority given to projects in particular categories. RNG Coalition asked to modify the Clean Energy Credit (CEC) program to create a companion (but non-fungible) Clean Fuel Credit program to recognize the grid-injection of renewable natural gas produced in Ontario.

Environment, Conservation and Parks

Conservation Authorities

Conservation authorities are local public sector organizations that offer a range of programs on behalf of the Province and municipalities. Some witnesses presented their views on the government’s proposed consolidation of Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities into 7 regional conservation authorities. The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce opposed the consolidation, indicating that the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority should remain a standalone entity focused on Northwestern Ontario conservation issues. Similarly, the Anglican Diocese of Toronto asked the Province to reconsider the planned amalgamation and instead pursue opportunities to enhance coordination between currently existing conservation authorities.

Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet asked the Committee to consider the following measures: developing a working transition team that retains local expertise and oversight; ensuring the Province pays for all transition costs for the proposed consolidation of conservation authorities; and restoring an even split of provincial–municipal funding.

Infrastructure Projects and Recycling

The Atmospheric Fund urged the Committee to consider establishing a provincial fund to support low carbon thermal networks for municipalities and new developments, asserting that district energy systems can “accelerate emission reductions, especially in growing urban centres.”²⁹ The witness also recommended a sustained investment in public charging infrastructure through the ChargeON program (a funding program for the installation of public electric vehicle (EV) chargers in communities across the province).

Regarding other infrastructure projects, Ontario Nature, an environmental conservation charity, encouraged collaboration with Indigenous communities to recognize Indigenous-led conservation efforts in support of reconciliation and the advancement of critical infrastructure projects that would require “Indigenous consent and a social licence to operate.”

The Town of Kapuskasing called for the expansion of residential-only recycling to include commercial and restaurant recycling collection.

²⁸ The witness is referring to recapturing depreciation claims under the payment-in-lieu-of-taxes regime that applies to municipal utilities.

²⁹ District energy systems (or “low-carbon thermal energy networks”) distribute thermal energy to buildings within a given geographic area or neighbourhood. These systems rely on a heating and cooling centre and a thermal network of interconnected underground pipes to distribute heating and/or cooling to a cluster of buildings (e.g., universities and neighbourhoods).

Protected Areas and Parks

Witnesses were interested in the allocation of funding to support protected areas in the province.³⁰ Certain witnesses broadly sought increased funding to expand protected areas, conserve wetlands, and maintain and restore the natural environment.³¹

The Nature Conservancy of Canada sought funding for the Taiga Forest and Peatlands project. According to the witness, this funding would benefit local infrastructure investments, regional economies, Indigenous engagement, and long-term economic and climate resilience, and bolster “Ontario’s reputation as a sustainable destination.”

Ontario Conservation Accelerator, a charity that both owns lands and partners with land trusts, municipalities, and other government entities, underscored the growing demand for campsites in the province, citing the “record number of visitors” that Ontario Parks has seen in recent years. The witness asked for the creation of a land securement fund over three years to enable the Ministry to co-fund projects with partners to expand parks and conservation reserves.

Finance

Insurance

Organizations wrote to the Committee recommending changes to automobile insurance. The Coalition of Health Professions in Auto Insurance requested updates to the hourly rates in the Professional Services Guideline to adjust for inflation, cost of living, and market value. They indicated that private practice health professionals and clinics are either leaving the sector or reducing the number of accident-benefit cases they accept, creating increased difficulty for claimants in accessing care.

The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association also wrote to the Committee recommending changes to automobile insurance, including eliminating the statutory deductible for pain and suffering awards that fall below a certain monetary threshold (in some cases, eliminating the award), arguing that the deductible functions as a “legal penalty” imposed on victims.

Tax Policies

As with previous pre-budget hearings, there were many recommendations from assorted witnesses seeking specific changes to tax policies and tax legislation. This year these requests included

- reducing Ontario’s small business tax rate to 2%, increasing the threshold from \$500,000 to \$700,000, and raising the threshold annually based on inflation (Canadian Federation of Independent Business);
- restoring the corporate tax rate to 14.5%, a level comparable to historical precedent and other provinces (Canadian Union of Public Employees — Ontario);
- launching an Affordable Housing Philanthropy Tax Credit and an Affordable Housing Investment Tax Credit (Habitat for Humanity Greater Toronto Area);

³⁰ Protected areas are granted the designation based on ecological, geological, and cultural heritage features with specific criteria applied to the selection of provincial parks and conservation reserves.

³¹ For example, Ontario Nature asserted that additional funding for protected areas networks, particularly on Crown Land, would support regional land use planning to shield areas of high biodiversity and cultural value from industrial development.

- lowering the provincial portion of the HST from 8% to 6% (Canadian Taxpayers Federation);
- rebating HST paid by municipalities for goods and services (Township of Bonnechere Valley); and
- supporting reform of the federal cannabis excise tax regime (NWN Scientific (Common Ground)).

A professor emeritus of history appeared before the Committee and recommended that the Province create a tax system that is “fair to all Ontarians” and described how “private wealth” has led to “public poverty.”

An individual wrote to the Committee requesting an increase to the Ontario basic personal amount tax credit, folding the Ontario Health Premium into the regular personal income tax rates, and restoring the Ontario Tuition Tax Credit. These changes were described as making Ontario’s personal income tax system “more fair,” compared to the “quite regressive” current system. Another individual was concerned about eliminating provincial debt and recommended an annual spending reduction of at least 10%.

Francophone Affairs

The Committee heard from many Franco-Ontarian stakeholders and Francophone organizations whose recommendations related to a variety of program and policy areas. Recommendations are found under the relevant ministries in other sections of this report.

Health

Broad Investments, Staffing and System-wide Initiatives

A number of individuals wrote to the Committee requesting significant investments in publicly delivered health care services and shared their concerns about long emergency room wait times, hospital deficits, health professional staffing shortages—in particular, the shortage of family doctors—and the “diversion” of public dollars to private health service providers.

The Ontario Association of Councils on Aging urged broad investments in health care, with a focus on Ontario’s Primary Care Action Plan and home care and community care services to prevent or postpone the need for more costly health services such as long-term care. The Ontario Caregiver Organization requested investment to sustain the Essential Care Partner Support Hub, which aims to integrate caregivers as partners in patient care, and asked for new base funding to meet a growing demand for direct-to-caregiver services (e.g., mental health supports, peer support, support for working caregivers). On a similar theme, the Ontario Caregiver Coalition proposed introducing a new Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit that would provide a monthly amount for eligible caregiving-related expenses.

Regarding staffing, the Committee heard from many witnesses advocating for salary increases in their sectors to help address ongoing workforce recruitment and retention challenges, as reviewed in the sections below. Associations representing Ontario’s community health sector emphasized the need to align the wages of its workers with the same positions in higher-paying sectors.³²

³² The Alliance for Healthier Communities, on behalf of ten provincial member associations representing community-based health sector agencies, told the Committee that community health workers earn

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario asked the Province to “harmonize compensation upwards” to address wage disparities between health sectors, to ensure compensation is competitive with jurisdictions such as the U.S., and to strengthen mentorship and retention programs. The Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) called for a clear plan to harmonize RPN wages and address “wage compression” among RPNs, personal support workers (PSWs), and registered nurses (RNs) so that nurses are not “penalized” for working in high-need areas like long-term care and home care.³³ It was noted that more competitive compensation for permanent RPNs would also reduce incentives for nurses to move to agencies (thereby also reducing the more costly reliance on agency nursing).

The Ontario Nurses' Association called for nurse-to-patient ratios, to be developed in consultation with nurses and health care professionals through their unions, as a solution to end the “crisis” of violence in health care and thereby also improve nurse retention (the Committee heard that “working short” creates the conditions for violence to occur and that jurisdictions with legislated ratios generally see improvement in retaining nurses).

Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), established under the *Connecting Care Act, 2019*, are intended to enable integration across the health system, with 58 OHTs across the province to provide full provincial coverage. The Niagara Ontario Health Team told the Committee that a lack of adequate funding to support medium and long-term planning poses challenges in achieving the Province’s vision for OHTs. They requested stable base funding as well as standardized province-wide engagement funding to replace the current in-kind model that favours larger institutions.

Disease Diagnosis, Management and Treatment

The Committee heard from witnesses requesting investments in the management and treatment of diseases and other health conditions facing Ontarians, including that the Province:

- expand the Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program, an integrated arthritis care pathway that includes the Rapid Access Clinic for Rheumatology (Rheum-RAC) pilot project to improve diagnoses and access to specialist care (Arthritis Society Canada);
- resume funding for the FAST signs of stroke public awareness campaign in Ontario (Heart and Stroke);
- support outpatient cardiac care including independent outpatient ambulatory clinics with overhead costs (e.g., salary increases for support staff to help address workforce challenges) because the current physician compensation model does not keep pace with the costs of delivering these services (Ontario Association of Cardiologists);
- make a one-time capital investment to support the Ronald McDonald House London expansion intended to double the facility's capacity to support more families of children receiving hospital care that must often travel far from home (Ronald McDonald House, Southwestern Ontario);

significantly less than their peers performing similar work in hospitals, schools, and other public-sector settings, urging significant investments to “eliminate the wage gap.”

³³ The witness stated that wages for RPNs in these settings are often similar to, or may fall below, those of PSWs despite having responsibilities closer to those of an RN.

- develop a provincial rare disease strategy to avoid delayed diagnosis, duplicative testing, preventable hospitalizations, and unmanaged disease progression (Canadian Forum for Rare Disease Innovators);
- establish a structured, time-limited out-of-country medical agreement for complex neurosurgical care that includes Ehlers-Danlos syndromes and Hypermobility Spectrum Disorders, while working towards developing capacity for Ontario-based treatment (Canerector Foundation);³⁴ and
- fund myStoria’s request for a one-year pilot program to provide proactive preconception support to 2,000 Ontario families who have been trying to conceive for six months or more (myStoria).

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario congratulated the Ontario government on its legislative efforts directed at dementia care, citing passage of the *Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, 2024* and the introduction of the *Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2025*. They urged the Province to implement the *Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, 2024* to establish a provincial dementia framework. They also requested the creation of a coordinating body to oversee and direct dementia care within Ontario Health. The Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region requested renewed funding for the Dementia Resource, Education, Advocacy, and Mentorship (DREAM) program that embeds local Alzheimer Society staff in hospital emergency departments to reduce avoidable hospitalization and support safe transitions home. They noted there is an opportunity to expand the DREAM model to an additional 40-50 hospitals.

The Medical Laboratory Professionals’ Association of Ontario requested a one-time investment to hire 130 preceptors to train 1,300 students with the goal of alleviating labour shortages, particularly in rural and northern labs. Witnesses told the Committee that staff burnout due to workforce shortages can increase the timelines for testing and diagnosis, and that this investment would complement recent investments in the Learn and Stay grant.³⁵

Drugs, Devices and Coverage

The Assistive Devices Program (ADP) helps individuals with long-term physical disabilities pay for customized equipment. Witnesses recommended that Ontario:

- include the RAYMEX® Lift by Axtion Independence Mobility as an eligible device (Axtion Independence Mobility);³⁶ and
- expand access to supplemental oxygen therapy for people living with pulmonary fibrosis and other respiratory issues (e.g., by modernizing eligibility criteria, increasing coverage levels, expanding access to ambulatory and exertional oxygen, and reducing administrative barriers) (Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation).

³⁴ The witness advised the Committee that the Foundation was prepared to make a substantial investment in Ontario-based capacity building (e.g., training, program development, equipment, and research) to complement public funding and proposed that the Province convene a joint Ministry of Health-Ontario Health-Foundation working group.

³⁵ The Committee also heard from the Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association and Medical Laboratory Professionals’ Association of Ontario — District 2.

³⁶ In addition to eligibility within ADP, the witness recommended eligibility within the new High-Intensity Bundled Home Care program and adding the device to the Ontario Health atHome reimbursement formulary.

A senior wrote to the Committee requesting legislative changes to facilitate access to more affordable software solutions for hearing difficulty, citing the Apple AirPods Pro hearing aid feature as an alternative to traditional hearing devices.

The Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers the costs of essential health care and diagnostic services in Ontario. The Committee heard recommendations to extend coverage to:

- include prostate-specific antigen (PSA) testing for early detection of prostate cancer when recommended by a physician (Canadian Cancer Society); and
- provide funding for optometric services to enable timely access to urgent eye care in community-based settings, as well as the ongoing management of chronic eye diseases (e.g., glaucoma) to eliminate unnecessary emergency department visits and duplicative assessments (Ontario Association of Optometrists).

Representatives from the Ontario Medical Association asked Ontario to address OHIP errors and rejected claims by ensuring timely appeals and creating a committee of the Ontario Medical Association and government to review innovative procedures and ensure they are funded. The witness representing District 9 requested tools for Northern Ontario physicians to support new and innovative surgical methods (e.g., robotic surgery facilities) to help attract trainees and new physicians. District 6 highlighted the Association's recommendation to create an Ombuds Office to deal with more complex rejected OHIP claims, with the goal of finding collaborative funding resolutions. The representative from District 7 proposed that the Province develop a fully integrated digital health ecosystem with a clinician interface, patient portal, and connected referral system, offering real-time insights for planning and resource allocation.

In addition, the Province provides prescription drug coverage through a number of public drug plans for millions of eligible Ontarians. The largest of such programs, the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program, provides access to eligible Ontarians, including seniors, social assistance recipients, and children under the age of 24 without private insurance. The ODB program covers most of the cost of approximately 5,000 medications on the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary.

Merck Canada urged Ontario to take steps to accelerate the process for listing new medicines to the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary, highlighting that patients face significant delays in accessing new medicines. The company acknowledged an Ontario pilot project to accelerate access to selected cancer medicines and asked that the pilot be quickly implemented and expanded to include all therapeutic areas.

The Canadian Cancer Survivor Network urged the Province to fund take-home cancer treatments to ensure that any cancer patient can access necessary oral and self-administered cancer drugs at no cost.

Representatives from the Ontario Dental Association and Thunder Bay Dental Association recommended making permanent the coordination of benefits between the Canadian Dental Care Plan and provincial dental programs (currently an interim measure). They also asked the Province to allow seniors to access coverage under the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program in any dentist's office while coordinating their coverage with the federal plan to enable greater access and increase seniors' use of the provincial program.³⁷

³⁷ An individual dentist wrote to the Committee requesting fee increases for publicly assisted dental programs such as coverage provided to ODSP recipients and under the Healthy Smiles Ontario program for eligible children and youth, stating that dental offices are delivering care under these programs "at a substantial loss."

Home Care and Community Support Services

Home Care Ontario applauded the Province's investments in home care but urged "corresponding increases" to staff compensation, describing a situation where service provider organizations are being asked to deliver more care without the tools needed to support the workforce (they said home care wages are "losing ground" relative to hospitals and long-term care settings). The organization asked for contract rate increases to support workforce recruitment and retention.³⁸

The Ontario Community Support Association described community support services—such as Meals on Wheels, adult day programs for people living with dementia, transportation services, respite programs, and assisted living supports—as "discharge infrastructure" for the hospital system. The Association requested base funding increases and additional investment in service growth to prevent "immediate cuts" across service provider organizations and to protect recent health system gains.³⁹

Community Care for Central Hastings requested investment to support the regional Integrated Community Assessment and Referral Team, which aims to prevent hospital readmissions by coordinating 30 days of community support services following hospital discharge.

Perley Health emphasized the benefits of the Assisted Living Services for High-Risk Seniors' program both in enabling seniors to age at home and providing cost-savings compared with long-term care and hospital use. The witness urged investment to help providers meet the demand for service and to address program deficits.⁴⁰

McCormick Care Group recommended increased investments in dementia-specific adult day programs and overnight respite to help stabilize individuals and families living with dementia in the community and prevent escalation to acute and long-term care.⁴¹

Hospitals

The Committee heard that while hospitals are appreciative of COVID-19 recovery support and recent investments, they face continued fiscal pressures related to population growth, inflation, and staffing challenges. Hospitals requested increased operating funding to reflect actual cost growth and predictable, multi-year funding commitments to enable hospitals to plan sustainably and avoid recurring fiscal instability.

Kemptville District Hospital emphasized the importance of regional capacity planning led by hospitals with knowledge of local needs and "existing system gaps." The Mississippi River Health Alliance asked the Province to target funding for small and mid-sized community hospitals, which have limited capacity to absorb structural deficits. St. Joseph's Health Care London explained that it is concerned about its ability to maintain services and urged significant investment in the hospital sector.

³⁸ VHA Home HealthCare made similar recommendations. Carefor Health and Community Services requested investments in both home care and community support services funding to increase front-line wages across the sector.

³⁹ Ottawa West Community Support echoed the Association's recommendations.

⁴⁰ While the witness expressed gratitude that Ontario Health had covered the organization's program deficit in the previous year, the Committee heard that Perley Health has had to reduce the number of seniors the assisted living program serves over the past several years.

⁴¹ The witness requested funding to support existing services as well as expansion by McCormick Care Group, including satellite sites to meet a growing need for dementia-specific community support services in London and the surrounding region.

Specific requests for capital investments included that the Province

- support the creation of a health care hub in Brockville with a service delivery model focused on preventative care, maintenance care, and non-emergent episodic care to provide timely access, divert care from the emergency department, and avoid hospital admissions (Brockville General Hospital);
- provide provincial funding for a new hybrid operating room to support Peterborough Regional Health Centre's regional vascular surgery program (Peterborough Regional Health Centre);
- commit to move the Critical Care Centre project at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre to the next stage to ultimately serve as the go-to location for trauma care, burn care, and cancer care (Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre); and
- ensure necessary approvals to move forward with Waterloo Region's new hospital and inclusion of Phase 1 of the building project in the 2026 budget and Infrastructure Ontario's multi-year infrastructure plan (Waterloo Regional Health Network; Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce).

Queensway Carleton Hospital recommended Ontario establish a fund to facilitate the adoption of Ontario-developed technologies by community and rural hospitals, specifically addressing costs associated with transitioning to new technologies (e.g., staff training, infrastructure challenges).

Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE urged broad increases in hospital funding to hire additional full-time staff to reach the national per-capita average, and advocated increasing staffed hospital beds to achieve 2015 service levels.

Mental Health and Addictions

The Committee heard that Ontario continues to face increased demand for mental health and addiction services following from the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding is provided to community-based mental health and addiction agencies to offer accessible services outside of hospitals. Witnesses said that, when these services are unstable or under-resourced, individuals are more likely to experience repeated crises, unstable housing, and increased use of the emergency system.

Local representatives of various Canadian Mental Health Association branches expressed gratitude for increased funding to this sector in the previous budget. However, they stressed that their sector requires further support, in particular for workforce stabilization. They asked for a 4% increase to base budgets to maintain current services, with year-over-year increases to retain skilled staff (witnesses advised that community mental health and addiction workers earn significantly less than their counterparts in hospital and other public-sector settings).⁴²

Addictions and Mental Health Ontario similarly urged investments in compensation to close the "wage gap" that draws community-based mental health workers to other sectors including education, acute care, and municipal services. The organization requested funds to implement proposed Minimum Care Expectations for Bed-based Substance Use Health Services

⁴² For example, Cochrane-Timiskaming; Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge; Kenora; Sudbury and Manitoulin; and Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services.

(developed in collaboration with the sector in 2024) and recommended a dedicated state of good repair fund for existing mental health and addiction supportive housing units.

Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health asked that the Province consider incorporating Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub (HART Hub) funding into their agency's base funding, and requested support for a local youth wellness hub offering low-barrier access to integrated care to help fill a "transitional gap" between child and adult services.

Regent Park Community Health Centre recommended reinstating funding for overdose prevention services, including injection and inhalation sites, and sustained funding in the full spectrum of harm-reduction-based services in Toronto's downtown east.

Progress Place requested funding to establish a second Clubhouse in the Greater Toronto Area, and investment to extend the hours and reach of the Warm Line peer support service.⁴³ ConnexOntario requested investment to support the organization's programs, including its 24/7 mental health and addictions navigation service and its real-time mental health and addictions service database.

Mothers for Mental Health Care Reform Ontario were among witnesses who recommended increased investment in the treatment of severe mental health issues such as schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, including funding for workforce expansion and to increase inpatient care availability.⁴⁴ A mother of an adult child who experiences paranoia as part of his mental health condition suggested the "serious harm" threshold used for capacity assessments is too high, while an intensive care nurse advocated support for a Treatment and Reintegration Program for the Homeless (TRIP) pilot site in Toronto as an alternative to a housing first approach.

Palliative Care

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario (HPCO) described the range of hospice services provided in Ontario, including hospice residences, grief and bereavement services, and in-home visiting hospice services. The organization requested increased investment in these services, including for non-clinical care by trained hospice volunteers that meet HPCO's standards of care.

Primary Care

Primary care providers offer a range of services that include routine care, diagnostics, developing treatment plans, and making referrals to specialist and other health services. The Committee heard that access to effective primary care reduces pressure on other parts of the health care system. While witnesses generally welcomed the goal of Ontario's Primary Care Action Plan to connect all residents to a primary care team (family doctor or nurse practitioner) by 2029, many highlighted the challenges their organizations currently face.

The Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario told the Committee their interprofessional health care provider teams are experiencing "severe" staffing shortages that limit their ability to attach new patients to support Ontario's goal. The Association urged the release of already-committed workforce funding for recruitment and retention and advocated additional investments targeted at reducing the "persistent 15-30% wage gap" team-based providers face

⁴³ The witness described the Clubhouse model as integrating mental health support with stable housing, employment opportunities, and community connection.

⁴⁴ The witness highlighted a need for "aggressive" recruitment and education efforts for psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, psychologists, and social workers.

compared with other sectors.⁴⁵ The Association also advocated a shift to global budgets and allowing teams to contract to fill gaps in response to community and organizational needs (without requiring prior Ministry approval), among other measures to support greater flexibility for family health teams.⁴⁶

The Committee also heard about the particular challenges individual family health teams face in serving their communities. For example, North Shore Family Health Team, located in Northwestern Ontario, emphasized that vacancies are especially felt in small northern and rural teams where there is often only one person in a particular role. These teams also experience persistent physician vacancies. Timmins Academic Family Health Team similarly requested incentives to help Northeastern communities secure primary care providers and allied health professionals.

The Committee heard that Indigenous people often face barriers to accessing primary care and may delay care due to past experiences of systemic racism and a lack of culturally safe care. North Bay Indigenous Hub and the Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team urged investment to achieve equitable wages for Indigenous primary health care organizations and more core funding for traditional healing and wellness. Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team further requested funding to embed two patient navigators in their team, as well as capital funding to relocate to a larger site.

Representatives from the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) urged the Province to continue working with them to further streamline paperwork and reduce administrative burden on physicians, particularly family physicians. The Committee heard this should also include addressing barriers that community-based specialists face in accessing team-based care (e.g., updating OHIP billing rules related to physician delegation that have not kept pace with today's team-based delivery models).⁴⁷

The Ontario College of Family Physicians was among witnesses that recommended investments in technology to reduce administrative workloads. The College requested accelerated development of a central intake and referral system and a provincially supported digital health and AI strategy that builds on Ontario's AI scribe program with a plan for incorporating other digital innovations in family practice.⁴⁸

The Primary Care Collaborative recommended funding for practice facilitation roles and initiatives to act as “neutral, supportive guides, enabling faster uptake and stronger impact” as primary care networks mature, and prioritizing data equity and base funding to support new

⁴⁵ The Peterborough Family Health Team gave the example of a valued employee leaving to accept an offer from an Ontario Health Team with a salary \$30,000 higher than the family health team wage grid allows. The Athens District Family Health Team requested additional funding for family health teams not currently able to afford a HOOPP (Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan), which is needed to be competitive in workforce recruitment.

⁴⁶ Many family health teams made submissions supporting the Association's recommendations. For example, City of Kawartha Lakes Family Health Team; City of Lakes Family Health Team; Espanola and Area Family Health Team; Greenstone Family Health Team; Hanover Family Health Team; Iroquois Falls Family Health Team; Kapuskasing and Area Family Health Team; Madawaska Valley Family Health Team; Marathon Family Health Team; Niagara North Family Health Team; Nipigon District Family Health Team; Summerville Family Health Team; Taddle Creek Family Health Team; Tilbury District Family Health Team; Two Rivers Family Health Team.

⁴⁷ Ontario Medical Association; Ontario Medical Association — District 6; Ontario Medical Association — District 9.

⁴⁸ OMA representatives also made similar recommendations.

technologies.⁴⁹ Guelph Community Health Centre recommended expanding link worker roles across primary care teams and embedding link workers as a mandatory part of Ontario's interprofessional primary care team expansion.⁵⁰

Public Health

The Committee heard that local public health units prevent illness, protect communities, and promote long-term health, which contributes to higher productivity, reduced health care costs, and a strong economy. Because of factors such as population growth and inflationary pressures, the Middlesex-London Health Unit cautioned that public health units may need to reduce services. The witness recommended more funding as well as changes to the provincial funding formula that balance a population approach with the unique needs of larger regions.

The Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority requested targeted investments to fund 79 additional full-time equivalent positions, such as registered nurses, social workers, health promoters, and public health facilitators, to support full coverage for public health programs across 33 First Nations.

Moderna Canada was among witnesses who spoke to the Committee about vaccines and vaccination programs. The company urged the Province to maintain stable and predictable funding for COVID-19 vaccination, with COVID-19 remaining the “single-highest-burden” respiratory virus in Ontario. The Committee heard that prioritizing procurement of made-in-Ontario vaccines would also support local jobs, strengthen supply security, and keep more economic value in the province.

C.A.P.E. The Hood Advocacy & Education Movement proposed funding for an integrated provincial public health data strategy, including enhanced laboratory information systems for faster detection of infectious diseases, culturally safe and modernized surveillance systems for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, and a province-wide violent injury reporting system to collect data to support development of prevention and intervention programs.

Regulated Health Professionals

The Association of Ontario Midwives told the Committee that Ontario's midwifery workforce is “at a crisis point” with midwives facing burnout and attrition driven by systemic undervaluation and poor integration within the health system. The Association asked for new investments in university-based midwifery education; support for community-based, Indigenous-led midwifery education pathways; and pay equity that recognizes the value of midwives' work. The College of Midwives of Ontario asked the Province to establish and fund an Ontario Midwifery Strategy to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that Ontarians have adequate access to midwifery care.

The Ontario Physiotherapy Association requested increased investment in the Community Physiotherapy Clinic program, which provides publicly funded assessment and services following an injury or hospital stay and to children, seniors, and social assistance recipients. The

⁴⁹ The Primary Care Collaborative includes the Alliance for Healthier Communities; Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario; Indigenous Primary Health Care Council; Nurse Practitioner-led Clinic Association; Ontario College of Family Physicians; and Ontario Medical Association's Section on General and Family Practice.

⁵⁰ Link workers assist patients experiencing non-medical issues that affect their health by connecting patients with community resources. The witness highlighted that this allows physicians, nurse practitioners, and other clinical team members to focus on medical care while ensuring patients get support for social and practical issues affecting their health.

Association also urged investment to bring compensation for physiotherapists in primary care, home and community care, and long-term care settings in line with the hospital sector.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Ontario recommended that funding be made available to establish a one-year pilot program to include Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture practitioners within interested interdisciplinary primary care teams as part of a holistic health care model. Speech-Language and Audiology Canada similarly asked for inclusion of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in interdisciplinary, team-based primary care in both community and institutional settings, and for the ability to refer patients directly to medical specialists.

The Ontario Chiropractic Association requested that the Province move forward with changes to chiropractic scope of practice to allow direct ordering of diagnostic imaging.

Supportive Housing

Offered through a network of programs, supportive housing provides both affordable housing units and accompanying support services for individuals with complex needs to maximize their independence and participation in the community. The Committee heard that significant investment is needed to increase supportive housing capacity, in part to address overlapping challenges for individuals experiencing homelessness and coping with mental health, addictions, and other complex issues.⁵¹ Addictions and Mental Health Ontario requested that the Province fund the development of at least 1,000 new mental health and addictions supportive housing units in 2026/27.

AdvantAge Ontario requested a dedicated capital and operating funding stream to increase the availability of seniors' supportive housing, including specialized supportive housing units for seniors with complex mental health and addiction issues. The witness said this could be partially accomplished without new building programs by converting existing seniors' rent-geared-to-income housing buildings into supportive housing.

LOFT Community Services requested capital funding to complete the redevelopment of Bradford House to expand capacity from 50 to 99 supportive housing suites for adults aged 55 and older with complex mental health and behavioural needs.

In addition to supportive housing service providers, the Committee heard from municipal stakeholders, libraries, and representatives from other sectors, as well as individual witnesses who highlighted the need to increase capacity for mental health and addictions treatment and wraparound supports in communities, including supportive housing. A Kingston City Councillor was among witnesses who told the Committee that property taxes were not designed to fund complex health care and social service systems and urged provincial investments to increase treatment capacity to help address "chronic homelessness and escalating health care and public safety pressures." The Old East Village BIA urged a coordinated approach with municipalities and the federal government to address complex mental health and addiction issues that can intersect with homelessness. In addition to a provincial focus on housing affordability, the witness highlighted a need for specific investments in supportive housing.⁵²

Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation

The Committee recognizes the importance of ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are considered and consulted in the development of the Budget. Witnesses asked the

⁵¹ For example, Canadian Mental Health Association branches.

⁵² A Toronto resident similarly expressed concern about "the state of homelessness and mental health issues" visible to her in Toronto and requested support for individuals and communities in need.

Committee to advance reconciliation and to support programs and services developed for and by Indigenous communities, including in areas of health, education, environment, social services, and capacity-building for sustainable economic development supported by First Nations. Recommendations are included under the relevant ministries in other sections of this report, in addition to the specific recommendations from witnesses detailed below.

The Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, a regional health authority established, owned, and mandated by the 33 Sioux Lookout area First Nations in Northwestern Ontario, recommended increased funding for employment, training, travel and administration for both the Authority's public health and developmental services. Additional funding was requested for eight new Health Hubs.

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres — Kingston Native Centre and Language Nest recommended annual investments for key programs operated by the organization in areas such as children and youth supports, housing stability, and Indigenous mental health and wellness. They said these investments would stabilize housing, strengthen families, and create real pathways to health, education, and economic opportunities. Support for this request was echoed by the Odawa Native Friendship Centre.

Infrastructure

The Committee heard oral testimony and received written submissions highlighting the importance of general infrastructure investments, as well as specific project proposals for the well being of Ontarians.

The importance of continued provincial infrastructure investments, such as the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the Building Faster Fund, were shared with the Committee by the Cornerstone Association of REALTORS.

The Committee heard recommendations for specific infrastructure projects. Peterborough County discussed how a new second bridge near Lakefield would require provincial and federal partnership for construction to proceed. The County also outlined a separate request for funding to purchase a courthouse building.

The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation recommended funding for Seaway Wharf 18 in Port Colborne, which was described as a shovel-ready, multi-modal infrastructure project. The witness linked increased seaway infrastructure with reduced congestion on busy Ontario highways and rail networks. The Port of Johnstown requested provincial investment for the rehabilitation of the Port's main dock, which was described as "mission-critical infrastructure" supporting marine access for agriculture, fertilizer, aggregates, salt, and industrial products transported from the region to global markets; the witness explained the second priority would be to finalize natural gas servicing and extension of water and sewer services to port lands.

Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

Employment Standards and Safety

Expressing concern about affordability, the Income Security Advocacy Centre was among witnesses that recommended increasing Ontario's minimum wage.⁵³

⁵³ Witnesses from the United Way, food banks, and faith-based organizations also supported minimum wage increases.

Witnesses also made recommendations to address the conditions within working environments. The Council of Ontario Construction Associations urged the Province to act on the recommendations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act Section 21 Construction Committee, an advisory panel focused on improving safety measures in the construction industry. White Ribbon asked for program funding to address harmful workplace cultures present in male-dominated workplaces including mining, construction, skilled trades, engineering, transportation, and sports.

Witnesses also recommended adjustments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) system. The Christian Labour Association of Canada recommended extending coverage to retirement home and residential care workers whose work frequently puts their health and well-being at risk. The Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group advised the Province to stop returning surplus WSIB funds to eligible employers and instead distribute those funds to injured workers directly.

Labour Markets and Training

Employment opportunities within the current economic climate were a prominent point of discussion during the consultations. Junior Achievement — South Western Ontario explained that many young people entering the workforce have been negatively impacted by their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended funding for training, particularly aimed at developing the “soft skills” necessary for integration into the workforce.⁵⁴ The Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes asked for additional annual funding for the centres that offer Get SET in French to support adult learners in developing communication, numeracy, interpersonal, and digital skills.⁵⁵ The Canadian National Institute for the Blind asked for investment to support their Come to Work program, which provides job readiness training, accessible technology support, mentorship, and direct employer engagement to support the workforce integration of Ontarians who are blind or have low vision.

The Ontario Federation of Labour requested that the Province provide stable funding for union-led skilled trades training centres to allow programs to plan and invest in equipment, instructors, and long-term training capacities. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers recommended investing in bridging programs and lifelong learning for engineers to create conditions to attract and retain a diverse engineering workforce. The Associated Equipment Distributors requested increased investment in workforce development initiatives, including partnerships with private sector employers, to address the skilled labour shortage in heavy equipment distribution, repair, and servicing.

There was also discussion of labour legislation as it relates to procurement policies for public construction projects. Cardus and Progressive Contractors Association expressed concern that bidding eligibility in Toronto continues to be restricted to unionized companies, and recommended that this practice be eliminated through amendments to the *Labour Relations Act, 1995*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The Committee also received a joint submission from Junior Achievement — Central Ontario on behalf of themselves and the other regional organizations of Junior Achievement in the province which echoed these comments.

⁵⁵ Learning Networks of Ontario also made a recommendation for a funding increase for the Get SET program more generally and described the financial strains that providers were under with some needing to cease operations recently.

⁵⁶ The Progressive Contractors Association made similar suggestions for procurement of construction for publicly funded energy projects.

The Committee also received recommendations related to immigration and labour market needs. An individual asked that the Non-Resident Speculation Tax exemption be extended to align with federal work-permit criteria to better attract international talent to the workforce. The London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre flagged a potential gap in the Resettlement Assistance Program network in Ontario. According to the Centre, a change to federal coverage will require newcomers to the province to make copayments for supplemental services and medication. The witness argued that many newcomers would not be able to afford this expense, ultimately resulting in increased load to the emergency services.

Long-Term Care

The Committee heard that individuals and families need the Province's support to transition away from institutional models of long-term care to models that provide more home-like environments, centred on the needs and preferences of residents. Witnesses also highlighted a need to improve wages and address staffing shortages, particularly as the Province seeks to increase direct hours of care for residents.

Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities urged the Province to transition existing for-profit homes to the not-for-profit and public sector and to increase the number of beds available in Ontario. They also requested a targeted funding stream for the evidence-based development of non-institutional models (e.g., clusters of small homes that promote resident-centred care).

The Champlain Region Family Council Network emphasized the need to increase staffing to support the target of four hours of direct care per resident per day and reduce reliance on agency staff who do not know the specific needs of residents or the routine of a particular home. The witness urged investment to improve compensation, benefits, and working conditions.

The Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists asked that the Province ensure long-term care home residents have access to dedicated occupational therapy services to help reduce falls and improve safety. The Society also urged the Province to address disparities in compensation for occupational therapists in long-term care (as well as primary care, and other community settings) as compared with the hospital sector.

Alzheimer Society witnesses recommended investment in supports that help people living with dementia transition to long-term care. The Alzheimer Society of Ontario proposed increased investment to deliver the Society's suite of dementia competency training programs, called U-First!®, to 3,000 additional personal support workers and other interprofessional care providers.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Housing Affordability and Homelessness

The Committee heard about the high cost of housing in the province, and the challenges faced by developers, housing organizations, and municipalities in bringing housing to market.

Many witnesses recommended that affordable housing be supported through provincial initiatives such as making provincial land available for this purpose.⁵⁷ Several witnesses suggested establishing a nonprofit housing acquisition fund that would allow housing providers to acquire affordable housing while protecting existing stock.⁵⁸ Another witness recommended

⁵⁷ For example, Habitat for Humanity Greater Toronto Area; and Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region.

⁵⁸ This was echoed by the Ontario Nonprofit Network and Pillar Nonprofit Network.

that ongoing funding should be established to provide solutions across the housing spectrum, including emergency shelters, transitional, supportive, and permanent affordable housing.⁵⁹ The Committee heard about the importance of co-operative housing to the affordable housing supply, with witnesses urging the Province to strengthen co-op oversight and enable providers to refinance so they can maintain buildings and reinvest in affordable housing.⁶⁰ Witnesses also suggested that specific projects be expedited, such as a shovel-ready housing project in Kenora intended to serve the local Métis population,⁶¹ and that other projects receive funding, such as a 14-unit affordable housing development in Midland.⁶²

Witnesses noted the potential for standardized building designs and techniques to reduce costs. For example, ATCO Structures Canada suggested that modular construction should be treated as a core infrastructure delivery tool and asked that the Province's procurement and regulatory approach enable it to be deployed at scale, particularly for homebuilding. Echoing this, the One Bowl Housing Corporation asked that certain proprietary wall assemblies be recognized under the Ontario Building Code, as they are deployable in remote areas for residential construction. The witness also suggested that a pre-approved catalogue of home designs would help to prioritize modular construction.

Witnesses presented the Committee with suggestions for tax incentives intended to encourage housing construction or reduce costs for homebuyers. These included

- implementing a time-limited PST exemption on all new homes—not just for first-time home buyers—to promote more liquidity in the housing market and stimulate new construction (Cornerstone Association of REALTORS and Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association);⁶³
- providing incentives for commercial property owners to convert vacant main-street upper floors to residential units, which could apply to building upgrades, accessibility, fire safety, and code compliance (Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas); and
- establishing a housing-focused heritage grant that would assist owners to renovate their heritage properties to create new housing units (Architectural Conservancy Ontario).

The Committee heard about the prevalence of homelessness in the province, particularly as it intersects with other issues such as mental health and addictions. Witnesses had a number of recommendations for addressing this issue, including

- introducing rent supplements targeted at youth homelessness prevention (Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa); and
- ensuring that youth homelessness is addressed in the Province's Homelessness Prevention Program, including through cross-ministry wraparound care and support for pilot programs focused on housing stability (360°kids).

The Mayor of Brockville asked that Ontario extend the Homelessness Prevention Program funding into the 2026 provincial budget, while another individual asked more broadly that

⁵⁹ Reach Out Chatham Kent Missions.

⁶⁰ Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada.

⁶¹ Métis Nation of Ontario — Huron-Superior Regional Métis Community (Region 4).

⁶² For example, Métis Nation of Ontario and Métis Nation of Ontario regions 2, 3, and 6.

⁶³ An individual recommended aligning the timing for First-Time Home Buyers' HST rebate eligibility to the closing date, to promote equitable treatment of buyers facing identical market conditions and to better reflect the stated objective of supporting housing affordability.

funding be directed to agencies and levels of government best suited to intervene and offer support.

Municipal Finance

The Committee heard from municipal stakeholders about the fiscal challenges facing municipalities, such as the inadequacy of property taxes to fund provincial responsibilities like health care.⁶⁴ The City of Pembroke noted the importance of the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund and the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which enable communities with small tax bases to pay for capital assets and provide services. Access2Pay recommended that the Province fund the development of modular and flexible payment systems for municipal services to reduce costs and provide efficiencies.

The Eastern Ontario Mayors' Caucus recommended that the Province resume the quadrennial assessment by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and not charge the portion of the MPAC levy on municipalities that is intended to fund the quadrennial assessment until two full assessment cycles have been completed. They said that municipalities have been funding MPAC over the last two quadrennial assessment cycles, however neither the 2020 nor the 2024 assessment services were received by municipalities.

Municipal Infrastructure

The Committee was told about the importance of adequate infrastructure—particularly in the context of residential construction—and the challenges that municipalities face in financing and maintaining it. Witnesses noted that adequate water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure is critical to enabling housing development while addressing health and safety concerns associated with severe weather.⁶⁵

Among the recommendations for how to pay for infrastructure, a common request was that the Province increase its contribution, including by extending the Building Faster Fund, which is targeted at housing-enabling infrastructure and is set to expire this year.⁶⁶ The Committee heard that the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program allocations should be increased for northern communities to recognize the higher per-unit servicing costs and shorter construction seasons.⁶⁷

The City of St. Catharines asked that the Province commit to stable, predictable, and flexible infrastructure funding, recognizing the heightened costs associated with intensification in older municipalities with aging infrastructure. This was echoed by other witnesses, who asked that provincial funding be directed toward wastewater treatment in Niagara and Waterloo regions.⁶⁸

Planning Matters

The Committee heard about Ontario's planning approvals process, and the impact that it can have on the cost and timeliness of development. For example, the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association asked that planning approvals be streamlined and harmonized across the province, with particular attention to the studies and documents required by municipalities in considering a development application. This position was echoed by the Cement Association of

⁶⁴ For example, Oxford County.

⁶⁵ For example, the Township of West Lincoln.

⁶⁶ For example, Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

⁶⁷ Thunder Bay Real Estate Board.

⁶⁸ Niagara Home Builders' Association and an individual witness, respectively.

Canada, which also asked that development charges be lowered and stressed the importance of close-to-market aggregate resources.

Residential Tenancies

Witnesses told the Committee that reforms to the Province's residential tenancies regime were required to make the system fairer and more effective for all participants. For example, the Rideau-St. Lawrence Real Estate Board recommended that the Landlord and Tenant Board should be reformed to provide faster adjudication and stronger enforcement tools, which could contribute to a more stable rental housing market. Others called for a review of the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, supported by an expert panel and stakeholder engagement, arguing that the legislation does not reflect the current rental housing market.⁶⁹

Witnesses also asked for greater tenant protections. For example, the Anglican Diocese of Toronto recommended that rent control be extended to all residential units, including when vacated, and that Above Guideline Increases be limited. Another witness called for the establishment of an Ontario Housing Advocate office under the Ontario Ombudsman to advise on tenants' rights and other rental housing issues.⁷⁰

Natural Resources

Wood Construction

The Committee heard from stakeholders about measures to support the province's forestry sector, which has been affected by the considerable combined duty and tariff applied to Canadian lumber exports to the United States, among other things. The Ontario Forest Industries Association suggested that every publicly funded building in the province ought to be "wood first" to support domestic businesses and use "green, low-carbon and sustainable material." They recommended partnering with the forest product sector to promote diversification and investment in the province; achieve ambitious housing targets; and maintain resilience when confronted with unpredictable trading partners. The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce lent its support for the Association's recommendations and specifically called for the use of Ontario wood through the Advanced Wood Construction Action Plan and the continuation of the Forest Biomass Action Plan beyond 2027.

One Bowl Housing Corporation called for modernizing the forest and biomass policy and leveraging forestry programs to support stable northern white pine inputs and Indigenous-led housing production supply chains. They believed these measures would secure the fibre supply for an Indigenous-led manufacturing hub.

Job Losses

Unifor Local 89 also discussed the impact of tariffs on the forestry industry, noting that thousands of jobs have already been lost.⁷¹ With further sawmill closures and curtailments looming, they warned of possible losses in both direct and spinoff jobs. They presented a three-step plan: 1) make Employment Insurance easier to access to provide immediate assistance to displaced workers; 2) provide monetary support for the research and development stages of

⁶⁹ London and St. Thomas Association of REALTORS and the Ottawa Real Estate Board

⁷⁰ The 519.

⁷¹ The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada also were concerned about the impacts of tariffs more broadly and recommended the Province advocate strongly for business interests in federal trade discussions.

new projects (e.g., new lines and products); 3) strike a new trade deal with the U.S. or find other viable trade partners.

Northern Economic Development and Growth

The Northern Ontario Resource Development Support (NORDS) Fund provides Northern Ontario municipalities with investment support for infrastructure affected by resource development. The Town of Kapuskasing urged the Committee to consider the continuation of NORDS funding, which supplements other funding used for northern roads (i.e., “stacked funding”). ATCO Structures Canada, which delivers modular camps and facilities in northern regions, echoed the call for workforce housing and other necessary infrastructure in remote and logistically challenging environments to support projects in Northern Ontario and the Ring of Fire.

The Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth provides annual funding for the winter roads network in remote and First Nation communities under the Winter Roads Program. Sensenbrenner Hospital urged the Committee to prioritize improving winter maintenance standards, proactive infrastructure upgrades, and timely responses to road conditions, noting that investing in Highway 11 “is an investment in health care access, patient safety, and system sustainability in Northern Ontario.”

Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement

The Committee heard recommendations related to government procurement policy, much of which was intended to promote domestic production. The Cement Association of Canada suggested adopting the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat standard on embodied carbon in construction, which sets requirements for disclosing and reducing embodied carbon for concrete used on applicable projects. They made the case that focusing on the high standards, including environmental attributes, would support local manufacturing. The Literary Press Group of Canada and Ontario Book Publishers Organization recommended directing school boards to prioritize the purchase of Ontario-made books. In life sciences manufacturing, Microbix Biosystems pointed to lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the risks of relying on foreign suppliers for essential diagnostic products. They recommended consultations to review procurement frameworks to better recognize qualified domestic manufacturers in the diagnostic sector.⁷²

Witnesses also discussed ideas for revising requirements within procurement policies. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers recommended implementing a qualifications-based selection (QBS) model for all public-sector engineering procurement.⁷³

The Tarion Warranty Corporation, which reports to the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, is responsible for administering and enforcing the *Ontario New Homes Warranties Plan Act*. Canadians for Properly Built Homes recommended moving to a multi-provider warranty model where consumers would have the option to choose providers other than Tarion.

⁷² The witness specified that the proposed consultations should involve the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, Supply Ontario, and others.

⁷³ Generally, under QBS procurement, consulting firms submit professional qualifications that are evaluated. The most qualified firm is selected and then the project scope of work, schedule, budget, and consultant fee are negotiated.

Seniors and Accessibility

The Committee heard from March of Dimes Canada, which pointed to the importance of accessibility changes that enable seniors and people with disabilities to stay in their homes and recommended increased funding for the Home and Vehicle Modification Program that provides grants for these accessibility changes.

Entente Education Canada made recommendations to support retirees, including taking steps to increase the number of geriatricians practising in Ontario; investing in supports to help seniors age at home; and developing a formal seniors' strategy for the Province.⁷⁴

WoodGreen Community Services recommended initiating standardized operating funding, separate from existing funding streams such as home and community care, which would support those seniors who need support with bathing, cleaning, cooking, and other activities associated with maintaining a household and personal activities of daily living. They said this would reduce intake for hospitals in the community as well as demand for long-term care beds.

Regarding accessibility, the Committee heard from Connect4Life, which recommended that the Auditor General of Ontario's mandate and funding be expanded to include an assessment on accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities to and within Ontario's publicly funded healthcare facilities. This would include a comprehensive Accessibility Assessment across all healthcare reviews and audits. The witness said these changes could ensure that Ontario's healthcare system meets the needs of individuals with disabilities by identifying and addressing barriers in service delivery, infrastructure, and policy.

Also related to accessibility, an individual wrote the Committee recommending changes to streamline the disability verification process. They indicated that the changes could be a "Quick Win" that would respect taxpayer dollars, support the business community and "restore dignity to Ontarians with disabilities."

Solicitor General

The Committee heard a range of requests from witnesses with respect to the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). The Ministry of the Solicitor General is responsible for overseeing policing services in the province, including the OPP.

The Ontario Provincial Police Association described the mounting demands placed on OPP resources, including the increased number and complexity of calls for service and the need for "proactive policing." The witness made several recommendations, including confirming financial support and a location for the new OPP academy in Orillia.

The Township of Bonnechere Valley called for a comprehensive review of the OPP municipal billing model, which includes meaningful municipal input, to better align funding responsibility with accountability (e.g., enhanced governance, oversight, or revised funding arrangements).⁷⁵ The witness also proposed an interim solution of imposing caps on municipal increases.

Sport

⁷⁴ Geriatricians are often internal medicine or family physicians with advanced training in caring for aging adults.

⁷⁵ Under the OPP billing model, municipalities may reimburse the OPP for the cost of policing services provided in their jurisdictions when they have not established their own police forces or arranged for policing from other municipalities.

Multiple witnesses recommended the Province provide additional funding for the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund.⁷⁶ The Committee heard about the importance of sporting infrastructure for communities, and some witnesses tied proposed changes to the Fund to the eligibility of local projects.

Laurentian University of Sudbury outlined their request for funding to renew and modernize the currently closed 50 metre long Jenő Tihanyi Olympic Gold Pool. The Committee heard how this project to restore access to essential regional infrastructure was also supported by the Mayor of the City of Greater Sudbury.

The City of Peterborough wrote the Committee to share their recommendation for provincial funding for their Multi Use Sport and Event Centre to support programming in the city and region.

Tourism, Culture and Gaming

The Committee heard from a range of witnesses recommending initiatives related to tourism, culture and gaming across Ontario, including support for libraries, museums, music, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), screen industries, and tourism, as described below. Some witnesses also made recommendations that have broader applicability across the sector. In particular, the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts recommended updating the *Status of Artists Act, 2007* to improve contract standards, labour protections, and income stability for self-employed artists. The Alliance culturelle de l'Ontario recommended that the Province take steps to optimize its investments in Francophone arts and culture, including by streamlining the application and reporting procedures for all provincial grants in the sector.

Libraries

The Committee heard from witnesses requesting increases in overall funding for libraries to address priority areas, as well as investments in particular library-related initiatives. The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries recommended a substantial increase in provincial funding for Ontario's public libraries to support priorities such as job training and skills development, early literacy and student success, and support for seniors, newcomers, and working families. The proposal for an increase to annual operational funding was echoed by several other witnesses.⁷⁷

Witnesses also recommended targeted investments in specific initiatives. In particular, a joint submission from the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, alongside oral and written testimony from other witnesses, proposed a provincial investment to create an Ontario Digital Public Library.⁷⁸ The Kitchener Public Library stated that an annual investment in that initiative would allow every Ontarian to access modern e-learning tools and online resources through their local public library, both on-site and remotely.

In addition, several witnesses recommended that the Province work with all levels of government to develop a coordinated, province-wide strategy to address what the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries described as “the growing

⁷⁶ For example, Parks and Recreation Ontario; and YMCA of Southwestern Ontario. The City of Elliot Lake also requested additional eligibility changes to the Fund to permit municipalities to be eligible under special consideration. YMCA of Greater Toronto recommended ensuring that non-profit organizations are eligible for provincial infrastructure programs.

⁷⁷ For example, the Brockville Public Library, the Kitchener Public Library, and a joint submission of the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries.

⁷⁸ For example, the Kapuskasing Public Library and the Espanola Public Library.

crises of mental health challenges, addiction, and homelessness to alleviate its impacts on public libraries.”

Museums

The Committee also received a range of recommendations regarding museums from the Ontario Museum Association. The organization proposed that the Province review the Community Museum Operating Grant (CMOG), and put in place a “reasonable increase.” The organization also recommended prioritizing net new spending to focus on new museums, particularly Indigenous cultural centres, and new programming by current CMOG recipients, and that the Province take steps to promote museums more generally.

Other recommendations from the Ontario Museum Association pertained to the issue of grant application timing. While underscoring the importance of consultation with province-wide heritage organizations, the organization proposed that Provincial Heritage Organization Operating Grant applications and payments launch in the first quarter of 2026-27, with a goal of flowing funds in the second quarter, which the organization stated would improve cash flow issues.

Music

The Canadian Independent Music Association stated that Ontario was the “engine of Canada’s music industry,” though that the province’s competitive advantage is “slipping.” The organization called for a restoration and increase to the Ontario Music Investment Fund. Orchestras Canada recommended sustained investment in publicly funded music education and also made broader recommendations for investment in the arts, including recommending stable support for the Ontario Trillium Foundation and investment in the Ontario Arts Endowment Fund Program.

Ontario Arts Council Funding

Orchestras Canada recommended increasing support for the Ontario Arts Council, arguing that the provincial allocation to the OAC today is the same as it was nine years ago while costs have increased. The Committee also heard from a substantial number of other organizations and individuals that recommended that the Province increase annual funding to the Ontario Arts Council.⁷⁹

Many of those witnesses drew attention to what they described as the benefits that would arise from an annual increase. For instance, Citadel + Compagnie, among other organizations, stated that increased funding would strengthen regional economies, stabilize artists and small cultural organizations, bolster tourism, and generate “new tax revenue” and “sustainable jobs.”

Screen Industries

FilmOntario recommended a series of measures aimed at improving the competitiveness of Ontario’s film and television industries, including changes to bonuses and expansion of tax credits, highlighting questions of eligibility. For instance, the organization recommended that the Province consider making the Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects tax credit a producer claimable (rather than vendor initiated) credit. Describing the current moment as

⁷⁹ For example, Alliance culturelle de l’Ontario; Brampton Arts Organization; Dundas Valley School of Art; the Guild Festival Theatre; McMaster Museum of Art; Outside the March; The Disability Collective; Théâtre français de Toronto; the Toronto Fringe Festival, Toronto Operetta Theatre; Voicebox — Opera in Concert; and the Young People’s Theatre.

“critical,” the Canadian Film Centre called for increased investment in its operations as a strategic investment in the province’s film industry.

Tourism

The Committee heard from witnesses regarding the economic contribution of the tourism industry and the benefits arising from attraction and sport hosting. The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario recommended additional funding for Destination Ontario, a request echoed by Ottawa Tourism, as well as the creation of a business events attraction fund and more funding to support Indigenous tourism. Ottawa Tourism also recommended the establishment of an Ontario Convention Development Fund, highlighting the importance of this tourism segment. Kingston Accommodation Partners highlighted the importance of sports tourism infrastructure to the economy and recommended that the Province deploy targeted, place-based capital tools to spur additional investment from municipal governments and the private sector.

Transportation

The Committee heard about challenges faced by small airports. For example, the Northern Ontario Aviation Committee noted that air service to remote First Nations is restricted due to how the minimum required length of runways is measured. The witness recommended that clearways and stopways be included in runway measurements to allow for larger payloads, as an interim measure while upgrades are considered.⁸⁰ Another witness asked that targeted, sustained investments be made to upgrade runways in remote and First Nations communities to meet Transport Canada standards.⁸¹ Also citing the challenges facing small airports, the Airport Management Council of Ontario asked that a provincial capital assistance program be created to support facilities that do not qualify for federal funding, including to pay for runway and lighting upgrades.⁸²

The City of London asked that a dedicated rail corridor be developed for Southwestern Ontario, connecting Toronto, London, and Windsor. The witness stressed that any new or expanded rail infrastructure should be located within existing transportation corridors to protect prime agricultural land and minimize impacts on rural communities. The Committee also heard from Mask-wa Transportation, which asked that the Province support its Bear Train project in Northern Ontario. The witness noted that public transportation is limited and costly in the North, and the need for reliable service would increase if the Ring of Fire is realized. Moreover, the Committee heard, the project could provide jobs for laid off Algoma Steel workers.

The Committee was told about the need for highway upgrades in Northern Ontario, including to highways 11, 17, 69, and 144, which were framed both from a safety and an economic development perspective.⁸³ The Ontario Good Roads Association asked that a five-year investment be made to improve the safety of roads across the province, including guardrails, rumble strips, modern lighting, curve warning systems, high-friction surface treatments, and upgraded protections at bridge approaches.

The Ontario Public Transit Association asked that the Province match federal transit funding under the Canada Public Transit Fund Baseline Funding stream, to cover up to 40% of eligible public transit capital costs, which are particularly needed for fleet upgrades. The witness

⁸⁰ A clearway is the obstruction-free area beyond a runway that allows an aircraft to gain altitude. A stopway is a paved surface beyond the runway that gives extra space for a takeoff to be aborted.

⁸¹ Perimeter Aviation.

⁸² This was echoed by the Niagara District Airport, which asked for runway upgrade funding.

⁸³ For example, the Town of Kapuskasing.

suggested that this would be a fiscally predictable approach that would provide indirect but meaningful operating relief without creating a new provincial operating program.

An individual recommended efficiency improvements for the Province's traffic ticket processing system. These include moving to an administrative penalty system for non-criminal offences, which, the witness suggested, would free up the court system, lowering costs and increasing efficiency.

Treasury Board Secretariat

Bill 124

The Committee heard that thousands of Ontario Public Service Employees Union members are “demanding a real remedy” for lost wages resulting from Bill 124, the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*, which was repealed in February 2024. The witness acknowledged the Province has funded backpay for some groups of workers, but called for additional funds to make up for lost wages that they stated were experienced by certain other groups, including social services workers, community service workers, development service workers, and youth corrections workers. Similarly, the Canadian Union of Public Employees — Ontario recommended that the Province compensate social service workers who it stated were adversely affected by Bill 124 and have yet to receive wage remedies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs submits the following recommendations to the Minister of Finance to inform the 2026-27 Budget:

1. Accelerate strategic investments in high-growth sectors—including technology, AI, nuclear, advanced manufacturing, and critical minerals—to strengthen Ontario’s global competitiveness.
2. Continue providing targeted supports that help people, workers, and businesses manage economic uncertainty, lower costs, and protect jobs.
3. Expand efforts to reduce red tape, streamline permitting, and eliminate interprovincial trade barriers to improve Ontario’s competitiveness and attract investment.
4. Maintain and enhance affordability measures that help families and small businesses keep costs down while supporting long-term economic stability.
5. Strengthen Ontario’s skilled workforce by expanding training programs, apprenticeship pathways, and upskilling opportunities in key sectors such as trades, health care, and advanced manufacturing.
6. Build on previous work to address the housing and infrastructure crisis by prioritizing rapid construction, modernized approvals, and collaboration across all levels of government.
7. Partner with municipalities to improve key infrastructure for transit that better connects communities and supports economic growth to accommodate Ontario’s expanding populations.
8. Increase access to connected, high-quality primary care by expanding interprofessional primary care teams, improving attachment for people without a regular provider, and strengthening capacity in growing and underserved communities.
9. Increase base funding for post-secondary institutions to stabilize the sector, support high-quality education, and ensure institutions can meet growing labour market demands.
10. Continue to promote Ontario’s entrepreneurship and innovation networks to help companies adapt to emerging technologies and attract high-value firms to the province.
11. Continue delivering targeted measures that support mental health and addictions services, reduce wait times, and address the unique needs of rural, remote, isolated, and Indigenous communities.
12. Leverage Ontario’s fiscal capacity to continue making sustainable investments in health care, education, long-term care, and other essential public services.

WITNESS LIST

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
211 Ontario and United Ways of Ontario	Written submission
360°kids	Written submission
Abram Ernest (Ernie) Epp	January 28, 2026, written submission
Access2Pay Ltd.	January 22, 2026, written submission
acorn30	December 5, 2025
Addictions and Mental Health Ontario	December 4, 2025, written submission
AdvantAge Ontario	January 13, 2026, written submission
Aeris Korper	Written submission
Ahmed Mumtaz	Written submission
Airport Management Council of Ontario	January 15, 2026, written submission
Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team	January 29, 2026, written submission
Alanna Quinn	Written submission
Algonquin College	January 14, 2026, written submission
Alliance culturelle de l'Ontario	Written submission
Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario	Written submission
Alliance for Healthier Communities	Written submission
Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa	January 14, 2026
Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region	Written submission
Alzheimer Society of Ontario	Written submission
Andrea Gomez	Written submission
Anglican Diocese of Toronto	Written submission
Architectural Conservancy Ontario	Written submission
Arthritis Society Canada	Written submission
Ashley Dadoun	Written submission
Associated Equipment Distributors	Written submission
Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario	Written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario	January 28, 2026, written submission
Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario	Written submission
Association of Municipalities of Ontario	January 21, 2026, written submission
Association of Ontario Midwives	January 20, 2026, written submission
ATCO Structures Canada	January 27, 2026, written submission
Athens District Family Health Team	Written submission
Axtion Independence Mobility Inc	January 20, 2026, written submission
Beef Farmers of Ontario	January 20, 2026, written submission
Big Brothers Big Sisters	Written submission
B'nai Brith National Organization of Canada	January 20, 2026, written submission
Brampton Arts Organization	Written submission
Brock University	January 22, 2026
Brockville General Hospital	January 13, 2026
Brockville Public Library	January 13, 2026
C.A.P.E.™ – Children’s and Parents’ Empowerment, The Hood Advocacy & Education Movement	Written submission
Canadian Cancer Society	January 22, 2026, written submission
Canadian Cancer Survivor Network	Written submission
Canadian Federation of Independent Business	December 4, 2025, written submission
Canadian Federation of Students — Ontario	January 29, 2026, written submission
Canadian Film Centre	January 14, 2026
Canadian Forum for Rare Disease Innovators	Written submission
Canadian Independent Music Association	January 14, 2026
Canadian Mental Health Association — Cochrane-Temiskaming	January 27, 2026, written submission
Canadian Mental Health Association — Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge	December 5, 2025
Canadian Mental Health Association — Kenora Branch	January 28, 2026

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Canadian Mental Health Association — Sudbury and Manitoulin	January 29, 2026, written submission
Canadian Mental Health Association — Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services	January 21, 2026, written submission
Canadian National Institute for the Blind	Written submission
Canadian Parents for French — Ontario	Written submission
Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation	Written submission
Canadian Taxpayers Federation	Written submission
Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario	January 22, 2026, written submission
Canadians for Properly Built Homes	Written submission
Canerector Foundation	Written submission
Cardus	Written submission
Carefor Health and Community Services	January 15, 2026
Carleton Village School Advisory Council	Written submission
Casey Foote	Written submission
Cathy Abraham	December 5, 2025
CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals	December 4, 2025
Cement Association of Canada	January 14, 2026
Champlain Region Family Council Network	January 14, 2026, written submission
Chemistry Industry Association of Canada	January 21, 2026, written submission
Christian Labour Association of Canada	January 22, 2026
Citadel + Compagnie	Written submission
City of Elliot Lake	January 29, 2026, written submission
City of Kawartha Lakes Family Health Team	December 5, 2025
City of Lakes Family Health Team	January 29, 2026
City of London	Written submission
City of Pembroke	January 15, 2026
City of Peterborough	Written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Coalition of Health Professions in Auto Insurance	Written submission
Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes	January 14, 2026, written submission
Collège La Cité	Written submission
College of Midwives of Ontario	Written submission
Community Care for Central Hastings	Written submission
Community Counselling and Resource Centre	December 5, 2025
Community Living Durham North	Written submission
Community Living Fort Erie	Written submission
Community Living Oshawa Clarington	Written submission
Community Living Toronto	January 20, 2026, written submission
Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities	Written submission
Connect4Life	Written submission
ConnexOntario	Written submission
Consortium Centre Jules-Léger	Written submission
Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada	January 20, 2026, written submission
Cornerstone Association of REALTORS	January 20, 2026, written submission
Corporation of the City of St. Catharines	Written submission
Corporation of the Township of West Lincoln	Written submission
Cory McReavy	Written submission
Council of Ontario Construction Associations	Written submission
Council of Ontario Universities	January 21, 2026, written submission
Dan White	Written submission
DashVapes	Written submission
David Sutin	Written submission
DeafBlind Ontario Services	Written submission
Dominion Dynamics	January 27, 2026
Doris Fiander	Written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Dundas Valley School of Art	Written submission
Eastern Ontario Mayors' Caucus	January 15, 2026, written submission
Elaine Johnston	January 29, 2026
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario	January 21, 2026, written submission
Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario	Written submission
Entente Education Canada	Written submission
Espanola and Area Family Health Team	Written submission
Espanola Public Library	January 29, 2026
Every Canadian Counts	Written submission
Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region	January 20, 2026, written submission
Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region	Written submission
Fanshawe College Ontario	January 21, 2026, written submission
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries	January 21, 2026
Filipino-Canadian Civic Action Network	Written submission
FilmOntario	December 4, 2025, written submission
FIREFLY	Written submission
Fleming College	December 5, 2025
Food Action Network of Northwestern Ontario	January 28, 2026, written submission
Geoffrey Whynot	Written submission
Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet	Written submission
Grape Growers of Ontario	January 22, 2026
Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce	January 20, 2026
Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association	January 14, 2026, written submission
Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce	January 29, 2026, written submission
Greenstone Family Health Team	Written submission
Greg Ridge	January 13, 2026, written submission
Guelph Community Health Centre	Written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Guild Festival Theatre	Written submission
Habitat for Humanity Greater Toronto Area	December 4, 2025, written submission
Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region	January 20, 2026
Halton Industry Education Council	January 21, 2026, written submission
Hanover Family Health Team	Written submission
Heart and Stroke	January 22, 2026, written submission
Home Care Ontario	January 22, 2026, written submission
Hospice Palliative Care Ontario	Written submission
Hydro One Networks Inc	Written submission
IAM Union Canada	Written submission
Impact Halton Coalition	Written submission
Imperial Tobacco Canada Limited	December 4, 2025
Income Security Advocacy Centre	Written submission
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition	Written submission
Invest Ottawa	January 14, 2026
Iris Murray	Written submission
Iroquois Falls Family Health Team	Written submission
Jerry Thomas	Written submission
Jessica Bushey	December 5, 2025, written submission
John McClelland	Written submission
Joshua Marchesini	Written submission
Jung Sing Chow	Written submission
Junior Achievement — Central Ontario	Written submission
Junior Achievement — South Western Ontario	January 20, 2026
Kapusksing and Area Family Health Team	Written submission
Kapusksing Public Library	January 27, 2026
Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre	December 5, 2025
Kemptville District Hospital	January 13, 2026, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Kevin Mott	Written submission
Kingston Accommodation Partners	January 13, 2026
Kingston Interval House	January 13, 2026
Kitchener Public Library	Written submission
Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health	January 13, 2026, written submission
Laurentian University of Sudbury	January 29, 2026, written submission
Learning Networks of Ontario	Written submission
Linda Lennon	Written submission
Literary Press Group of Canada	Written submission
LOFT Community Services	Written submission
London and St. Thomas Association of REALTORS	January 21, 2026
London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre	January 21, 2026
London Family Court Clinic	January 21, 2026, written submission
Madawaska Valley Family Health Team	January 15, 2026, written submission
Maison de la francophonie d'Ottawa	Written submission
Marathon Family Health Team	Written submission
March of Dimes Canada	January 29, 2026, written submission
Margot Meijer	Written submission
Mask-wa Transportation Association Inc	Written submission
Matt Wren	January 13, 2026
McCormick Care Group	Written submission
McMaster Museum of Art	Written submission
Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario	January 29, 2026, written submission
Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario — District 2	January 27, 2026, written submission
Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario — Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association	January 14, 2026, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Merck Canada	Written submission
Métis Nation of Ontario — Huron-Superior Regional Métis Community (Region 4)	January 28, 2026
Métis Nation of Ontario — Region 2	Written submission
Métis Nation of Ontario — Region 3	January 27, 2026, written submission
Métis Nation of Ontario — Region 6	January 15, 2026, written submission
Microbix Biosystems Inc	Written submission
Middlesex-London Health Unit	January 21, 2026, written submission
Mississippi River Health Alliance	Written submission
Moderna Canada	December 4, 2025
Modular Energy Solution	January 22, 2026, written submission
Mothers for Mental Health Care Reform Ontario	Written submission
Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration	January 21, 2026
myStoria Inc	January 21, 2026, written submission
Nature Conservancy of Canada	January 27, 2026
Niagara District Airport	January 29, 2026, written submission
Niagara Home Builders' Association	January 22, 2026
Niagara North Family Health Team	Written submission
Niagara Ontario Health Team — Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara	Written submission
Nina Deeb	January 27, 2026, written submission
Nipigon District Family Health Team	Written submission
North Bay Indigenous Hub	January 29, 2026, written submission
North Shore Family Health Team	January 28, 2026, written submission
Northern Ontario Aviation Committee	January 28, 2026, written submission
NWN Scientific Inc (Common Ground)	Written submission
Odawa Native Friendship Centre	January 15, 2026
ODSP Action Coalition	Written submission
Old East Village BIA	January 21, 2026

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
One Bowl Housing Corporation	Written submission
Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs	Written submission
Ontario Association of Cardiologists	January 22, 2026, written submission
Ontario Association of Councils on Aging	Written submission
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses	Written submission
Ontario Association of Optometrists	Written submission
Ontario Autism Coalition	December 4, 2025
Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization	Written submission
Ontario Book Publishers Organization	Written submission
Ontario Caregiver Coalition	Written submission
Ontario Caregiver Organization	Written submission
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association	January 29, 2026, written submission
Ontario Catholic Teachers' Association — Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Unit	December 5, 2025
Ontario Chiropractic Association	Written submission
Ontario College of Family Physicians	January 15, 2026, written submission
Ontario Community Support Association	January 14, 2026, written submission
Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations	Written submission
Ontario Conservation Accelerator	January 13, 2026
Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE	January 22, 2026, written submission
Ontario Craft Brewers	Written submission
Ontario Craft Cider Association	January 22, 2026, written submission
Ontario Dental Association	January 13, 2026, written submission
Ontario Dental Association — Thunder Bay Dental Association	January 28, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Eastern Ontario Unit	January 13, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Northeastern Unit	January 27, 2026

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Ottawa Catholic Teachers	January 14, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Renfrew Catholic Teachers	January 15, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Sudbury Secondary Catholic Teachers	January 29, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Thunder Bay Secondary Unit	January 28, 2026
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers	December 4, 2025, written submission
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association — Waterloo	January 20, 2026
Ontario Federation of Agriculture	December 4, 2025, written submission
Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres — Kingston Native Centre and Language Nest	January 13, 2026
Ontario Federation of Labour	January 29, 2026
Ontario Forest Industries Association	January 15, 2026
Ontario Good Roads Association	January 28, 2026, written submission
Ontario Library Association and Federation of Ontario Public Libraries	Written submission
Ontario Medical Association	January 22, 2026, written submission
Ontario Medical Association — District 6	December 5, 2025
Ontario Medical Association — District 7	January 13, 2026, written submission
Ontario Medical Association — District 9	January 29, 2026
Ontario Museum Association	December 4, 2025, written submission
Ontario Nature	Written submission
Ontario Nonprofit Network	Written submission
Ontario Nurses' Association	January 28, 2026, written submission
Ontario Parents for Education Support	January 27, 2026
Ontario Physiotherapy Association	Written submission
Ontario Provincial Police Association	Written submission
Ontario Public School Boards' Association	January 20, 2026, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ontario Public Service Employees Union	December 4, 2025
Ontario Public Transit Association	Written submission
Ontario School Library Association	January 20, 2026, written submission
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation	January 22, 2026, written submission
Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists	Written submission
Ontario Society of Professional Engineers	December 4, 2025, written submission
Ontario SPCA and Humane Society	January 28, 2026, written submission
Ontario Student Voices	Written submission
Ontario Trial Lawyers Association	Written submission
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance	Written submission
OPSEU Local 172, Ingersoll Support Services Inc	Written submission
Orchestras Canada/Orchestres Canada	December 5, 2025, written submission
Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas	Written submission
Ottawa Food Bank	January 14, 2026
Ottawa Network for Education	Written submission
Ottawa Real Estate Board	January 14, 2026
Ottawa Tourism	Written submission
Ottawa West Community Support	January 14, 2026
Outside the March	Written submission
Oxford County	January 20, 2026
Parks and Recreation Ontario	January 22, 2026, written submission
Pembroke Co-operative Nursery School Inc	January 15, 2026
Perimeter Aviation	January 28, 2026
Perley Health	January 14, 2026, written submission
Peter P. Lupo	Written submission
Peterborough County	December 5, 2025, written submission
Peterborough Family Health Team	December 5, 2025, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Peterborough Regional Health Centre	December 5, 2025, written submission
Pets Canada	Written submission
Philanthropy of the Soul	Written submission
Pillar Nonprofit Network	January 21, 2026, written submission
Port of Johnstown	January 13, 2026, written submission
Poverty Free Thunder Bay	January 28, 2026
Primary Care Collaborative	Written submission
Progress Place	January 27, 2026
Progressive Contractors Association	January 20, 2026, written submission
PTX Metals Inc	January 27, 2026, written submission
Quantum Valley Ideas Lab	January 20, 2026
Queensway Carleton Hospital	January 14, 2026, written submission
Rachel Penny	Written submission
Ranji Singh	Written submission
Reach Out Chatham Kent (R.O.C.K.) Missions	Written submission
Regent Park Community Health Centre	December 4, 2025
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario	Written submission
Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN)	January 22, 2026
Renfrew County District School Board	January 15, 2026
Renfrew County Real Estate Board	January 15, 2026
Rideau Hall Foundation	Written submission
Rideau-St. Lawrence Real Estate Board	January 13, 2026
Rita Bijons	Written submission
RNG Coalition	Written submission
Ronald McDonald House, Southwestern Ontario	Written submission
Rothmans, Benson and Hedges Inc	January 15, 2026, written submission
Sebastian Marziali	Written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Sensenbrenner Hospital	Written submission
Shirley Schuurman	Written submission
Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority	January 28, 2026, written submission
Speech-Language and Audiology Canada	Written submission
St. Joseph's Health Care London	Written submission
St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation	January 22, 2026
Stephen Abrams	Written submission
Summerville Family Health Team	Written submission
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre	December 4, 2025
Surrey Place	December 4, 2025
Susan Fischer	Written submission
Sustain Ontario	January 15, 2026
Table de concertation postsecondaire francophone	Written submission
Taddle Creek Family Health Team	December 4, 2025, written submission
TakingITGlobal	January 28, 2026, written submission
Terry Wayne	Written submission
The 519	Written submission
The Atmospheric Fund	December 4, 2025, written submission
The Disability Collective	Written submission
The Food Sharing Project	January 13, 2026, written submission
The PADDLE Program	January 27, 2026
Théâtre français de Toronto	Written submission
Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group	January 28, 2026
Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce	Written submission
Thunder Bay Real Estate Board	January 28, 2026
Tilbury District Family Health Team	Written submission
Timmins Academic Family Health Team	January 27, 2026, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Timmins Family Counselling Center	January 27, 2026, written submission
Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts	Written submission
Toronto Fringe Festival	Written submission
Toronto Operetta Theatre	Written submission
Tourism Industry Association of Ontario	January 13, 2026
Town of Deep River	January 27, 2026, written submission
Town of Kapuskasing	January 27, 2026
Township of Bonnechere Valley	January 15, 2026, written submission
Tracey Gilmore	Written submission
Traditional Chinese Medicine Ontario	Written submission
Trent University	Written submission
Two Rivers Family Health Team	Written submission
Unifor Local 89	January 27, 2026
United Way East Ontario	Written submission
United Way Greater Toronto	Written submission
University Pension Plan Ontario	Written submission
University Students' Council at Western University	Written submission
VHA Home HealthCare	January 14, 2026, written submission
Voicebox — Opera in Concert	Written submission
Waterloo Regional Health Network	Written submission
White Ribbon	Written submission
WoodGreen Community Services	Written submission
YMCA of Greater Toronto	Written submission
YMCA of Southwestern Ontario	January 21, 2026
Young People's Theatre	Written submission

**APPENDIX A – DISSENTING OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY MEMBERS
OF THE COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Official Opposition would like to thank the witnesses who provided oral and written submissions before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs during the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultations. We are filing this dissenting report as we believe that several themes raised consistently by witnesses across the province require more attention from the government.

As the Official Opposition, we believe that this budget should focus on delivering the basics: making life more affordable, creating and protecting good jobs, and investing in good public services, such as health care and education. What we heard from representatives across communities is a collective desire for investment in these core priorities.

We heard from hospitals who are operating over capacity while under serious financial strain. We heard from Family Health Teams (FHTs) who cannot keep staff because staff wages in hospitals are much higher. We heard about years-long waitlists for development services, supportive housing, mental health, and services for seniors. We heard from teachers who are leaving the profession because they are teaching in overcrowded classrooms with increased incidents of violence. We heard from municipalities who are under serious financial strain because they are taking on the lion's share of delivering essential services, like emergency services and supportive housing, with declining provincial funding.

We heard from many organizations who spoke about the importance of upstream investments. Pam Tobin from CMHA Thames Valley Addiction & Mental Health Services noted that the monthly cost of housing someone in supportive housing is far less than the cost of jail time or a hospital bed.¹ Bonnie Clark from Peterborough County asserted that increased home and community care for seniors can prevent costly emergency visits.² Tania Duguay from the Timmins Family Counselling Center argued that early mental health intervention for youth can reduce future crisis or justice involvement.³

These witnesses and others had a common ask: they need stable, predictable, multi-year commitments to operating and capital funding to pay for sensible programs and services that will save the government money in the long term.

Before we move to the recommendations, we want to outline some specific concerns ministry by ministry, raised by stakeholders that warrant further attention.

Children, Community, and Social Services

Social Assistance Rates

Witnesses spoke about the rates for OW and ODSP being too low to meet even basic living costs. In their written submission, Income Security Advocacy Centre noted that Ontario is now the only province that has not increased social assistance rates since 2018.⁴ Mary Kathleen Dunn of March of Dimes argued that the shelter allowance under ODSP is far below current

¹ Pam Tobin, CMHA Thames Valley Addiction & Mental Health Services, SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

² Bonnie Clark, Peterborough County, SCFEA, December 5, 2025.

³ Tania Duguay, Timmins Family Counselling Center, SCFEA, January 27, 2026.

⁴ Income Security Advocacy Centre, "ISAC Recommendations for Ontario Budget 2026," January 2026.

market rents. Combined with insufficient investments in supportive housing, this has contributed to a 72 per cent increase in homelessness among ODSP recipients since 2019.⁵

Non-profit sector

Witnesses warned that the non-profit and community services sector are operating under increased demand, high staff turnover, and chronic underfunding. Allen Mills of Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region reported that while 17,000 individuals are receiving residential developmental support, 28,000 individuals remain on waitlists.⁶ Their organization has seen no budget adjustments since 2010. Maureen Cassidy of Pillar Nonprofit Network shared that two-thirds of non-profits have already scaled back services due to demand and stressed the need for stable, multi-year funding and wage parity with other health care sector workers to retain staff.⁷

Many organizations stressed that supportive housing and wraparound community services are practical, cost-saving upstream investments. Jennifer Lalonde of Ottawa West Community Support highlighted how their extended home and community care programs allow seniors to age safely at home, preventing hospital admissions and long-term care placements.⁸ Steve Perry of Carefor Health & Community Services emphasised that home and community care supports 730,000 individuals with just 6.4 per cent of Ontario's health budget.⁹ Amy Walby and Andrew Camham of the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario explained the importance of integrated childcare, youth programming, and family supports as such supports can help stabilize households before crises escalate.¹⁰

Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security

The Committee heard from post-secondary institutions and student representatives who all described a sector under serious financial strain. Steve Orsini from the Council of Ontario Universities stated, "We are the lowest funded in the country per student. There hasn't been an increase in operating funding in a decade."¹¹ Multiple universities including Brock, Lakehead, and Laurentian called for increased, predictable base operating support tied to inflation. Colleges such as Fleming, Algonquin, and Fanshawe emphasized the need for stable public investment to protect regional access and workforce development. Many schools described cuts and job losses. For example, Peter Devlin of Fanshawe College described suspending 25 programs and cutting 300 jobs this year due to financial pressures.¹² Student organizations, including Cyrielle Ngeleka of the Canadian Federation of Students¹³ and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance,¹⁴ raised concerns about affordability and reduced access to OSAP, calling for restored student aid to reduce student debt.

Economic Development and Trade

Public Infrastructure

Public infrastructure projects are foundational to economic development, housing supply, and job creation across regions, but stakeholders warned that they do not have the funding tools to

⁵ Mary Kathleen Dunn, March of Dimes, SCFEA, January 29, 2026.

⁶ Allan Mills, Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region, SCFEA, January 20, 2026.

⁷ Maureen Cassidy, Pillar Nonprofit Network, SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

⁸ Jennifer Lalonde, Ottawa West Community Support, SCFEA, January 14, 2026.

⁹ Steve Perry, Carefor Health & Community Services, SCFEA, January 15, 2026.

¹⁰ Amy Walby and Andrew Canham, YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

¹¹ Steve Orsini, Council of Ontario Universities, SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

¹² Peter Devlin Fanshawe College, SCFEA, January 2026.

¹³ Cyrielle Ngeleka, Canadian Federation of Students, SCFEA, January 2026.

¹⁴ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, "OUSA's Written Submission for the 2026 Budget Consultations", January 2026.

keep up with growing needs. In their presentation, Lindsay Jones of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) reported that municipalities are dealing with an unprecedented need for infrastructure and skyrocketing construction costs while federal and provincial contributions have not kept pace with this growth.¹⁵ Marie Litalien of the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce underscored the need for long-term infrastructure commitments, including Highway 69 completion and reliable air access, to support northern industries and workforce retention.¹⁶ Sarah Ane of Parks and Recreation Ontario stated that community sport and recreation infrastructure is aging beyond its intended lifespan, with a \$1.1 billion backlog of asset maintenance and reconstruction.¹⁷ Stakeholders emphasized the value of investing in public infrastructure to create local, decent jobs.

Buy Ontario

Ontario spends about \$30 billion a year on procurement. With so many people looking for work, stakeholders called on government to leverage its buying power to give contracts to local businesses. Witnesses raised concerns about local procurement rules for public contracts. For example, Ian McLean of the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce, cautioned that new “Buy Ontario” procurement rules must have clear strategies to ensure small businesses across Ontario are included in these opportunities.¹⁸ Drew Spoelstra of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture urged the province to focus its efforts on buying Ontario grown every day of the year instead of just symbolic days.¹⁹ Bryan Walchuk of Moderna Canada made the case that prioritizing domestic vaccine procurement supports biosecurity, supply chain resilience, and the creation of hundreds of Ontario jobs.²⁰ Aaron Dunn of the Ontario Forestry Industry stressed that the provincial government has power to boost the market for home building.²¹

Education

Elementary and secondary

The Official Opposition believes that every child deserves to learn in a safe, supported classroom. School boards emphasized that schools are not meeting this goal. In its written submission, The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario described a system “shaped by chronic underfunding, worsening learning and working conditions, and policy decisions that are eroding safety, stability and trust in public education.”²² The committee heard about chronic staff shortages, recruitment and retention challenges, increased violence in the classroom, lack of basic supplies, crumbling infrastructure, and students with special needs being sent home because there is no staff to support them.²³

Finance

¹⁵ Lindsay Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

¹⁶ Marie Litalien, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, SCFEA, January 29, 2026.

¹⁷ Sarah Ane, Parks and Recreation Ontario, SCFEA, January 22, 2026.

¹⁸ Ian McLean, Greater KW Chamber of Commerce, SCFEA, January 20, 2026.

¹⁹ Drew Spoelstra, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, SCFEA, December 4, 2025.

²⁰ Bryan Walchuk, Moderna Canada, SCFEA, December 4, 2025.

²¹ Aaron Dunn, Ontario Forest Industries Association, SCFEA, January 15, 2026.

²² Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, “ETFO Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,” 2026 Pre-Budget Consultation.

²³ Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO), SCFEA, January 21, 2026; Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF), SCFEA, January 22, 2026; Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA), SCFEA, January 20, 2026; Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (multiple regional units), SCFEA, December 4-Jan 29, 2026.

Tax Reform

Witnesses spoke about the importance of fair and strategic tax reform. Fred Hahn of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario argued that restoring corporate tax rates to historical levels would strengthen public revenues needed to fund core services.²⁴ Julie Kwiecinski of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business called for reducing the small business tax rate to 2 percent. Not only would this help small businesses, but when surveyed, their members said that this would lead them to increase compensation and hire more workers.²⁵

Health

The Committee heard extensive testimony on Ontario health care system. While this is reflected in the final report, we believe that further emphasis is warranted.

Hospitals

The Committee heard from hospitals who were running under significant financial strain while over capacity.²⁶ Witnesses described increased demand for surgical, diagnostic, trauma, and critical care services. Cameron McLennan explained that the Brockville General Hospital's emergency room department has gone from serving 19,000 people per year, which is how many people it was designed to serve when it opened in 2003, to 30,000 today.²⁷ Doug Allan of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions stated that it will take significant increases to hospital funding, hospital staffing levels, and staff beds just to achieve service levels last seen in 2015.²⁸

Witnesses also spoke about staff shortages, high turnover and staff burn-out, and wage disparities across care settings. Allan noted that Ontario has the fewest hospital staff per capita, requiring an additional 48,249 full-time hospital staff just to achieve parity with the rest Canada.²⁹ At the same time, according to Dianne Martin of the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN), Ontario spent almost \$1 billion in 2023 on nurses and PSWs from private staffing agencies at more than twice the cost of permanent staff.³⁰ Martin joined Erin Ariss of the Ontario Nurses' Association and Jessie Clelland of the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario in emphasizing the need to move away from for-profit agency nursing and back to hospitals hiring permanent staff.³¹

Primary Care

Ontario's primary health sector is facing a critical staffing crisis. Family Health Teams across the province spoke passionately about how they cannot pay their staff enough to stay because they can earn more money in a hospital.³² According to a written submission by the Association of

²⁴ Fred Hahn, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario, SCFEA, January 22, 2026.

²⁵ Julie Kwiecinski, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, SCFEA, December 4, 2025.

²⁶ Peterborough Regional Health Centre, SCFEA, December 5, 2025; Queensway Carleton Hospital, SCFEA, January 14, 2026; Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, SCFEA, December 4, 2025; Brockville General Hospital, SCFEA, January 13, 2026; Kemptville District Hospital, SCFEA, January 2026.

²⁷ Cameron McLennan, Brockville General Hospital, SCFEA, January 13, 2026.

²⁸ Doug Allan, Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (CUPE), SCFEA, January 22, 2026.

²⁹ Doug Allan, Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (CUPE), SCFEA, January 22, 2026.

³⁰ Dianne Martin, Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN), SCFEA, January 22, 2026.

³¹ Dianne Martin, Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN), SCFEA, January 22, 2026; **Erin Ariss**, Ontario Nurses' Association, SCFEA, January 28, 2026; Jessie Clelland, Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario, SCFEA, January 29, 2026.

³² Taddle Creek Family Health Team, SCFEA, December 4, 2025; Peterborough Family Health Team, SCFEA, December 5, 2025; City of Kawartha Lakes Family Health Team, SCFEA, December 5, 2025; City of Lakes Family Health Team, SCFEA, January 29, 2026; Timmins; Academic Family Health Team,

Family Health Teams of Ontario, primary care health professionals earn 15 to 50 percent less than their hospital counterparts.³³ Cheryl Dobinson, Executive Director of Taddle Creek Family Health Team, told the Committee that almost half of her staff had resigned over the past 18 months. Dobinson said, “Staff who leave repeatedly tell me that although they enjoy working here, they need to take higher-paying positions to support themselves and their families.”³⁴ Dobinson warned that this could lead to the “collapse of our primary care teams.”

A strong, reliable health system attracts investment, keeps workers healthy and on the job, and helps local economies thrive. The Official Opposition maintains that Ontario should protect public health care, stop privatization, invest in public hospitals, and rebuild the workforce that keeps Ontarians healthy.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Homelessness and Affordability

The Committee heard a great deal about homelessness and housing affordability. While it was reflected in the final report, we believe that it warrants additional review. While the reasons for homelessness are complex, many witnesses pointed to the benefit of investing in permanent, affordable, safe, and supportive housing.³⁵ Municipalities stressed that the province is offloading responsibility for this issue onto them and that this is unsustainable. In his presentation, Mayor of Brockville Matt Wren stated that “homelessness remains one of Ontario’s most pressing challenges, and Brockville is no exception. The property tax system was never designed to address these needs, yet municipalities are on the front lines.”³⁶ Patty MacDonald of CMHA Sudbury–Manitoulin reported that homelessness in Sudbury rose by 37 percent in one year, with shelters operating over capacity and turning people away.³⁷ Without stable provincial investment in affordable and supportive housing, other services such as emergency services and hospitals must pay more to provide services to a homeless population, often struggling with addition and mental health challenges.

The continued need for affordable housing was heard across the province. Witnesses emphasized that improving housing affordability requires a comprehensive approach that includes expanding non-market and co-operative housing,³⁸ strengthening tenant protections; including closing the 2018 rent control loophole, limiting above-guideline increases,³⁹ enabling new supply through coordinated investment in essential infrastructure,⁴⁰ and changing planning and development rules to spur private-market construction.⁴¹ Affordable housing is an economic

SCFEA, January 27, 2026; Summerville Family Health Team, SCFEA, January 2026; Tilbury District Family Health Team, SCFEA, January 2026; Two Rivers Family Health Team, SCFEA, January 2026.

³³ Association of Family Health Teams Ontario, January 2026.

³⁴ Cheryl Dobinson, Taddle Creek Family Health Team, SCFEA, December 4, 2025.

³⁵ Kimberly Compeau, Kingston Interval House, SCFEA, January 13, 2026; Lindsay Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), SCFEA, January 21, 2026; Katie Burkholder Harris, Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, SCFEA, January 2026, SCFEA, January 29, 2026.

³⁶ Mayor Matt Wren, City of Brockville, SCFEA, January 13, 2026.

³⁷ Patty MacDonald, CMHA Sudbury-Manitoulin, SCFEA, January 29, 2026.

³⁸ Elana Harte, Simone Swail, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, SCFEA, January 20, 2026; Katie Burkholder Harris, Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, SCFEA, January 2026, SCFEA, January 29, 2026

³⁹ Anglican Diocese of Toronto, “Provincial Pre-budget Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs,” January 2026; ODSP Action Coalition, “2026 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission,” January 2026.

⁴⁰ City of St. Catharines, “City of St. Catharines: Provincial Pre-Budget Submission,” January 2026; Lindsay Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), SCFEA, January 21, 2026.

⁴¹ Jason Burggraaf, Greater Ottawa Home Builders’ Association, SCFEA, January 2026.

imperative. People can't contribute to our workforce or economy if they can't afford a place to live.

Transportation

Transportation remains an area of concern for the Official Opposition, particularly public transit and highway safety. In its written submission, the Ontario Public Transit Association urged the province to match federal transit funding to help municipalities modernize and expand their public transit systems.⁴² Witnesses from northern communities and infrastructure organizations stated the need for reliable winter maintenance to clear snow, improved highway standards, and long-term, predictable investment.⁴³ Mayor Dave Plourde described Highways 11 and 17 as overburdened and unsafe, carrying nearly 10,000 vehicles daily—including approximately 8,700 trucks—on infrastructure originally designed like southern country roads. He warned the Committee: "More people are going to die unless we do something."⁴⁴ We are calling on the Minister to take the needed steps to make our highways safe.

Conclusion

The Official Opposition believe that this dissenting report paired with the Committee's report fully captures what was heard across Ontario during the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultation process. We hope to see the government focus on affordability, good job creation, and strong public services, supported by investments that provide upstream solutions to strengthen communities across Ontario in the upcoming 2026 budget.

Recommendations

The Ontario NDP Official Opposition submits the following recommendations to the Minister of Finance to inform the 2025-26 Budget:

Attorney General

1. Increase strategic investment in the tribunal and court system to meet the goal of fast, fair, affordable, and timely access to justice.
2. Reform the Landlord and Tenant Board so landlords and tenants can quickly get their issues resolved in a virtual or in-person format, or via mediation.
3. Address staffing shortages in the criminal justice system so no serious charges are dismissed because of court delays.
4. Allocate increased dedicated funding to organizations supporting sexual assault survivors.

Children, Community and Social Services

5. Double social assistance rates and increase the amount recipients can earn while working before benefits are clawed back, with the goal of reducing poverty and increasing workforce participation.
6. Increase investment in developmental services to recruit and retain staff and increase service levels.

Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security

⁴² Ontario Public Transit Association (OPTA), "Pre-Budget Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs," January 2026.

⁴³ Cheryl Fort, Good Roads, SCFEA, January 28, 2026; Marie Litalien, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, January 29, 2026

⁴⁴ Mayor Dave Plourde, Town of Kapuskasing, SCFEA, January 27, 2026.

7. Increase operating funding to colleges and universities so Ontario funding is on parity with the national average of per-student funding.
8. Convert OSAP loans to grants so students can graduate free from crippling debt.
9. Create more funded work coop positions to help students get needed work experience in key sectors, such as health care and life sciences.

Economic Development and Trade

10. Raise the minimum wage to \$20 an hour and index it to inflation.
11. Increase investment in public infrastructure across Ontario to improve service quality and create and protect jobs.
12. Strengthen Ontario's Buy Ontario, Build Ontario rules so more government purchases of services and products go to qualified Ontario and Canadian companies first.
13. Expand eligibility for the manufacturing tax credit to make it easier for industry to bring in value-added processing and manufacturing, from agriculture to housing.
14. Bring in a strong Electric Vehicle Strategy to incentivize the manufacturing and purchase of Canadian-made electric vehicles. This plan must include the rollout of electric charging stations across Ontario.
15. Expand Ontario's Risk Management Program to assist farmers impacted by the trade war, drought, and other harmful events.
16. Lower the small business tax rate to 2%.
17. Bring in progressive tax reform, including raising the capital gains tax inclusion rate while lowering taxes on low and moderate-income workers.
18. Invest in energy efficiency and electrification, including providing rebates to incentivize retrofits and heat pumps in homes and commercial buildings, and direct investment to retrofit public buildings.

Education

19. Restore the \$6.3 billion cut from education since 2018 so school boards can hire more teachers and staff to work in the classroom, with a specific focus on recruiting French language and special education teachers and staff.
20. Invest in school building repair and the construction of new school buildings so every student learns in a well-maintained school.
21. Increase provincial investment in the Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care System (CWELCC) so childcare centers can hire more staff, pay staff increased wages and benefits, and provide care to more children.

Environment

22. Strengthen Ontario's rules to protect air, land, and water quality, starting with restoring the power of Conservation Authorities to restrict development in flood plains.
23. Develop and invest in an evidence-based comprehensive climate action plan to reduce Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050 and prepare Ontario's services and infrastructure – from health care to fire departments – to respond to emergencies and withstand extreme weather, including flooding, wildfire, and extended heat waves.

Health

24. Increase investment in publicly funded healthcare with the goal of improving health outcomes.
25. Provide an increase in stable and predictable funding for hospital infrastructure and hospital operating costs to match the national average so Ontario's hospitals can: meet growing population demand while operating at 100 percent capacity or less; deliver care within clinically recommended timeframes; expanding operating room capacity, lower staff to patient ratios; and keep emergency rooms operating 24/7.
26. Increase investment in publicly delivered primary care and community healthcare with the goal of increasing staff wages to address staff shortages and attaching all Ontarians to a family doctor or nurse practitioner, with a focus on rural, northern, and Indigenous communities.
27. Implement measures, such as reforming OHIP billing, to reduce the administrative burden on doctors, freeing them up to attach more patients.
28. Increase investment in public and non-profit home care and long-term care so eligible Ontarians can receive increased hands-on care from properly compensated staff.
29. Cover the cost of take-home cancer drugs.
30. Raise the legal age of vaping to 21 and ban the sale of flavoured vaping products.
31. Invest in evidenced-based mental health and addictions treatment commensurate with demand to ensure easy and quick access to medication, treatment and harm-reduction services delivered by properly compensated staff, including in rural, remote, isolated, and Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Affairs

32. Increase investment in indigenous-led service organizations, including Friendship Centres and affordable housing providers.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

33. Reduce homelessness and make housing more affordable by building at least 30,000 affordable housing and supportive housing units a year in regions across Ontario, including rural, northern, and Indigenous communities.
34. Bring in vacancy control on all homes to stabilize rent costs and reduce the rate of illegal eviction.
35. Address the housing shortage by increasing investment in infrastructure, such as water and sewerage, and wastewater, along with changing planning and development rules to spur the private-market construction of needed housing, including student housing, senior housing, and housing for families and first-time home buyers.
36. Update planning rules and approval processes so first-time homeowners and renters can find homes they can afford in the neighbourhoods where they want to live, including legalizing starter home options such as four-storey multiplexes in all neighbourhoods as-of-right, and allowing mid-rises near transit as-of-right.
37. Provide increased stable and predictable funding to municipalities to maintain and improve critical infrastructure and operate essential services while keeping property tax rates at affordable levels. These services include water and sewerage, road maintenance, public transit, community housing, police, fire, crisis, and paramedic services, public health, and emergency shelter.
38. Conduct a review to reform and reestablish a fair and fiscally sustainable partnership between the province and municipalities with the goal of having the province pay a greater share of the cost of delivering essential services. This is especially important in northern and rural communities who have a much smaller tax base to operate with.

Transportation

39. Improve public transit affordability, reliability, and speed, including investing in the capital costs of bringing in all-day two-way GO service, and providing 50% of the cost of operating municipal public transit systems.
40. Invest in northern highway maintenance, snow clearing, and safety measures with the goal of reducing traffic injuries and deaths to zero. These measures should include more safety inspection stations and staff to monitor truck safety and the expansion of Highways 11, 17, and 69.

Treasury Board

41. Provide ministries and government-funded agencies with funding to provide lost wages to eligible public sector workers whose pay was suppressed by Bill 124.

APPENDIX B – DISSENTING OPINION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE

Preamble

Throughout December and January 2026, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted pre-budget consultations in cities across Ontario. The committee's objective in conducting these consultations was to hear from Ontarians, local businesses, municipal leaders, and community organizations, and use that feedback to inform the 2026 provincial budget. The committee received oral and written submissions from hundreds of Ontario's stakeholders who shared the importance of the work that they do in their communities and the many challenges that they currently face. It is incumbent upon this committee to ensure that the recommendations we propose to the Assembly and ultimately to the Minister of Finance present an accurate and proportionate response to the serious concerns we heard from these stakeholders. Many of the presenters provided specific funding requests that are readily available to inform the government's budget decisions.

Unfortunately, while the above report is a good summary of the testimonies, feedback, and suggestions that the committee heard, **the recommendations included in the majority report do not proportionately reflect the concerns shared by stakeholders.** It is for this reason that the Ontario Liberal Party committee members are submitting this dissenting opinion with additional recommendations.

Health

The most significant shortcoming of the majority report is its failure to provide meaningful recommendations with respect to improving healthcare. While most topics in the report were covered in a page or two, the health section covered a staggering 10 pages of a 42-page report. The needs are serious and come from every corner of the system. Despite this, health is only mentioned once in the recommendations of the majority report.

Ontarians are finding it increasingly challenging to access the care they need. Significant concerns on access to care, crowded emergency rooms and hallways, the need for mental health care, and the inability to support care in the community were consistently raised.

The committee heard from hospital leaders across the province about the severe financial challenges they are facing. Many hospitals are running deficits and are experiencing challenges not only in maintaining their workforce but also investing in modern technologies and making infrastructure upgrades. These hospitals require sustained and predictable multi-year funding so they can not only maintain services but also expand capacity by making capital upgrades and hiring additional full-time staff.

A wide range of community service providers – from dementia care to assisted living services, transportation services, meal providers, and respite programs – also communicated the need for greater financial support to avoid service cuts. The services these organizations provide are essential to reducing the load on our hospitals and institutionalized healthcare settings. If the province does not increase financial supports to these organizations, people will remain without care, and it will only serve to augment the crisis already being experienced in our hospitals. The Government must ensure that these organizations are fully equipped to meet the needs of patients and that the healthcare workers providing these essential services are properly compensated.

Maintaining and growing the healthcare sector workforce was a focus for many presenters that we heard from. Registered nurses, nurse practitioners, personal support workers, community agencies, family health team practitioners, home care providers, and mental health care providers, hospice and palliative care providers, midwives, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and long-term care providers – all of these healthcare workers play important roles in

our healthcare system and we must ensure that the compensation they receive is competitive, regardless of the healthcare setting they work in. Without competitive compensation packages for healthcare workers across the sector, we risk depleting the healthcare workforce that is essential to providing quality care to Ontarians. The Government must also note that these workforce challenges are only exacerbated in northern, remote, and Indigenous communities.

To begin to meaningfully address these important challenges, we propose the following recommendations related to health:

- Address the issue of the wage gap between salaries of workers across the health system, particularly for those working outside of a hospital setting.
- Increase operating funding for Ontario hospitals with stable, multi-year funding commitments. A minimum of \$1 billion is required to address the current shortfall.
- Reassess the funding levels required to support essential community healthcare service providers and avoid service cuts.
- Provide funding to increase access to mental health and addictions services as a high priority. Specialized support for those with complex mental health and developmental needs should also be prioritized.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

The housing crisis was a large theme throughout the public consultations. New housing developments require municipal infrastructure like stormwater and wastewater management systems, roads and bridges; however, municipal budgets are already stretched to the breaking point, making it difficult to finance such large projects, particularly in aging cities and northern communities who have smaller tax bases.

Addressing the sharp rise in homelessness has largely fallen on municipalities, which do not have the resources required to respond to such complex and urgent needs. Homelessness requires provincial leadership to ensure appropriate healthcare, mental health and addictions treatment, and supportive housing is available, as well as to help mitigate the impacts on local small businesses and communities.

Therefore, we make the following recommendations:

- Implement a sustainable funding model for municipalities, including increased support for infrastructure like roads, bridges, and storm and wastewater systems.
- Using a cross-government approach, proactively address the growing homelessness crisis including measures to prevent people losing their housing and make life more affordable.
- Lower the cost of new housing by reducing taxes and fees on new construction ownership homes to help more people reach the dream of home ownership.
- Increase investments to build supportive housing with wrap-around supports available for those with complex mental health and addictions challenges.

Agriculture

Ontario's agricultural sector was left out of the majority report, yet we heard from stakeholders about the importance of investing in our farmers and helping them get their products to market. The cost for farmers to enter the industry remains significant in Ontario. For beef farmers, one important cost is obtaining breeder cattle. By providing financial support to beef farmers to purchase breeder cattle, we can help young farmers start and grow their business while also protecting the resilience of domestic supply chains against trade-related shocks from the United States. Similarly, Ontario excels at producing raw products but our capacity to add value

through food processing remains limited, forcing our agriculture sector to export a large majority of their raw materials. By investing in the creation of food processing plants, the province can grow the economy by creating value-add products right here in Ontario. We recommend that the provincial Government commit to the following:

- Establish a fund to offer capital cost-share grants to attract new investment in food processing plants.
- Support new and young farmers by investing in the loan guarantee program for breeder cattle.
- Immediately implement the full increase of the Risk Management Program to \$250 million, to give Ontario farmers needed confidence and stability.

Education

The committee consistently heard from stakeholders who highlighted the many warning signs in the education sector. Some of the primary issues raised include the significant building repair backlog, the need to attract and retain workers in the childcare sector, large class sizes, violent incidents in the classroom, the lack of supports for students with special needs, and the long-standing shortage of qualified teachers in the French-language school boards.

Many local education stakeholders also shared their concerns about the provincial takeover of school boards and the possible elimination of school board trustees, particularly considering recent changes made by Bill 33. They expressed the need to protect local governance and decision-making structures in the education system.

These important issues merit more consideration in the recommendations of the report than simply a brief mention of “education”, as in the majority report. The Liberal members of the committee recommend the following additions:

- Fund increased wages for Early Childhood Educators to recruit and retain the workforce needed to expand childcare spaces.
- Commit to targeted funding to enable school boards to hire much-needed special education support staff.
- Allocate funds to help school boards urgently address the large building repair backlog.
- Reassess funding allocations to support the recruitment and retention of French-language teachers.

Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security

The concerns raised regarding Ontario’s post-secondary education sector were significant. Funding for French-language post-secondary institutions is a major concern given their unique realities. Additionally, multiple organizations expressed concern about the high debt load being placed on new graduates through OSAP loans and interest payments. For these reasons, our recommendations include the following:

- Remove or delay interest payments on OSAP loans.
- Reinstate the maximum allowed grant level of 85% to ensure Ontario college and university graduates are not saddled with high debt levels.
- Modify the allocation of funding for post-secondary French language institutions to reflect their northern and regional contexts.

- Ensure colleges in rural communities have the support needed to maintain programs that support local businesses and sectors such as hospitality and culinary arts programs.

Transportation

Community leaders in northern Ontario have repeatedly called for improvements to highways in the region and the committee hearings were no different. Highways 11 and 17 are vital transportation routes for those in the North and their poor condition has a significant negative impact on communities in the region. The committee heard from hospitals in the North who explained how minimal winter maintenance and poor conditions on northern highways negatively impacts patient access to healthcare and the effectiveness of emergency services. It creates challenges for business owners and leads to preventable deaths every year. The Government has a responsibility to make sure these routes are safe and effective transportation routes at all times of the year. In addition, the committee also heard several requests to take action to address airport infrastructure in several communities, many fly-in only, in the North. The lack of any recommendation in this report regarding these issues is a serious omission, which is why we propose the following:

- Allocate funding for highway upgrades in Northern Ontario, specifically for the twinning of highways 11 and 17 and to achieve higher winter maintenance standards.
- Provide specific funding for updates to airports in Ontario's northern, remote, and First Nations communities.

Finance

Ontario small businesses are the backbone of our economy. The committee heard from many small business organizations about the challenges they are experiencing such as strain from United States tariffs, increasing operational costs like rent, and uncertain economic conditions. These businesses require relief from cost pressures and their tax burden is one of the primary challenges. Therefore, we recommend that the Government:

- Reduce Ontario's small business tax rate to 1.6% and increase the income threshold to \$600,000.

Attorney General

This committee has heard complaints about the Landlord and Tenant Board for years and this year was no different. Immediate action is required to protect tenants from negligent or exploitative landlords, as well as ensure landlords can recoup the rent due to them. To help make the Landlord and Tenant Board more efficient, we recommend the Government:

- Expand mediation services at the Landlord and Tenant Board to help resolve disputes more quickly.

Solicitor General

Over-capacity detention centres is a prevalent issue across Ontario, and this was reiterated by stakeholders during pre-budget consultations. Overcrowding in jail cells can foster negative outcomes in staff trying to maintain order, the safety and conditions of inmates and staff, and recidivism rates by inmates. To reduce recidivism rates, many inmates require appropriate mental health programming which is why we recommend the Government:

- Invest in appropriate mental health and primary care supports within detention centres, including jail diversion programs for those with severe mental illness.

Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

When it comes to accessing the labour market in Ontario, two main groups who consistently experience challenges are youth and internationally trained workers. The youth unemployment rate in Ontario remains high, depriving young people of the entry-level employment opportunities that allow them to explore the job market and will prepare them for meaningful careers. Similarly, internationally trained workers are eager to use their expertise to contribute meaningfully to Ontario's economy but the barriers to entry are often too high, leaving them in lower-paying positions that ignore their unique skills sets and expertise. To continue to grow our economy, it is essential that we support both groups to find meaningful employment opportunities. The Ontario Government should:

- Create a youth jobs program that uses wage subsidization to incentivize businesses to hire young people.
- Invest in bridging programs in a variety of sectors to help internationally trained workers quickly enter the workforce in their area of expertise.

Conclusion

We appreciate the time and effort made by the many presenters to the Finance Committee during the budget consultation. We urge the Minister of Finance to reconsider the balance of recommendations given the clear calls for urgent action in several sectors that are not adequately reflected in the recommendations of the final committee report.

APPENDIX C – DISSENTING OPINION OF THE INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE

I want to thank the many witnesses who shared their expertise and lived experiences during our 2026 pre-budget consultations, either through in-person presentations or written submissions. I am filing this dissenting report as the Independent member of the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee not in opposition, but out of a commitment to working collaboratively with the government to advance policies and investments that are truly beneficial for most Ontarians. My goal is to highlight opportunities, gaps and priorities so that together we can create solutions that strengthen our communities, support families and ensure a prosperous Ontario for businesses, and those who farm our lands to feed us all.

While each jurisdiction has its own unique challenges as well as attributes, many of the concerns and requests we heard were remarkably consistent from one hearing to another. Communities across Ontario spoke of chaos in our classrooms and escalating violence in our schools, citing students who need additional supports are not receiving them and those who don't cannot thrive in the current system. We heard urgent testimony about rising homelessness. Community organizations highlighted the inequitable wage gap between frontline workers in the community care sector and their counterparts in institutional settings, warning that without parity, recruitment and retention will remain an ongoing crisis.

School boards, colleges, and universities emphasized the need to modernize funding formulas in both public education and post-secondary institutions, particularly in light of the federal cap on international students, which has exposed structural vulnerabilities in institutional financing.

Collectively, these voices underscored a clear message: without strategic, targeted investments and structural reform, the pressures facing our classrooms, healthcare system, and community supports will only intensify.

I firmly believe that the best way to tariff-proof Ontario and secure long-term food sovereignty is by expanding and accelerating strategic investments in ag-food processing.

By strengthening our domestic processing capacity, we keep more value here at home, insulate producers from cross-border disruptions, and build a more resilient supply chain from farm gate to table. The Beef Farmers of Ontario echoed this position, underscoring the importance of protecting and enhancing the competitiveness of Ontario's beef sector in an increasingly uncertain trade environment. That means supporting young and new farmers with access to capital and succession planning tools, investing in local processing infrastructure, and ensuring regulatory frameworks that allow our producers to compete and grow.

Reducing dependency on U.S. markets where possible, diversifying trade opportunities, and reinforcing our domestic capacity are not protectionist measures — they are prudent economic strategies that safeguard jobs, strengthen rural communities, and secure Ontario's long-term food independence.

The chronic underfunding of Ontario's developmental services sector has created a structural failure that now drives significant pressure — and avoidable costs — across multiple government ministries. In the [Lost in Transition](#) by the [Office of the Ontario Ombudsman](#), and reinforced in [Community Living Ontario's](#) pre-budget submission, *Catch Them Before They Fall*, the evidence is clear that the system is failing some of the province's most vulnerable citizens and their families. Today, more than 53,000 adults remain on waiting lists for developmental services, and far too many are consistently diverted into hospitals, emergency departments, the justice system, and even long-term care; and not because these are appropriate or effective supports, but because no funded, community-based alternative exists. This is not only a moral failure; it is fiscally unsound, shifting higher downstream costs onto healthcare and corrections while families are left to shoulder the burden of a system that has not kept pace with need.

Similarly, families navigating Ontario's autism system face long, often overwhelming wait lists that can stretch for years, leaving children without timely access to critical interventions and supports. Parents describe a constant struggle to find appropriate services, coordinate care, and advocate for their child's needs while juggling work, household responsibilities, and the emotional toll of uncertainty. Early intervention is crucial for development, and every year spent waiting represents missed opportunities to help children reach their full potential.

The challenge extends beyond childhood. As autistic individuals grow into adolescence and adulthood, families continue to face a fragmented system, with supports often disappearing just when they are most needed. Autism and developmental disabilities do not know a date or a birthday. Autism Ontario has repeatedly called for a coordinated, cross-sector approach that ensures timely access to services across the lifespan, adequate funding to reduce wait times, and consistent, equitable supports regardless of geographic location or family income.

Without meaningful action, families are left to navigate a complex, under-resourced system on their own, compounding stress and creating avoidable costs for the broader healthcare and social service system.

While the government has taken steps to combat contraband tobacco, treating the issue as "dealt with" ignores its escalating severity. Incrementalism is no longer sufficient; the 2026 Budget requires a monumental shift in strategy which the committee heard from Rothman's Benson & Hedges Inc.

Contraband now commands 39 to 50 per cent of Ontario's tobacco market, meaning nearly one in every two cigarettes sold is illegal. This market penetration represents a systemic enforcement failure that costs the province between \$990 million and \$1.7 billion in annual tax revenue. These funds could be applied to public services such as healthcare and education. Any claim of fiscal responsibility is undermined by tolerating such massive revenue leakage.

Beyond the fiscal impact, this is a matter of public safety. Contraband tobacco is a primary financing mechanism for organized crime, often linked to the trafficking of firearms and illicit drugs. While the 2025 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review committed to reviewing the *Tobacco Tax Act*, a review without immediate legislative action will not disrupt these criminal networks.

The Committee's current recommendations understate this crisis and risk perpetuating a status quo that benefits gangs at the expense of law-abiding citizens. The upcoming Budget must move past "reviews" and implement decisive enforcement measures to restore the rule of law.

Municipal leaders across Ontario appeared before the committee to raise concerns about a "broken" fiscal framework. Relying on property taxes to fund provincial-level responsibilities is increasingly unsustainable, particularly as Ontarians already pay the second-highest property taxes per capita in Canada. Across jurisdictions, leaders are calling for a comprehensive review of municipal revenues and expenditures to ensure municipalities are adequately funded to deliver essential services.

Key requests for the 2026 Ontario Budget include predictable, long-term infrastructure funding for roads, bridges, water and wastewater systems, and housing-enabling services. Municipalities currently shoulder roughly 80 per cent of growth-related infrastructure costs, prompting calls for the Government of Ontario to increase its share. Rural municipalities specifically seek an extension of the Building Faster Fund with a dedicated rural allocation.

Health and public safety priorities presented include funding capital costs for Family Health Teams, addressing the shortage of family doctors for 2.5 million Ontarians, and sustainable funding to manage rising OPP and municipal policing costs.

Governance and operational reforms remain critical. Completing the long-delayed Property Tax and Assessment System Review would provide certainty for residents and businesses, while clarifying “Strong Mayor” provisions would reduce administrative confusion and prevent wasteful expenditures. The submissions presented highlight the urgent need for a fiscal framework that aligns municipal funding with growing community needs and responsibilities.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of the province’s economy, driving innovation, job creation, and community vitality. Small and medium-sized business represent 99 per cent of all businesses in Ontario, they employ millions of Ontarians and provide essential goods and services to both local and global markets. Beyond these economic milestones, our small and medium-sized businesses contribute to the social fabric of our communities by supporting local suppliers, sponsoring community initiatives and sporting organizations, and fostering entrepreneurship that inspires the next generation of business leaders.

Our businesses are often the first to adapt to changing market conditions, demonstrating resilience and creativity in the face of economic uncertainty, regulatory shifts, and technological disruption as we saw during the pandemic. Their ability to pivot and innovate not only strengthens local economies but also assists Ontario to remain competitive internationally. In sectors ranging from agri-food processing to advanced manufacturing and digital services, Ontario’s small and medium-sized businesses are key drivers of economic diversification and regional development.

Despite their contributions, businesses often face disproportionate challenges, including access to capital, rising energy and labour costs, and complex regulatory requirements. Supporting these businesses with targeted policies is critical to sustaining Ontario’s economic growth. Further, investments in our province’s small and medium-sized businesses are not only investments in jobs and Gross Domestic Product but also in vibrant, resilient communities that make Ontario a dynamic place to live, work and raise families.

Key recommendations:

1. Accelerate strategic investments in the agri-food processing sector to maintain and strengthen Ontario’s position in the international market and global competitiveness.
2. Examine how special education is delivered, and ensure resources allocated lead to improved student achievement, social-emotional well-being, and safer learning environments for all students.
3. The Ontario Government should commit to a comprehensive review and modernization of the funding formula for public education, with the review considering pressures from enrolment growth and inflationary costs.
4. Undertake a review and establish a new funding formula for colleges and universities that reflects current and future needs, particularly in-light-of the federal cap on international students. A new formula should provide stable, predictable and equitable funding so that institutions can maintain quality programming and so that domestic students are not saddled with further financial burden.

5. Implement standardized wage frameworks to ensure community care workers receive compensation comparable to similar roles in hospitals and long-term care facilities.
6. Directly fund and prioritize enhanced enforcement, through taking seriously recommendations to explore a better enforcement model like that of Quebec and its gold-standard ACCES Tabac Program.
7. Remove the “in plain view” limitation in the *Tobacco Tax Act*, which unnecessarily restricts police authority and hampers effective roadside enforcement.
8. Expand regulatory licensing requirements to ensure that anyone in possession of tobacco manufacturing materials is required to hold a valid tobacco manufacturer’s license, closing a key loophole exploited by illegal producers.
9. Use the Budget to assert national leadership, urging the federal government to develop a comprehensive, cross-Canada strategy that targets all aspects of the contraband tobacco supply chain, beyond online sales.
10. Provide an immediate base budget increase of five per cent for developmental service agencies to address the ongoing underfunding and rising costs in the sector.
11. Establish predictable annual increases to the base funding of developmental service agencies to address rising operational costs and prevent further program cuts.
12. Provide a commitment that the provincial government will not claw back the new Canada Disability Benefit from individuals receiving ODSP.
13. Commit to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)’s call for a [social and economic prosperity review](#), with the goal of ensuring municipalities have revenue streams appropriate for the services they are expected to deliver.
14. Complete the Property Tax and Assessment System Review and ensure that the next assessment cycle starts as soon as possible.
15. Reduce autism waitlist times from 5 plus years to under 6 months.
16. Publish monthly transparent autism waitlist data.
17. Establish better coordination and cross-sector action across the Ministries of Education, Health and Children, Community and Social Services for those requiring autism services.
18. Implement a coordinated transition framework for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities, ensuring seamless access to adult services and continuous support for housing, employment, healthcare and community participation.
19. Immediately lower the small business tax rate from 3.2 per cent to 2 per cent and increase the eligibility threshold to \$700,000.

20. Address high operating costs and regulatory burdens to combat low business confidence and weak demand.
21. Expand the *Buy Ontario Act* to include municipal procurement, prioritizing local businesses for infrastructure and vehicle purchasing.

