

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

F-47

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

F-47

**Standing Committee on  
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Thursday 18 January 2024

**Comité permanent  
des finances  
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Jeudi 18 janvier 2024

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Chair: Ernie Hardeman  
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman  
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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House Publications and Language Services  
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building  
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Telephone 416-325-7400  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-4386

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES  
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Thursday 18 January 2024

Jeudi 18 janvier 2024

*The committee met at 1000 in the Cambridge Hotel and Conference Centre, Cambridge.*

**PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Good morning, and welcome to Cambridge. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting today to resume public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents, including written submissions via SharePoint. As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we've heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the timeslot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time for the questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group. Are there any questions from the committee?

**ONTARIO PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION  
GRAND RIVER ENVIRONMENTAL  
NETWORK**

**BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF NIAGARA**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If not, we would call the first presenters this morning: the Ontario Public Transit Association, the Grand River Environmental Network and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara.

As I said in the opening remarks, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop, because one minute later exactly, I'm going to say, "Thank you." Then, you can stop.

So with that, we also ask as you start your presentation that you start with introducing yourself to make sure that we have the right name to the great presentation you're going to make, for Hansard.

With that, we will start with the Ontario Public Transit Association, and the floor is yours.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** Good morning. Thank you, members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I'm Karen Cameron, CEO of the Ontario Public Transit Association. With me virtually today is

Kelly Paleczny, board member of the Ontario Public Transit Association and general manager of the London Transit Commission.

Today, we join you as representatives of Ontario's public transit sector. Public transit is the backbone of livable cities. Better transit means less congestion, faster commutes, more convenience and higher productivity. Frequent and reliable transit facilitates movement, supporting economic activity and enhancing quality of life for millions.

With the exception of commuter rail, which is trending upwards, the good news is that transit ridership is back to pre-pandemic levels, or higher, in most Ontario municipalities. This is true for transit agencies in rural and urban centres, but there's bad news too.

The fiscal situation facing Ontario transit agencies is dire, resulting in systems raising fares by double digits, cutting services or both. That means transit agencies are being forced to do everything you shouldn't do if you want to increase transit ridership and make life affordable.

This rebound is a clear indicator of the essential nature of public transit in providing affordable, accessible and reliable transportation, but our transit systems are at crossroads, challenged by capital and operating deficits. Such measures disproportionately affect our most vulnerable populations, including low-income families and seniors, who rely heavily on public transit for their daily commutes and essential activities.

The government's past support has been instrumental, especially the top-ups to the Dedicated Gas Tax Funds for Public Transportation Program, also known as the gas tax fund, yet the harsh reality of inflation has eroded the fund's effectiveness. A 13% year-over-year increase in operating costs due to inflation has substantially diminished the fund's purchasing power since it was created in 2006, creating a gap between our capabilities and the needs of our growing ridership. Adjusted for inflation, the purchasing power of the fund's two cents per litre of gasoline sales is now equivalent to only 1.4 cents compared to when that amount was first introduced.

Thanks to recent provincial support for Toronto's transit operations, the previously reported \$510-million province-wide operating shortfall has been partially alleviated. However, most Ontario transit systems continue to face operating pressures.

Transit planners and schedulers from across the province recently shared their experience with September ridership, with some reporting record daily boardings and monthly

ridership well over pre-pandemic levels, but many transit agencies also reported how the housing crisis is making it more difficult to serve customers efficiently, with students unable to get housing in areas served by high-frequency transit.

Societal pressures are also putting strains on transit operations. Transit agencies are seeing increased safety and security costs, given increasing numbers of incidents of violence and harassment on public transit systems. Agencies are responding to the need for action, to ensure the safety and security of transit riders and workers.

For these and many other reasons, provincial operating support through the dedicated public transit fund is crucial to transit's ongoing success. That's why we recommend increasing the total funding envelope of the dedicated public transit fund to \$700 million in 2023-24 and \$725 million in 2024-25. This increase will return the value of the fund that was lost to inflation.

Moreover, as the Ford government's 2019 review of the public transportation fund proved, the fund has been successful in its goal of growing transit ridership, but it has not kept up with the growth it created. As such, this is an investment in maintaining affordability and maintaining our level of services to meet the demands of our growing cities and towns.

Additionally, until the federal permanent transit fund comes online in 2026, we strongly urge the province to support bus purchases by covering one third of the costs. This support is needed to grow and maintain the maintenance of our transit fleets. Adequate funding for bus purchases is not just about keeping vehicles on the road; it's about advancing toward a more environmentally sustainable and efficient transit future. Roughly 24% of buses that are in service today are within three years of the end of their lifespans, and transit agencies are struggling to find funds to purchase replacements.

An estimated investment of \$450 million per year for two years is proposed, which is critical for meeting growing ridership demand and addressing state-of-good-repair needs. This investment is crucial, as it lays the groundwork for a more resilient and future-ready public transit system.

Upgrading our fleets with more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly buses is a step towards reducing our carbon footprint and contributing to a greener Ontario. Investing in public transit is an investment in the future.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** We ask for your support in strengthening our transit systems, which are vital for the ongoing economic and social health of our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration of our requests. We are deeply committed to working alongside the government to create a prosperous future for public transit in Ontario, and we're happy to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will go to the Grand River Environmental Network.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Good morning, members of the standing committee and guests. My name is Kevin

Thomason, and I'm vice-chair of the Grand River Environmental Network. For decades, our members and member groups have been stewards, activists and a proactive voice for the environment across the vast Grand River watershed, which is home to almost one million people, facing more growth pressures, more loss of biodiversity and more environmental challenges than ever.

This budget and the coming years need to be about ensuring our survival on a rapidly changing planet. After a rocky start cancelling EV incentives and ripping out charging stations, it has been fantastic to see the efforts of this government to ensure that Ontario's auto industry continues to be a world leader with the rapid change to electrification. However, a couple of battery factories isn't enough. We need to ensure that Ontario has the same opportunities for sustainability as other provinces and states, with consumer incentives and provincial rebates for electric cars and, even more importantly, electric bikes.

Our local governments here in Waterloo region have prioritized active and public transportation, and we're seeing record levels of transit ridership that are transforming our communities, with billions of dollars of private sector investment along our very successful transit lines. As our Ion rapid transit BRT and LRT moves forward with phase 2 to Cambridge and phase 3, an east-west route connecting our airport to downtown Kitchener to western suburbs, it will be essential to see the province join in joint funding of these transit initiatives that are serving as a visionary model for communities across North America.

**1010**

Good planning and development need certainty, and too many hastily implemented changes, with little to no public consultation by this government, have created planning chaos across Ontario. Our visionary regional official plan, approved by all local mayors, is focused on sustainable, complete, walkable 15-minute communities, with a priority on public transit and more affordable missing-middle housing that has been ridden over by the province, delaying development and inhibiting housing. Intensification and building within our existing boundaries is far more economical, efficient and faster. It avoids destroying the farmland we need for local food and avoids threatening the underlying water aquifers we are totally dependent on for all our drinking water needs here.

Unless this committee is willing to fund billions of dollars of water and sewage pipelines to the distant Great Lakes, our communities must live within the carrying capacity of the land and our watershed. This means that good, sustainable planning and land use is paramount. Thankfully, the Grand River Environmental Network and thousands of citizens have advocated for years for sustainable solutions such as intensification, high-quality public transit that everyone will use, water efficiency programs, green space protection, our visionary Countryside Line concept, blue box recycling, source water protection areas and many other pioneered-in-Waterloo solutions that are now being adopted around the world.

In addition to provincial housing pledge targets, our community has announced an unprecedented plan for 10,000 affordable homes in the coming years in a very innovative

partnership of private sector, public sector and non-profit organizations. We need participation from the provincial government and this standing committee needs to be budgeting funding directly for affordable public housing, as the private sector is not going to solve our housing crisis, particularly for those in most need.

And what we build matters. We are in a climate crisis, so why are we still building homes to yesterday's standards? The Ontario Building Code needs to be updated immediately so that every new home build in Ontario is net-zero, efficient and economical to operate. Why would we build 1.5 million homes to outdated standards, without EV chargers, without efficient heat pumps, instead burning fossil natural gas that needs to be eliminated within a few years, with insufficient insulation, with inferior windows, without the solar panels and efficiency required in most other places around the world? It's simply astounding. All of these homes will need to be gutted and completely upgraded at great expense, just a few years after they have been built.

Green development standards will improve our resilience and make our province far more efficient and competitive, saving billions of dollars. The lack of provincial leadership on green development standards is appalling. Toronto has seen its population grow by 14% in recent years, but because of their green development standard, energy use has only increased by 2% and carbon emissions have actually dropped by 25%, contrasting with the rest of Ontario, where greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, with dire consequences that we're just starting to grasp with smoke, fires and floods.

Only modest funding would be required in the upcoming budget to roll out world-leading green development standards across Ontario, providing better homes that are more economical to run. There are many issues that we still need to address, as well, such as restoring our conservation authorities and ending the absurd request for conservation lands to be sold for development when it has been broadly agreed there is no development land shortage.

Ontarians overwhelmingly support the addition of new protected parks and conservation reserves. Innovative plans have been put forward for a made-in-Ontario \$1-billion "wild accelerator fund" to match the federal government and for the province to invest \$100 million a year for four years, to establish new protected areas to meet 2030 Aichi accord commitments, to see 30% of Ontario protected. Funding for aggregate reform, enforcement, and pit rehabilitation also needs to be a priority.

It's absurd to be wasting billions of dollars on gas plants that will burn expensive fossil fuels, pollute our air and kill our citizens when the rest of the world is installing far more economical and sustainable solar, wind and battery solutions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Ontario used to be an energy leader. All our homes are already equipped with smart meters and citizens are expecting Ontario to be a global leader, not a laggard.

In conclusion, there is so much that this committee needs to get right. However, you actually have hundreds of billions of dollars to accomplish things in the years ahead, and most of what I've presented has a very high return on investment for government, for our environment and for our society.

Please strive to provide the sustainable, leading solutions we need for a successful and survivable future. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now go to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Good morning. I am Erin Graybiel. I'm going to start off by telling you about Justin. Justin is a 12-year-old boy who lives with his mother in St. Catharines. For most of his life, Justin's father has not been present due to challenges with addictions. Justin's mother works two jobs to be able to support her family, which results in Justin frequently being home alone in the evening.

Justin's mother noticed he was spending more time with an older group of teens from their neighbourhood and his teacher reported that he was falling behind in school. This is a critical point in Justin's story. Justin's mother called us and enrolled him to receive a mentor.

After completing the intake and training process, Justin and his mother had their first meeting with Ben. Justin and Ben hit it off right away and a Big Brother Big Sisters match was formed. They initially bonded over their shared interest in baseball and video games and their relationship has expanded to include so much more.

During his four-month match-monitoring, Justin told his caseworker, "I look up to him. I feel like I can really talk to him about anything. He's like a real brother for me. I don't feel alone anymore."

During her one year of match-monitoring, Justin's mother told the caseworker, "He has always been so supportive of us and really there for Justin. He's been through a lot with us, especially with Justin's father trying to come back into his life. It's way more than he signed up for, but he stuck with us. He's part of our family."

Although Justin's story is unique, he is one of the hundreds of young people that experience life-changing relationships through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara.

As I mentioned, I am Erin Graybiel and I have the privilege of being the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara. I am joined by Frank Ruberto, who is our agency's volunteer board chair.

We're here today to ensure that every child and youth like Justin receives the support they need to make positive life choices. Early intervention will ensure they are not part of the youth justice system or requiring mental health or medical interventions, while encouraging them to stay in school and become productive members of society.

Research has proven that youth who receive support from a consistent mentor are 46% less likely to initiate drug use than children from similar socio-economic backgrounds; 80% have better attendance in school; they are 17% more likely to be employed and earn 13% more, on average, in those jobs; 47% hold senior leadership pos-

itions; they are 50% more likely to volunteer; and spent 30% more time volunteering.

An investment in preventative mentoring supports for children and youth will have a direct return to Ontario society. Every \$1 invested in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring returns \$23 to society through taxes, higher income, voluntarism and charitable donations.

Today, we're seeking your support for a multi-year financial investment of \$550,000 per year in Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara to expand our reach, enhance supports and ensure that every child has the opportunity to benefit from meaningful mentoring relationships. This request amount reflects the annual salaries of our front-line social workers that directly support children and youth volunteers and families.

For 87 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara has been at the forefront of providing mentorship programs, connecting caring adults with children and youth who are facing adverse childhood experiences. Last year, close to 900 children and youth across Niagara were able to experience Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship programs at no cost.

Of the children and youth currently enrolled in our programs, 35% have identified mental health concerns. In Niagara alone there are currently over 300 children and youth waiting for their mentor. This wait-list continues to grow as the challenges young people are facing continue to increase.

#### 1020

Big Brothers Big Sisters also has a long-standing presence throughout Ontario. We have 37 agencies currently positively impacting communities across the province.

Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, has recently advocated for further investment in preventive mental health supports for youth. With further investment from the Ontario government, Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship programs can be scaled up to fill the current gap.

A parent recently shared with her caseworker, "My daughter Celine has seen lots of therapists, but nothing has worked to increase her confidence as much as her Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor. I have seen so much improvement with her depression and self-esteem."

By investing in Big Brothers Big Sisters, you are investing in the mental health and well-being of children and youth and contributing to a stronger, more resilient Ontario.

The ripple effects of mentorship extend beyond individuals, influencing their families, schools and communities. Mentorship also reduces the strain and costs on our already-burdened systems, including the youth justice system, mental health supports, hospital visits and other reactive social services.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Currently, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara is responsible for fundraising 93% of our annual operating budget. Only 7% of the funds we need to maintain our current service level comes from the government of Ontario.

This investment in preventive mental health supports for children and youth will allow Big Brothers Big Sisters

of Niagara to increase service levels while reducing the wait-lists for mentorship programs.

Earlier, I told you about Justin. At that critical point in his life, if his mother did not enrol him in Big Brothers Big Sisters, he would have gone down a different path—one that could have led to involvement with crime, drugs and dropping out of school. Thankfully, with early intervention, that wasn't his path.

I urge you to consider the long-term benefits of investing in our children and youth through Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

That concludes the presentations. We will now start the round of questioning, and we'll go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks to all presenters for being here this morning.

I'm going to start with public transit. In one of your recommendations, you say that you need \$725 million in that first component to prevent further service cuts and to address the fare increases.

You also mentioned in your delegation that the DPTF has been successful. The government's own review of that has proven that it's successful to increase growth but that the funding hasn't kept up with the growth that it created. So it's a successful program that is working. But I think what we need to hear from you, as a committee, is what's at risk if the government doesn't step in and support a program that's actually working to increase ridership for public transit.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** Thank you for that question. You did a great job of summarizing the success of the dedicated public transit fund.

I'll hearken back a bit to our experience during COVID to answer your question. We were very thankful to Minister Mulroney, during that time, that the public transit systems and our association had weekly meetings with Minister Mulroney, and she absolutely understood the economics of transit.

So what's at risk—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I just want to point out that she's not the minister anymore.

I really just need to know, if the government doesn't flow the funding right now—you're at a tipping point—what's at risk? That's what the committee needs to understand.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** Yes—apologies for taking time to get there.

What's at risk is what we refer to as the death spiral of transit—that if you don't fund transit, the reality is, people will take frequent and reliable transit. It's like any other product or service. If it's not a good service, people are not going to take it; they're going to find other alternatives. We have just successfully got people back to taking transit, with the economy back to where it was pre-COVID. Without keeping pace with the growth of communities, we run that risk of people finding other alternatives.



**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So, to avoid this death spiral for transit, you're also asking for the capital, really, to maintain the current fleet but also to grow the fleet. Is that correct?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** Correct.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay. Thank you very much for being here. That's what we needed to hear.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** Thank you.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm going to move over to Kevin Thomason from Grand River Environmental Network. Kevin, thank you very much for the work that you do and the work of your group. I believe it was a game-changer in the province to mobilize people around some of the planning alterations, if you will, that the government was going in that direction.

You had mentioned aggregate in your presentation. This is a huge issue for this region. We're absolutely surrounded by a plethora of aggregate pits and open licences that already exist. The Auditor General's report that was released in December highlighted inspections had decreased by 64% between 2018 and 2022; there is high non-compliance with aggregate operators, and they extract below the accepted or approved depth; and that non-compliance hit 74% around maintaining those regulations, but also around rehab of pits. Can you give the committee some sense as to why this is so important to have strong regulations that are enforced around aggregate pits, please?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes. Thank you. Indeed, aggregates is a really tough issue. We need to build. We need aggregates. On the other hand, we seem to do aggregates a bit different in this province than the rest of the world. We don't have near the level of aggregate recycling that Europe and most other places see. We have I think it's 13 times the number of pits approved than what demand actually requires, and the pits aren't free. They come at tremendous cost: tremendous cost to the environment, tremendous cost to surrounding communities. And in areas like ours that have no pipelines to the Great Lakes, that is totally dependent on groundwater and living within the carrying capacity of our watersheds, it is absolutely appalling to see pit after pit after pit after pit approved, despite any efforts to try to mitigate it, because there is no measure of cumulative impact of pits. Every pit is considered in isolation.

For places like the region of Waterloo, that is terrifying, if you're the director of water operations in the region of Waterloo, to continually see all these holes punched in the aquifers. And unfortunately the gravel is where the good water is too; the gravel and sand is what filters the water so well. It is essential that we start to do a better job on pits, particularly as we're looking at a changing climate, increasing water pressures and that sort of thing.

And the nice thing with aggregates: There's so much low-hanging fruit. The need is to simply remove the self-policing and do more enforcement. There are so many cost-effective things that can be done. Avoid water-taking, gravel and mining, below the water table. There are just so many opportunities for pit rehabilitation, because so few pits are ever rehabilitated that there's just such opportunity with aggregates, and it's really something we need to be doing a better job on.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much. You make a good point: The auditor also noted that, with this government, grant applications for new aquifer permits have increased by over 60%, which means they see an opportunity and they're getting their licences. And it's hard to walk that back. Sarah Harmer, I think, referred to it as the Wild West out there.

So given the scathing Auditor General report that we saw, do you feel that the government should impose a moratorium on future aggregate licences until we get this right?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes. We've seen our local communities, even before the last election, demanding moratoriums on any new pit applications. There is no shortage of aggregates in the province. We have so many pits that are opened and running and yet have not even removed one truckload of gravel in up to 50 years.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** So it's something that's a scar on the landscape that needs to be healed.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much.

Moving over to the boundary issue: I, like you, was very disconcerted to find my name in a briefing note from the government that had come to watch us speak about the boundary changes. Can you talk about how important it is to have a transparent and practical process for boundaries and for municipal guidelines around new growth?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes, indeed. In Waterloo region, because of our land constraints, we've come up with these visionary concepts such as the Countryside Line. That is a totally different European concept. We look at our land differently here. And when we have our community working on things like our regional official plan where every single municipality has unanimously agreed upon it with almost unanimous support across the board, to then see the province come in and override that and force open thousands of acres of forced urban boundary expansions, driving our Mennonites and farmers off the land and creating all kinds of sprawl that throws all our other plans for intensification—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

1030

We'll go to the independents—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Hazell. I was just trying to decide which one was going to put their hand up first.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Good morning. Thank you everyone for presenting to us today. My question would go to the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara first. That organization is very close to my heart. I know the great jobs that you do every day to support the vulnerable population that we have. These issues are very sensitive.

But I want to note that you provided 900 youth mentorships in Niagara in 2022. You have a wait-list of almost 300 youth. I want you to expand on that a little bit.

But then you received \$108,000 from the Ministry of Education—that is 7% of your funding—and 93% from

donations. And so, as you're doing a great job on increasing your donations, how is that sustainable? Is it sustainable in 2024? And if it's not sustainable in 2024, how will this add pressure to your operating budget for 2024? Erin up front can answer.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Thank you so much. Maybe I'll start off with answering that. I appreciate your comments and support of Big Brothers Big Sisters. I think there were a few questions there, so I'm going to try to touch on all of them.

Yes, our current wait-list is about 300 children and youth. It is a constantly rolling wait-list. Every day, we're able to make matches and we're getting new referrals from the community, other social service agencies and schools. We are still able to offer some level of support to children and youth who are on our wait-list and their families, but we're working to get them through the process to be able to match them with that life-changing mentor.

You're correct: Our current level of government funding is not sustainable. We're relying on donations and grants, and we have to put a lot of resources into fundraising through events, through grant applications, through donor stewardship to be able to offer all of our programs at no cost. That's why we're really seeking support from the Ontario government, so that we can serve the children and youth in Niagara who need it the most.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** And I have a follow-up question: There is a claim that every \$1 you spend provides \$23 to the local economy. Can you elaborate on how this is calculated, if you have that information?

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Yes. We did, throughout Canada, have research done that helped to quantify that amount. Through investment, through every dollar invested, it's a \$23 return through higher taxes, higher income, higher graduation rates, higher employment rates. There are so many positive outcomes and returns to society that come from having mentorship and that proactive early intervention.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you for noting that.

My next question will be for the Ontario Public Transit Association. I'm going to make this very quick. Karen or Kelly can answer it.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** We all know the importance of public transit, strengthening the financial *[inaudible]* the economy. It's good on the environment, it brings the community together, workers get to work on time, students get to school on time and seniors get to their appointments. Federal funding for bus purchases is starting in 2026. What impact would further service cuts and fare increases have on transit users, particularly low-income users? What are the consequences of limiting public transit funding?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** I'd be happy to answer that. I'll answer generally and I'll give Kelly Paleczny an opportunity to give you some specifics. But it is a lifestyle impact. Just as congestion causes people to not be able to get home to their families quickly, similarly, when transit is not frequent and reliable, that has a lifestyle—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the question.

MPP Bouma.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Thank you, Chair, and through you: Thank you to all of our presenters today. It's good to see you all, and I appreciate the work that you all do in your communities. I'd like to chat with everybody, but I'm going to start just with the Ontario Public Transit Association.

Karen, I really appreciate what you have to say, and I can't help but wonder what the future looks like. I'm very excited about the potential completion of the Ion, I believe it's called, the LRT that goes into Cambridge. Do you know what date that's going to be?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** I don't. Although, Kelly is a Waterloo resident. Maybe I'll ask Kelly.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** She's shaking her head too. That's okay. I'm looking forward to that, just because I've had children—well, adults now—who go to school in Waterloo, and it would be nice, because students can ride the Ion for free. I look forward to young people being able to travel to Cambridge from my riding and being able to take advantage of that.

But that brings me to my next question: Do you have thoughts on what's the best way of connecting communities that aren't serviced by GO rail? What I'm talking about is, obviously we have Laurier in Waterloo, but we also have Laurier in Brantford. I've had lots of conversations with the registrar and people in Laurier Brantford, and the mayor of Brantford and the mayor of the county of Brant about, "How do we make those links locally, and what's the province's role connecting Brantford to Cambridge when that LRT gets done?"

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** I just had a great conversation this week with the county of Brant representatives about a new, on-demand transit model that they are rolling out right now. The Community Transportation Grant Program has been excellent in funding those missing linkages, a good number of them around the Waterloo area, around the London area.

I want to give Kelly a chance to give you some specific examples.

**Ms. Kelly Paleczny:** Thanks, Karen.

Yes, as Karen indicated, there are a number of those models that are in place, and that community transportation program was critical in getting them up and running. However, that program is running out and there is concern that a number of those systems that have gotten off the ground will unfortunately not have the funding that they require to keep going. So that's another piece in terms of the role of the province: That funding needs to continue.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Excellent. Thank you. And then, just your thoughts: As we see the electrification of vehicles across the province—maybe that has been a little bit negative over the last couple of days, with the cold, cold weather and running out of—but I'm sure we'll be able to get over some of those hurdles also over time.

I've heard it said that if everyone drove an electric car, we'd need 12 big nuclear plants in order to just supply the

energy, let alone the infrastructure to supply homes with, that sort of thing. I'm wondering: Have you given any thought to what the model will be, moving forward, as we see less gas and diesel vehicles on the road, how transit will be funded without a gas tax, because there will be no gas?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** We are happy to report that we've already begun discussions with the Ministry of Transportation on that. We have an annual conference in April, and we're looking at a panel that's going to look exactly at that, beyond the gas tax. There are some international models that are worth looking at.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Very good. And then, lastly, just your thoughts, because with the very strong protections that we're now putting in place for the greenbelt, which means that we will see more and more growth in that ring that goes around the greenbelt—I imagine it someday being kind of like a megacity that entirely encircles the GTHA with the greenbelt in between. I think it's very important that we give thought to securing the transit corridors—for rail of some sort, I'm imagining; I don't think we'll have hover vehicles yet at that point.

But what are your thoughts about what that looks like moving forward, as we see a greater and greater need for people to be able to go back and forth? I think of myself trying to get GO service; the CN line is very busy with freight. What kind of partnerships does that look like, and what does it look like with the federal government having the control they do over CN moving forward, if you've given any thought to that?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** The permanent public transit fund is coming on in 2026. We understand from early indications that they are looking at regional solutions. They're favouring regional solutions, so that will be very important for the GTHA. The fare and service integration committee has had a huge success in the last year helping subsidize cross-border trips in that area. It's going to grow ridership.

OPTA itself, though—those agencies deal with the provincial government on their own on those topics. We don't really get involved in just GTHA topics.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

Very quickly, though, I wanted to have a quick chat with Kevin. I really appreciate the work that you do. I spent eight years on the Brant Waterways Foundation down in my area, was president for a couple of years, and when I got on county council in 2014, I remember our first budget, when GRCA came to us and told us what we were going to have to pay that year. And that's all good.

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With the growth targets that we have to have in order to handle these things, something that has really troubled me and that doesn't often come up in public conversation is what we are going to do with our sewage long-term. We're downstream from you guys here, and we don't want all of your effluent.

I remember we had a very dry summer, so I've been very heavily looking at technologies that do a better job of cleaning sewage so that we can head towards low-impact designs, so we can really see our communities in a certain form act like the forests that were there hundreds of years ago.

I was wondering if you had any thoughts on the long-term solutions for sewage and what that looks like in our growing communities, without relying on our watercourses.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** It's an excellent question and a concern that is serious. We already have area waterways that are reaching their assimilative capacity, like the Nith River. Right now, in order to add housing along the Nith River—the sewage plants are already at capacity, and the river is at capacity; we can't dump any more sewage in it, so we have to do what's called polishing the water, which is literally where you pull the water out of the river, purify it and dump it back in the river so it's clean enough to dump sewage in it, so you don't overwhelm the communities downstream. And that's just appalling.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** We need to be taking more time to plan our growth more carefully to ensure we're putting the right infrastructure and the growth is happening in the places where it's most sustainable. That is a challenge when we have ministers randomly overruling local plans where a lot of time and energy has gone into considering that. So careful planning will be key.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Thank you very much.

Quickly to Erin—loved the presentation; loved the ROI countrywide.

What's the number that we should be looking forward to helping you out, with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara—a dollar figure?

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** The dollar figure that we're looking for is \$550,000. That is equal to the front-line social workers we employ—so to help fund those direct front-line workers who are having the impact on children and youth.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all of our presenters here today as well as those participating virtually.

My first questions will be for Karen with the Ontario Public Transit Association. I want to thank you for your presentation. It's extremely comprehensive—a very reasonable ask.

I believe you said, "People will take frequent and reliable transit." When you said that, it immediately made me think of the GO Transit pilot from my home community of London, which people said was doomed from the beginning. It was very slow—a four-hour trip to Toronto. I know that falls under Metrolinx. It also harkens back to a May 2022 election promise from Premier Ford that he would invest \$160 million to increase the speed and frequency—a promise that was broken just a few short months later. CBC London has obtained a Metrolinx report where more than half of it is redacted and nobody will seem to answer to that broken promise.

I want to thank you for also pointing out that in my home community of London, transit fares have risen by a staggering 18%. I know my office has heard quite a bit about that.

I've also heard that due to provincial government changes, there has been a reorganization of priorities such that those

accessing social assistance are losing their bus passes in favour of other programming.

If people can't use the bus to get to work or to appointments, what happens to their prospects for a happy, healthy and prosperous life?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** We know that transportation changes lives. There's a great project in Calgary, for example: a low-income bus pass that, for some people, is \$5 a month, and it has been life-changing. Affordable, reliable transit makes a difference to everyone. It is part of upward mobility.

We know that students are a significant portion of transit riders, so ensuring that they have frequent, reliable transit will have economic benefits down the road.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** If we can get people riding transit as students, then they're more likely to continue into the future as long as it is, as you say, frequent and reliable.

Thank you very much for your presentation today.

I'd like to move over to Kevin with the Grand River Environmental Network. I want to thank you for a very comprehensive presentation. You've touched on many things, including transit.

I wanted to ask: I think something that the government has been very arrested with has been the increase of urban sprawl. We've seen, of course, the greenbelt grift, which has since been backpedalled upon, thankfully. But I wanted to know, specifically in terms of the financial considerations, are there specific investments that the province should be making to reduce urban sprawl and increase intensification?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes, great question. I think intensification is one thing we've done really well here in Waterloo region and we're actually the second-most intense community in the province after Toronto. That density means we can build more economically. We can build more housing faster and cheaper within our existing boundaries and communities, and that makes it easier to service by transit; it makes it cheaper and easier to get around. Our plan in the future for complete, walkable communities is something that is transformative compared to the costs of sprawl.

One of the nice things is that good planning is economical. Sprawl is very expensive and very inefficient, unaffordable from a farmland perspective and unsustainable. The infrastructure required is very time consuming and very expensive. So the nice thing is, with reining in sprawl, there isn't a lot of cost for this committee. It's a policy change more than an economic change. It's something the government can easily take action on and it's something that will help budgets across the board by building more efficiently and economically.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Understood. You've put forward that we should be using what we already have rather than expending further resources to increase sprawl—

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Particularly in our current housing crisis, where it's so important we build as quickly as possible. That's where our regional official plan, that looks at those affordable accessory units, those basement

apartments, those second-floor walk-ups and that—how can we encourage those laneway homes, the missing-middle housing, those four- to- six-storey apartment buildings or whatever? Those are the things that people can afford. Those are where the demand is. It's not for green-field urban sprawl and million-dollar-plus homes. There is no shortage of those.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. We may as well use the services and the utilities that we already have in place.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** To that end, I was particularly interested in your comments about green development standards. How can the committee help to improve those standards?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes, there is such an opportunity with green development standards, and we're so lucky in this province to have communities already leading the way. Toronto has had their green development standards and have been leading the world for almost 13 or 14 years now with them. We see Markham, Ajax, Vaughan, Ottawa—so many other places across the province bringing in their own municipal standards, but unfortunately, it's a hodge-podge, because every community, with no guidance or leadership from the province, has had to reinvent the wheel and try to come up with things on their own.

It would be so simple for this government to lead on green development standards and transform things across our province and ensure that Ontario remains a world leader. It will improve our efficiency; it will improve our resilience; it will improve our economy. And these are things that, by building better homes now, there is a payback over time because they're simply more cost-effective and economical for those people to live in them.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. It's getting the best bang for your buck, and it is an upstream investment rather than having to revisit something and spend yet more to simply be current.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** And something that doesn't have a huge cost to it. To roll out green development standards across Ontario right now will not cost the standing committee a lot. We can simply pick up the models from what's already working in existing Ontario communities and come up with a hybrid version of that for the entire province.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Wonderful, thank you very much.

I'd like to now move over to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara with Erin and Frank. Erin, I want to thank you for sharing Justin's story, as well as Ben's. I think the work that you do to promote social cohesion is incredibly important.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I recognize that as a former educator and it seems to be a deep concern that we've heard, with many service organizations having to fundraise to simply pay staff to keep the lights on, when fundraising should be for those extras. The government should really be funding organizations properly, and I wonder how many

Ontarians know that this government has left people on the brink of disaster.

I recognize that there are a number of different organizations in the social services sector that provide support for children and youth. How does Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara make sure that that work isn't duplicated?

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Thank you for your question. Absolutely, there are lots of other agencies and our approach has been partnering with them and working together. We have standing and multi-year partnerships with our local school boards in Niagara. We have programs in the schools during the school day.

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**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We will now go to the independents. MPP Clancy.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Hi, there. Thank you so much to all of you. It's great to learn more about your various positions and organizations.

My first question is for the Ontario Public Transit Association. I really appreciate how you're advocating for sustainable solutions, as well as advocating for better well-being and connectivity, especially for our middle- and low-income folks.

One thing that I think I'd love to hear more about is how much we can save on roads by having less people in cars and more people in transit. As a former city councillor, I know that the vast majority our city budget goes into repairing roads, and this is a huge expense to people, and people are really feeling the burden of that as their property taxes go up and more and more is downloaded onto municipalities.

So I'd love to hear if you have any thoughts on how much we can save in terms of our road repair—the hundreds of millions, I'd imagine. Can you speak to that?

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** I don't have at my fingertips a province-wide number, but I want to give Kelly an option. London is an area where they're building BRTs as an alternative to get more people on buses. So I'd like to let Kelly Paleczny answer that.

**Ms. Kelly Paleczny:** Thanks, Karen. And unfortunately, I don't have an exact number, but as Karen indicated, the savings associated with road maintenance, even health benefits associated with less accidents—obviously, the greenhouse gas savings associated with less cars on the road. All of those things combined were included in the business case that went forward for London's BRT infrastructure, and all of those savings played a big role in the return on investment for that project.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Thank you. I hope that we can look into this number. I know with electric vehicles being almost double as heavy, we're looking at massive, massive expenses on municipalities repairing their roads going forward. And the more we can do to ensure that people have access to alternatives is not only good for their health and well-being, but also to the city budgets for generations to come. Thank you so much for that.

I have some questions for Kevin from Grand River Environmental Network. You spoke a lot about, again, the

environment and well-being for our community. I always like to look at the economic impact of those decisions as well. I know you spoke about our farming communities being negatively impacted. I heard recently that farmland in our area cost 10 times as much as it does in PEI. We're seeing a migration of farmers out of Waterloo region and into other provinces, where they can access affordable farmland. Farming is one of our biggest economies in Ontario.

I wonder if you can share your thoughts around the negative impact of speculation and sprawl and these questions about boundaries on our farming community and their ability to have inter-generational access to their livelihoods.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Thank you—excellent question. Although Waterloo region is known for our universities, our technology sector, automobile manufacturing and other things, it actually turns out that agriculture is the largest part of our economy. And our farms are thriving here. Our farms are the most profitable farms in Canada, with our farmers making more dollars per acre than any other farmers in the county, simply because we've managed to keep our agricultural fabric intact.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** By things like our countryside line and our no-rural severances less than 80 acres, it's meant that our farms have remained large and intact, and our countryside isn't full of estate subdivisions and junkyards and churches out in the middle of nowhere and things like that.

It shows how planning can have repercussions in many ways. Because of our thriving farms, we have things like farm-gate sales and farmers' markets and local food that has become part of our identity here in Waterloo region. Waterloo region looks different than other parts of the province. You know when you drive into our region because all of sudden every driveway has got something at the end of it. And so there are a lot of ways that good planning can result in not only cost savings for the government but also a higher quality of life for our citizens.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** And finally, I know that there's a trillion-dollar economy in sustainable energy and building, and we're missing out on that by not having a more progressive building code. Can you speak to the—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We'll now go to MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank the presenters. I'll be very brief, and I'll pass to my colleagues MPPs Smith and Dixon.

My question is for you, Kevin. With respect to Grand River—a phenomenal canoe route. I love it, and one of Waterloo region's greatest assets.

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** It is.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I wanted to ask you about some of the government's investments in reducing major emitters of pollution. I think of Dofasco and Algoma Steel moving to the electric arc welding and steel development. Are those types of investments, the large emitters and

changing their technologies, worthwhile for the government to pursue, in your opinion?

**Mr. Kevin Thomason:** Yes, definitely, and it has been absolutely fantastic to see the electric arc and some of the technologies and innovations being brought in. We need to ensure that Ontario remains a leader and our economy is strong, and it will take the government partnering with our private organizations, our communities and even our universities and technical institutes and that—so kudos for that.

Although it's unfortunate, as much as it's been a great reduction in emissions on that front, to see the increase in fossil gas and the fossil gas plants. Anything that's being saved in one is going to be offset by rapidly increasing emissions in the other, and I would strongly urge this government to look into the far more economical wind, solar and battery that the rest of the world is going to. We need to be reducing fossil gas, not increasing it.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay. Thank you. Chair, I'll pass to MPP Smith.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Smith.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** First, I want to thank everyone for being here, whether you're here live or virtually. It's a cold day, and we all know what it was like to get our boots on this morning.

Fair warning: In my previous life, I dealt with matters under the child protection act, and I was intrigued by some of the conversation that Erin provided with Big Brothers. Children's aid was something that was circular in my area of work, and I realize the importance of having that family individual behind that child, because it makes for a more positive outcome. It honestly makes the difference between that child being able to get through the decade, so to speak, and our government is committed to removing the barriers for youth in Ontario and realizing their full potential.

I'm just wondering: Did your programming involve Big Steps to Success? Because that was something that I think in 2022 we invested \$2.2 million in, this one-of-a-kind program that I think was partnered with children's aid. I wondered if you could comment on that.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Absolutely. Thank you. Yes, we are one of the agencies across Canada that is part of the Big Steps to Success program. Unfortunately, what we're seeing with that program is that we're in phase 2 of that program, so they're still working through phase 1 of the agencies, and a lot of the focus and investment is on those phase 1 agencies.

We do partner with our local children's aid and receive a number of referrals from them to provide those wrap-around supports to young people and families. We will continue to do that, but we're hopeful that we are able to get more traction locally in Niagara with the big steps program.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Just a question: Do you have an ASP, an after-school program, offered within your—yes?

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** We do have it within our repertoire. We haven't had the volunteers available since COVID to be able to resurrect that program, but it is one of the

programs that pre-pandemic we were able to offer in our community.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you. Sorry—what's the time?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Three point three.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Very quickly: You were going into partner programs for children within schools, if you could just answer that really briefly, and then I'm going to pass it over to a colleague.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Absolutely. We work with other organizations to ensure that we're providing those wrap-around supports for families, children and youth, and not duplicating services. We work with our local school boards. We partner with Pathstone Mental Health—we're in two locations with them—and other service agencies—we're located within a food bank in one of our communities—and the Community Health Prosperity Program, amongst other partners and programs, to ensure that we're able to get families, children and youth the supports they need.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you. I'm going to pass this over to MPP Dixon.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** My questions are to Erin with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Just by way of background, I was a crown attorney for nine years, so you're preaching to the choir with the crime-prevention thing. That's specifically why I ran for office, and Big Brothers Big Sisters was actually specifically mentioned in an advocacy document that I wrote that, if you're interested in seeing what I had to say, you can find on my website.

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One of the issues that I find in trying to advocate for early intervention crime prevention strategies isn't so much looking for the evidence basis, it's looking for data on where does the money actually need to go. When I was looking at this, I was trying to figure out: Does Ontario together—all the different organizations—do you track in a way that would be intelligible to us the areas that are suffering the most from lack of volunteers and lack of mentors? Because that would be very valuable information to have from a provincial government perspective.

**Ms. Erin Graybiel:** Absolutely. The 37 agencies in Ontario do work collaboratively, so that's definitely information we can get. Unfortunately, we're seeing a number—if not all—of our agencies are struggling both with recruiting volunteers and raising donor dollars. Those seem to be the two hardest pieces in our charitable sector right now. But definitely, we can get that specific information.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** That would be great. Thank you.

Time, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** All right, thank you. Thank you, Erin.

I'll just finish off with a quick question to Karen. I wondered if you could comment a little bit more on what you see as the province's role in what I will call simple, within-city bus transit. I know you talked a little bit in your document about this. In some ways, the concern over sort of prioritizing that everything has to be brand new, electric, that type of thing, and driving up costs—if you can talk a little bit more about how you think we could invest in or

encourage it so that people just have a bus to get to places in the city quickly.

**Ms. Karen Cameron:** What we found when the dedicated public transit fund was made permanent in 2013—when that funding was permanent and predictable, transit agencies were able to invest in five-year growth plans, and that 2019 review proved that. Those agencies that put 100% of that funding into operations were the ones that had the highest growth in ridership, so it's that predictability that is one of the most important pieces.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time, not only for this presentation but for the panel. We want to thank all the participants, both virtual and at the table, for your time you took to prepare and the time you came here to spend with us to help us understand. With that, thank you for that panel.

#### WATERLOO REGION HEALTH COALITION

MS. LYNSAY DAJKA

#### REFORM GRAVEL MINING COALITION

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Will now call the next panel. It is the Waterloo Region Health Coalition, Lyndsay Dajka and the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition. As they come forward, the rules are the same. We'll get seven minutes to make a presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop, because we want to make full use of the time. At the end of the one minute, I will say, "Thank you," and that will end it—onto the next question.

With that, we do start the presentations with the Waterloo Region Health Coalition. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Good morning, and thank you to the committee and the Chair for allowing me seven minutes to discuss public health care in Ontario.

We're currently in the fifth year of the Ford administration's health care policies and I would like to ask the people of Ontario, through this media, and the committee, how could we describe public health care today? Basically, it comes down to a number of adjectives, such as "crisis," adverbs like "ER closures." Wait times have increased tremendously. We have a staffing catastrophe in public health care. Funding is completely inadequate. We are really in a death spiral of public health care in the province of Ontario, as the government continues to dismantle and destroy public health care and move toward an American-style, two-tier, privatized health care model.

Most people in the province of Ontario are adamantly opposed to that idea. In our recent referendum, held in May 2023, 98% of the people of Ontario that participated in that referendum, all across the province, said that they were not in favour of privatization.

So my real question to the committee is: Why are we doing this? It doesn't make any kind of health care policy sense and certainly no financial sense.

I've provided a number of documents, including this document by Andrew Longhurst. It is an incredibly well-researched document that discusses how costly privatiza-

tion is to the public health care system and to the people of Ontario generally, and why it makes no sense.

With that, I'd like to talk about a number of issues around public health care, and I'd like to talk about hospital funding in particular. Hospital funding in the province of Ontario is dead last compared to all of the other provinces in Canada. We're at the very bottom of hospital funding. And we're not just at the bottom of hospital funding, but we also have the fewest number of RNs per capita in our province compared to any other province, and we have the fewest number of hospital beds per thousand people in our province compared to any of the other provinces, so we're doing incredibly poorly.

With respect to public health care in crisis, I just would like to sort of illuminate a couple of points about that, because when I see the primary research that we've done on what's happening in our public health care system this year, what we've seen is:

- 868 temporary or permanent emergency department closures across the province;
- 316 urgent care centres have been closed;
- two outpatient laboratories have been closed;
- 11 obstetrics units have been closed;
- one ICU closure; and
- one labour and delivery unit was closed.

I know a personal friend in Listowel who was in labour, went to the L&D department of her local hospital, and found it closed, in the middle of labour. That is unconscionable, that we would allow our hospitals to be dismantled to this level. It has never happened in history. This is, again, unprecedented, and this is something that we are totally against.

That really amounts to 1,199 closures of various departments across the province, amounting to 31,000 hours of care or 3.44 years of care that were not delivered.

Hospital funding is inadequate, too. Let's just talk about the province of Ontario's funding over the last few years. In the most recent documentation from the FAO—that's the Financial Accountability Office—it showed that in the first quarter of this fiscal year, we were \$1.2 billion underspent. So we had health care budgets that were underspent by \$1.2 billion in 2023-24. In 2021-22, it was \$1.8 billion that was less than planned, and in 2020-21 it was \$1 billion less than planned. So there's a history of underspending in our public health care system, and that really has to be drawn to the people of Ontario's understanding.

Just to illustrate, what does that underspending really result in? Well, it results in not having adequate operational budgets for our hospitals, obviously. It results in not having adequate resources in our hospitals. If you look at just nurses, there are 24,000 vacant nursing positions across the province of Ontario. Locally, in the region of Waterloo, there are 140 empty nursing positions in our hospitals that can't be filled because there isn't adequate operational funding for it.

We also have had a long and continuous depletion of hospital funding for our beds. Basically, we're looking at a population in the region of Waterloo that has increased by 359% over the last 58 years, and it's expected to go

well above a million people in this region in the next few decades. How many beds should we have? How many beds should we have for that, and how many funded beds should we have? That is unknown at this point by the government of Ontario.

Then, to go on: The government of Ontario is not just underfunding our public health care system, but it's redirecting massive amounts of money into private, for-profit health care delivery like the Don Mills Surgical Unit.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** I would just like to conclude that—I could go on in detail, and perhaps I'll have an opportunity during the questions to discuss this analysis in more detail, but you do have my documentation.

What we're really asking for here is that the government of Ontario, at a very minimum, reach the average spending on public health care that all of the other provinces combined do. I would like to see our public health care system no longer dead last. It would be lovely if it was at the top, but we'd be happy with at least a 5% increase per year on funding levels so that we could reach the average of what all of the other provinces spend and eliminate this huge amount of money that's going into privatized health care, which costs the system much more—and I can explain that in detail if you give me the opportunity—and actually increases the wait times.

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**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We now go to Lyndsay Dajka, virtual. The floor is yours, Lyndsay.

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** Hi. My name is Lyndsay Dajka. I'm here today to speak about my concerns about the climate crisis and how the Ontario government can take action against it. As likely one of the only youth presenters at any of these consultations, there's a lot of pressure on me. I must speak on behalf of all youth in Ontario. I'm a university student. I'm balancing seven courses on top of this right now. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have to, but Ontario's youth need a voice, and today, I am that voice.

As I have watched the actions of the provincial government over the past few years, I have grown increasingly worried about the future of our province. At a time when we need to be taking big steps forward towards climate solutions, this province has been moving backwards. The Ontario government has tried to tear up the greenbelt, strip conservation authorities of their power, gotten rid of green rebates and so much more.

However, despite all of this, I still believe that Ontario's future is bright. We can turn this around. It's not too late to invest in densification instead of sprawl, protection instead of destruction and the future instead of the past. We have a lot of work cut out for us. To be successful, we must change the way we live, move and work, but I believe it is possible, and it starts with this budget.

As we are all aware, there is a housing crisis in Ontario. We need a solution—a real solution—because urban sprawl isn't it. Not only is it unaffordable, but it is also unfeasible and harmful to both people and the environment. Instead

of investing in more urban sprawl, I ask that you follow the lead of the region of Waterloo and focus on densifying cities instead of sprawling out into farmland and drawing a hard countryside line throughout the province.

The region of Waterloo's official plan plans to accommodate 125,000 homes by 2031, in comparison to the 70,000 that the province proposed, all while respecting the countryside line and building forward into a greener future. It focuses on intensifying city cores rather than building suburbs out into farmland. This plan supports communities by protecting the farmlands that feed us and the wetlands that keep us safe from environmental disasters and provide clean drinking water; supporting low-income housing; building complete, 15-minute walkable communities that allow citizens to use affordable active and public transport to get to jobs and amenities; and saving tax money.

This plan thinks far into the future and works to solve several important issues, including the housing, climate, gas and transportation and food crises. The provincial government can help continue this great work by investing in building and subsidizing city housing so that it is affordable to all.

The next important change that our province must make is a change in the way we move. Sixty-seven per cent of Canadians use cars at their primary mode of transportation, with the average car emitting 4.6 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide every year. Municipalities across Ontario have been working to solve this issue by investing in public transport systems to get people around the cities, but once you pass the city boundaries, it becomes very difficult to travel by any means other than car.

We need an efficient way to get people from city to city without using cars. Fortunately, there is a solution that's already available: trains. The train system in Ontario can get you to and from most large city centres, but it's expensive. Other than the GO trains, which are limited to the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, train tickets are extremely expensive—normally about three times more expensive than a European train going about the same distance. Emitting 28 times less CO<sub>2</sub> than planes, trains are considered the greenest form of non-active transport. My recommendation is that you invest in subsidizing train ticket expenses and in expanding the GO train system across Ontario so that it eventually reaches from Windsor to Ottawa.

There is a lot of work to do to build the infrastructure necessary for Ontario to transition into a greener future. Luckily, there is an entire demographic of people ready to get some hands-on action: youth.

The Climate Emergency Unit, an environmental charity in BC, has been calling for a federal Youth Climate Corps for years. In a 2021 Abacus poll, 58% of Ontarians said that they would support a Youth Climate Corps, and 81% said they would support or can accept it, which is even higher than in BC, where the program already exists.

This program would train youth in green-tech and climate-solution career skills by involving them in projects that confront the climate emergency, such as building green infrastructure, emergency response and strengthening the



environmental resilience of communities. It would cost approximately \$36,500 per person for a conservative estimate of about 25% of Canadians aged 18 to 35.

By involving youth in these projects, Ontario would become a leader in both green jobs and green infrastructure. More importantly, though, it gives Ontario's youth not only hope, but also a chance to make the future of Ontario bright. These past few years have been scary for Ontario's green space and climate policies. However, things have been turning around. The greenbelt land grabs have been reversed. Green energy projects are being encouraged to come back into the province. Please keep that momentum going and continue to focus on protecting Ontario's future.

In whatever budget decisions you make, I urge you to always consider the environmental impacts of those decisions. What is decided now will have immense impacts, for better or for worse, on the future of the province. The government of today has a responsibility for the province of tomorrow, the province that my entire generation will have to live in. All we want is a livable future.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** So on behalf of all the youth of Ontario, please, please don't forget about us.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We now go to the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition.

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Good morning. I'm presenting today on behalf of the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition, an alliance of groups across Ontario. Coalition members support the long-term goal of winning regulatory and legislative reforms that safeguard health, water and nature; ensure community—yes?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Excuse me, could you put your name at the front of your presentation?

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** My name?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Introduce yourself—thank you.

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Yes, sorry. My name is Susan Lloyd Swail. I'm a former registered planner and a former municipal councillor, now working for the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition as a consultant.

So where was I? Okay. We're looking for winning regulatory and legislative reforms that safeguard health, water and nature, ensure community participation and honour treaties and obligations with First Nations from the devastating impacts of gravel mining in Ontario.

We are here today to ask that budget resources be allocated to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, known as MNRF, for the full funding of an enhanced aggregate resources management program.

Why is funding needed? Well, despite industry claims that the aggregate industry is highly regulated, the Auditor General's value-for-money audit released in December 2023 reveals this is not the case. In fact, the audit found that cutting red tape has come at the cost of its inspection, enforcement and oversight activities. This lack of oversight has left communities and residents more vulnerable than ever to the negative impacts of gravel mining, includ-

ing serious air pollution, impacts to well water, excessive noise and vibrations.

Underfunding also compromises the ability of MNRF to fulfill its statutory obligation to administer and ensure compliance with the Aggregate Resources Act. The audit states, "To effectively deliver the mandate of the Aggregate Resources Act, we recommend that the" MNRF "assess the province's full cost of operating its current aggregate program, as well as the additional resources necessary to adequately enforce aggregate policies."

To that end, we request that the budget committee endorse our request to allocate funding to MNRF that fully funds advancing the recommendations in the Auditor General's report until a full cost recovery from industry can be achieved.

The Auditor General's audit of aggregate mining unearthed a long list of issues that indicate the ministry does not have the capacity to manage aggregate resources. I will outline a few of those issues today. The Auditor General notes fees to extract aggregate are too low to cover the cost of the management program, despite support from municipalities and aggregate operators for higher fees. It's kind of a no-brainer.

**1120**

There is no cumulative assessment process for aggregate resources. The ministry does not have a process to access the impacts of adding new pits within close proximity of existing pits and quarries. There is no way to minimize the combined effect of these operations on the air, noise and water and the effect of the health and well-being of nearby residents and wildlife.

The MNRF is failing to collect the fine payments owed for violations. There is no mechanism to enforce the payment of fines for non-compliance, and the ministry does not charge interest on hundreds of thousands of dollars in overdue fees. How would you like that on your next parking ticket?

Not only does this lack of enforcement encourage non-compliance; it shows contempt for communities living with non-compliant mines. Communities suffer from violations that impact their air, land and water. There are residents of Ontario living near pits and quarries within Waterloo region who cannot sit in their backyard or play with their children outdoors without breathing in particulate matter from rock dust.

Thirteen times more aggregate is licensed to be mined each year in Ontario than is used, as there has been less construction of new highways and housing than predicted in Ontario. Supply estimates are likely conservative. Further, the soon-to-be-released MNRF study of aggregate supply is relying on voluntary surveys from industry. As the Auditor General notes, this type of data collection "creates a high risk of incomplete and inaccurate reporting." The Auditor General's report also identifies the need to provide independent field verification of supply data.

Self-filing for certain activities has expanded since 2020 as a red-tape-reduction exercise. According to the Auditor General, the result is not efficient; rather, poorly managed self-filing condones illegal changes to operations, as

evident by the 48% of self-filed amendments that were not even permissible.

Finally, according to the Auditor General, the industry does not have processes in place “to ensure that sites are promptly rehabilitated, and returned to productive use after extraction is completed,” despite the Aggregate Resources Act requiring rehabilitation. Some 1,524 sites have sat dormant for at least 10 years, over 61,000 acres, the size of the city of Brampton.

The government needs to restore requirements to collect security deposits from industry to sustain a reserve fund, the rehabilitation fund. In 1997, the province eliminated security deposits and refunded \$48 million to industry.

Communities in Ontario experience the failure of the ministry to meet its obligations to minimize negative impacts to—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:**—residents and communities, including serious health threats from air pollution, flyrock, threats to groundwater supplies, and destruction of farmland, woodlands and wetlands. Until the Auditor General’s recommendations are implemented, we contend that the province should halt the approval of new aggregate licenses.

In closing, we ask the committee to give full consideration to our request to allocate funding to the MNRF that fully funds the ministry’s aggregate management program, including advancing the recommendations in the Auditor General’s report, until full cost recovery from industry can be achieved. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We will start the first round of questioning with the independents. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Good morning. Thank you for coming in and presenting to us today. I want to give my time to Jim. Jim, I felt your pain in your presentation. I felt your passion, and I want to tell you, kudos to you for detailing your experience in your presentation to us. But your crisis, unfortunately, is not new.

Yesterday, at our consultation, there were nine health care providers with the same crisis. I’m calling them “crises” because they’re beyond “issues.” They told us about the financial pressures to their operating budgets, staffing retention, staffing shortages, emergency room closures, horrible wait times. Physicians and nurses are reporting a high level of burnout, and this is not the Ontario that we chose to live in, that is experiencing this health care crisis. And I’m running out of questions, because there are so many organizations coming into this consultation and speaking to the committee about where we are in our health care crisis.

Take my time and really detail your suffering. Let the committee hear.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Well, thank you very much. I appreciate that.

First of all, I’ll give you a couple of examples of the mismanagement of our public health care system. For instance, if we look at the transfer of surgical procedures

to private, for-profit clinics, the idea is that this would be more efficient and it would cost less and it would improve our wait-lists. That has been completely debunked.

For instance, if we look at just cataract surgeries and hips and knees, not obstetrical work that was outlined two days ago by the Minister of Health, and just focus on, say, cataract surgeries: Cataract surgeries in a private, for-profit clinic have a \$205 privatization premium. That means that OHIP is paying \$205 more to see the same procedure done in a private clinic rather than in a public hospital. What that looks like if you multiply that by all the cataract surgeries that are done every year in Ontario—150,000 cataract procedures—that adds up to \$30.7 million in additional costs to OHIP for exactly the same procedures. That doesn’t include the fees to the surgeons who are completing this, or the facility fees that are being transferred out of our hospitals into private clinics. It doesn’t make financial sense.

But to illustrate even more fully, if we look at hips and knees, the privatization premium is estimated to be between \$9,500 for knees and \$17,500 for hips, depending on the complexity of the surgery. So that means that if we’re doing 32,000 knees and 25,000 hips in Ontario every year, that adds up to an eye-popping \$600 million more that OHIP has to pay to do exactly the same procedure every single year.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Those two procedures alone cost us \$630 million more every single year and it doesn’t include all of the other costs.

What I’m saying here is that it doesn’t make any financial sense, and when we take all of our human resources out of our public hospitals and transfer them into private facilities, we only have a limited pool of human resources, as you are very much aware of. And what that does is destabilize our entire public health care system and increase our wait-lists, adding more complexity, with fewer funding and fewer numbers of nurses and medical technologists and surgeons to do it in the public hospital. And it’s more costly.

I can go on in more detail if anybody would give me more room to talk about our OR capacity.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank all the presenters for being here.

First, I just want to tell Lyndsay, actually: Thank you for being here, because my very first experience with provincial government was doing exactly what you did. I appeared at one of the provincial committees and expressed my concern for health care. This was back 20 years ago. I say keep at it. You did a phenomenal presentation. If you’re ever at Queen’s Park, I’d love to engage with you on the issues that you’ve raised. You raised some good ones. I’d also love to share some of what the government is doing, but it’s probably too ambitious to do that today. But thank you so, so much, and if you do come to Queen’s Park, give me a shout. I’d love to connect.

I wanted to move to Jim. I just heard your comments and your presentation. I have to concede, my riding is home to the Windsor Surgical Centre, one of the community surgical clinics operated by the two doctors who continue to perform at the Windsor Regional Hospital. And so our experience in my riding and in our community is completely contrary to what you described to the committee.

I want to apologize to the rest of the committee. I'm going to just cite my hospital CEO, David Musyj; I did this the other day. I'm just going to give you, verbatim, what he said about our experience. I'm hoping you might be able to comment. He says: "The gaps in health care were highlighted, exacerbated and attacked relentlessly during the pandemic. These gaps did not occur in the last three years. They have existed for decades and will take years to fix. It will require bold actions and accepting the status quo is not tolerable. Doing nothing is actually a decision. I always say God gave us a neck for a reason: Stick it out every so often. Now is the time to stick it out."

1130

"Talking about sticking out your neck, a lot of attention has been made on the issue of creating community surgical centres. I appreciate some are skeptical. However, you don't have to look far to see one working and a massive success. Since 2020, we have the Windsor Surgical Centre in coordination and collaboration with Windsor Regional Hospital—in place to now handle some 6,000 eye surgeries a year. If it was not for creating the 2020 surgical centre, the wait-list would be close to 20,000 people. The only thing that changed for a patient is the location of the surgery. Oh, you know what? I take that back. Actually, they don't charge for parking. We do. Same physicians in the hospital; OHIP still works.

"This concept of upselling has been raised by those that unfortunately do not want to stick their neck out and would be the first to complain if the wait-list was 20,000 people. Can a patient pick a non-OHIP covered lens if they want to? Yes. I've been in health care for over 20 years. That's been around for over 20 years. Nothing's changed. Each political party could have made that change themselves. They had the opportunity. They decided not to. If you want a 100% covered lens, you get it.

"Another issue is this issue about having surgeries later in the day at hospitals' ORs. Sure, our ORs do reduce later in the evening, but for good reason. There's been many a study that indicates later-in-the-day surgery results in increased morbidity and mortality for patients. In talking to surgeons like Dr. Tayfour, he works all day, and asking him to operate at night is not good, let alone the age of a patient getting things like a cataract surgery to be done at 10 p.m. at night. Is that patient-focused?

"I can tell you we run our MRIs and CTs late into the evening. Our no-show rate is much higher than during the day. Is that a wise investment? Those that complain about community surgical centres—do they want us to start charging patients who fail to show up at night? I didn't think so.

"So I can inform you that whenever Windsor Regional Hospital has asked for help in the last three years of this

government, they've answered the call. This includes extra funding for hiring close to 500 more front-line clinical staff than we had pre-COVID, approximately 60 more medicine-surgical beds than we had pre-COVID. We got funding for lost revenue, funding to recruit more staff in the form of signing bonuses and the like. Nothing has gone unanswered."

That was CEO David Musyj of Windsor Regional Hospital appearing in front of this very committee as part of the consultation. I wanted to just ask for your comments on what Dave Musyj has said and how it's contradictory to what you have told the committee.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Well, I agree with some of the comments that you've made, but if you look at the province of Ontario generally and in every other region, including Waterloo region, what we see—for instance to deal with the gaps or the wait times that he's referring to—is that we have here in Waterloo region six underutilized or shuttered ORs. We've bought and paid for these ORs, but we're not using them. And we only use our ORs between the hours of 8 and 3 or 9 and 5, Monday to Friday, across the entire province. These ORs aren't being utilized into the night. They're not being utilized sufficiently. And quite frankly, our OR capacity across the province is 34% of underutilized ORs. So have adequate capacity to deal with things like cataracts.

Let's talk about cataracts. If we looked at our existing OR capacity across the province and established, say, opening 50—just 50—of our ORs for an extra two hours a day to do cataract surgeries, what would happen is that we would be able to deal with the existing backlog of cataract procedures that are on a wait-list across the province, which is 12,000. We would be able to deal with that in 12 weeks, just simply by using our existing OR capacity—and not even fully: again, just 50 ORs operating for two hours a day, five days a week, doing a minimum of two cataract procedures every hour. And they could certainly do more; it's about a 15-minute procedure. So we could easily take care of these gaps and these wait times across the province, and it would be a lot less expensive than creating a complete second tier of ORs in private for-profit clinics across the province.

Why would we consider building a—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Sorry?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:**—second level of two-tier medicine across the province, at enormous expense, and, at the same time, not really do anything to alleviate the overall cost and wait times? So I understand what you're saying, but it's an anomaly.

The issue that we have across the province is that we have underutilized our ORs. And the real issue that I have is why would we go to this two-tier, for-profit delivery of care when there's no mandate for that in the province? That wasn't included in the election. There was no discussion of whether or not we were in favour, as people of Ontario, privatizing our public health care system. In fact, in the lead-up to the election, the Ford administration said

that we, the Ontario Health Coalition, were categorically wrong in suggesting that they were going to privatize.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks to all presenters.

I'm going to start with you, Jim. I'm sure it's comforting to hear a quote from a whole year ago about how things are going to be okay when we've seen 1,199 closures, as you indicated in your report. I actually toured one of those closures in Minden over the summer and met with the folks there. Since that time, Haliburton hospital has, in turn, been overrun with patients, and even the Minden urgent care that replaced the Minden emergency room is now closing intermittently because of staffing shortages.

So my question to you is very, very transparent: What do you say to a government that is actively undermining the public health care system by, as you point out, creating a second system that is in direct competition with the health care system that people in Ontario value? And what does that say when you see the Ministry of Health yesterday double down on a system that is not working? She's actually expanding more private clinics when, as you point out—and the minister knows this full well. Ontario does not lack the physical space and equipment to improve wait times for surgeries and medical imaging. What is missing is the health care workforce and funding necessary to do the work. That's the research that came out to this government last fall. What does that say to you—that they are intentionally moving in the wrong direction, knowing that this is harming our universal health care system?

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Well, to me, it really begs the question as to why are they doing this? I would like to understand what is the motivation for a government to do something that the public of Ontario is adamantly opposed to, that costs us more and doesn't improve our health care system in the least? And there's adequate evidence from all over the world that privatization doesn't work. You just have to look at the US to understand how incompatible a two-tier health care system is with the needs of the people.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, but there is also a pattern of behaviour here we are seeing. Even the outsourcing of ServiceOntario service kiosks to Staples and to Walmart—and taxpayers are going to be paying for that refurbishment.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Right.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Walmart has a net value of \$434 billion. Why are Ontario citizens being asked to pay for these refurbishments? I want you to speak to the ethics of these decisions that are being made, please.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** I think the ethics are really questionable. The motivation on the part of the government to do this, in my estimation, is really all about corporate lobbying and the fact that we've got an \$80-billion health care opportunity for various private health care corporations that see—not just Canadian ones, but obviously American ones—opportunity in Ontario. It's a greenfield for them. We see opportunities for maximizing profit by these health care companies, and once these health care companies, specif-

ically the Americans, get entrenched in the province of Ontario to deliver for-profit health care, we will never get rid of them.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So they see an opportunity here—the corporatization of our health care system—

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Huge.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** —and they see a willing partner at the table.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This is a good segue, actually, to Susan. The Auditor General delivered a report in December—a scathing report on aggregates, as you indicated. Inspections have decreased by 64% over the last five years. There's high non-compliance, 74%, around following even the regulations that are in place. We see massive applications for more aggregate pits. Do you think that this is the Wild West for aggregate in Ontario?

1140

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Yes, it certainly would appear so, and it appears that the government is favouring industry, just as in health care, over the interests of communities and residents. This is very, very disturbing because we know that the negative impacts of gravel mining are really deleterious.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes. Specifically for us here in Waterloo region, we're dependent on the aquifer. There's a huge amount of pressure already on that aquifer and on source water protection. When municipalities are asking for indemnification because these pit applications are being approved, they are asking—like, local cities and councils are asking to be protected from future legal action because they're so concerned about this, but the province is overriding those local municipalities. What does that say to you as a taxpayer and a concerned citizen?

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Well, as we've just heard about health care, this is a government that seems to be interested more in industry and not protecting the citizens. We really need to make sure that we look after our communities, and it's really difficult for municipalities. You've got all kinds of communities—Wellington county, Puslinch, Caledon—who have gone to the province and asked them to increase fees, they've asked them to increase property taxes so that this industry can at least pay its way. It's not happening.

We are losing financially to an industry, again, that is having a very negative impact on our communities. You've got North Dumfries here, which has over 40 pits. It's becoming a desert. It's not really going to be a community, I think, if the aggregate industry has its way; it's just going to become a gravel desert. This gravel rush is just really affecting our communities. It's so negative.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Do you think that, given the scathing findings in the Auditor General's report around aggregates in Ontario, the government should at least call a moratorium, just to pause and potentially take action on some of those recommendations?

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Oh, yes. That's our demand.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** A moratorium now is our position.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay. Thank you so much, Susan.

Lyndsay, it was very good to meet with you at the protest around the regional boundaries some time ago. We were both listed in the government's report, who were monitoring our actions at that time. That's always lovely. You're a strong voice for youth in Ontario and locally. My question to you is simple: Who do you think best understands community, local councils or the provincial government when they override 10 years of regional planning?

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** Most definitely the local councils, and we've seen this, especially in Waterloo region. We've had local councils working with us on—their strategic plans have been considering the community. They've been focused on densifying cities, protecting the countryside line. It's really important in Waterloo region.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Do you think it's democratic?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to MPP Clancy.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** My first question is for Jim. You and I were at a meeting recently about our region needing a new hospital. At that meeting, we heard that 50 municipalities and 58 communities in our province will need new hospitals in the coming decades.

You spoke about P3s, the public-private partnerships. Can you talk a little bit about the added costs of how we invest in hospitals, and what other communities in the world and in Canada are seeing and doing to interrupt this waste of money that ultimately is paid by taxpayers?

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Okay. All right. Well, with respect to P3 hospital builds, that's obviously capital investment, rather than operational investment. The bulk of my presentation today has been around operational investment and ensuring that we have enough money to adequately fund our hospitals and adequately fund the people who work in our hospitals, because ultimately, if we build a really fancy hospital but don't fund it from a human resources perspective, what use is it, really? It's a nice building with no people in it. So we have to really focus on operational costs.

But to your point, Aislinn—and thank you for the question—P3 hospitals are enormously expensive. We know that they cost two to three times more to build the same hospital under the P3 model. Unfortunately, the government of Ontario has mandated that we would use P3 hospitals routinely, but we know just locally in the region of Waterloo that our P3 build down at Cambridge Memorial Hospital was a disaster. It took 10 years over schedule to get it done. It was only a small build and a refurbishment, and it cost untold numbers of dollars. We can't really understand how much that built costs, because it's hidden under the secrecy around private information as a part of the P3 appropriations.

I can say that in the UK, the NHS in England has outlawed P3 hospital builds, because they have bankrupted the health care budgets in the UK. I can also say that in the province of Quebec, they have also outlawed P3 builds for hospitals, because of the same financial sort of implications, the incredible costs.

In Ontario, I think we have to really consider how to control and get some level of transparency with respect to P3 builds. We really have to have the people of Ontario know how much it's costing and tell us if that's a good idea. The P3 industry talks about the transfer of risk from the public purse to the private purse, but that almost never happens.

There's a motivation on the part of all governments to go with P3s, because it really helps their financial visibility in terms of not having to put the cost of the hospital builds on their books, their accounting, despite the fact—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** —that we would be paying for P3 hospitals for 30 years at enormous costs—at twice the interest rates, for instance. It could become so problematic that in places like North Bay, they've had to eliminate 150 nurses to pay for the interest on the P3 build itself.

So there's a lot of communication on P3. Most of it is very positive, but I would just like to alert the committee that P3s can be very damaging and financially disruptive, disastrous for health care. So we should be very careful about how we approach new hospital builds.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thirteen seconds.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** I just wanted to ask Lyndsay: I put RESPs in for my kids and try to invest for their future. From what I see, we need to look at our—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Smith.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you, everyone, for coming here today. I was intrigued by Lyndsay's discussion. First, I want to applaud you for your dedication. Did you say you were taking seven courses?

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** Yes.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** How do you do that?

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** It's difficult.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I can imagine. All right, I will try and make myself as concise as possible, because I'm sure you've got to get to a class. I'm not sure if you're aware, but our government is transforming the electric vehicle community and Ontario is very quickly becoming one of the EV capitals of North America, with, I believe, one of the newest slated for St. Thomas, which is transforming. It's providing a green economy and jobs.

There is also something called the mineral innovation fund, to strengthen a green economy, and there's \$5 million to support this innovation fund, which is specifically not only green, but made in Ontario. That involves a made-in-Ontario supply chain.

I'm wondering if you'd have any kind of comments on that, given our government's trajectory towards a greener EV vehicle community.

**Ms. Lyndsay Dajka:** I would say that EVs are part of the solution, but they're not the full solution. They still have a few issues associated with them, such as the mining required to create the batteries, and the batteries only last a certain amount of time, then end up being waste, which is why I think the EVs are more of a supplementary way to help people who can't access trains if they live in rural

areas and they don't have access to public transportation. But I think the main focus should be on public transportation because it has less waste associated with it and it still has the opportunity to be Ontario-focused, just in a different sense.

1150

**Ms. Laura Smith:** E-buses, though, are quite a reality—I'm sure you've seen them—and they get individuals from one place to another as well. Actually, I'm the member of provincial Parliament for Thornhill, and I'm fortunate because we actually have innovation that deals specifically with transforming buses. They do that in an efficient way, and people unknowingly get on buses that have transformative, greener methodology on top of them. So I would be very mindful—everybody's very quick to get on a bus, but a number of them are e-vehicles, and I would just put that out there.

I'm sorry, how much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Four point two.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Okay. Aris? I'm going to be sharing my time with MPP Babikian.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you to the presenters for their insight and input.

My question is to Jim. Jim, I'm sure you agree that the current difficulties that we're facing with the health care system are not new. I have been living in Ontario for 42 years, and from the first day that I arrived in Ontario, the same crisis is happening, the same issues we're trying to address. This government, when it came to form government, created so many resources. For example, we allocated \$48 billion over the next 10 years to build health infrastructure, including over \$32 billion in capital grants to support more than 50 hospital projects that would add 3,000 new beds over 10 years to increase access to reliable, quality care. Furthermore, our health care expenditure for 2025-26 will be \$87 billion.

In addition, when it comes to health resources, we are allocating \$25,000 to train new nurses and we provided a \$46-million investment for that issue alone. We've hired 3,700 nurses since 2020; 15,000 new nurses registered; 30,000 nurses currently studying to become nurses. And we've added 14,800 health care workers to the system since 2020, 60,000 new nurses and 8,000 physicians.

So these are the efforts that this government has done in the last three years, four years to address the current crisis that we're facing, which was accumulated with the pandemic, and we have seen how the health care surgery lineup increased in hospitals to hundreds of thousands on the waiting list.

How do you reconcile all these efforts and attempts with your statement that we are going to two-tier medicine in Ontario?

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Okay. Well, we—

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** And another related question: How do you address the waiting list for the surgeries?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Well, I've already addressed the waiting list issue for cataract surgeries and the hips and

knees. We can do it in our unused OR capacity less expensively, more efficiently and faster than doing a duplicate level of privatized health care systems across the province. Here, your own Minister of Health has outlined how many new surgeries are going to be targeted to private, for-profit clinics.

But to address most of your points there, my question back to you would be, where is the plan? Where is the health care plan for the province of Ontario? How many nurses do we need? How many physicians do we need? Where should the OR capacity be? What kind of modalities should be delivered in Ontario in terms of departments? Should it be obstetrics, pediatrics, neurosurgery? How do we get that? We haven't done a plan—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes that.

We'll go to MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to our presenters, both in person and virtual.

I'd like to begin with Jim from the Waterloo Region Health Coalition. We've seen a lot of positions where the government will claim one thing and be doing something else, especially with the evidence of the greenbelt, claiming that was about housing when, in actual point of fact, it was a way to really line the pockets of a few very wealthy developers. It seems as though you're saying the same about health care: They claim that this is about care, when actually it's about taking public taxpayer dollars and putting it into private shareholder pockets. Your comments make one wonder whether these decisions that the government is making are actually intended to actively destroy the public health care system. I believe it's recently been said that the average wait time for a hospital bed is 22 hours across the province of Ontario.

I wanted to know, Jim, if you had any comments—there was recent news coverage about how the province has issued waivers to allow hospitals to now carry debt. So they must know that they're not funding them properly. They're now allowing them to carry debt and take out high-interest loans. Do you have any comment on that change from the province?

**Mr. Jim Stewart:** Yes. I think it's obnoxious. I think the fact that the province is under-resourcing our hospitals so dramatically and creating such a fundamental problem in our public health care system—it really speaks to the old sort of mantra of, "Create a massive problem and then claim that privatization is the only way forward." So I think it's disgusting.

But back to my last question: If you don't mind, I'd like to finish my comment about the fact that we don't have a population-based needs assessment for health care delivery in the province of Ontario. And why not? Because these types of technologies, like risk-grouping technologies, that are commonly used in other domains allow us not only to understand what needs we have in health care across the province but what would our future needs be so that we could build these hospitals and fund these hospitals appropriately across the province and not be doing stop-gap measures like throwing huge amounts of dollars and under-reporting how much

money we're putting into private clinic across the province, because we just feel that that might work—that might work. But there's no plan.

So I'd ask, again, the gentleman who asked me the question about how much money they're spending in the government of Ontario and hiring all these nurses, for instance, across the province of Ontario—I'd ask him to go back and ask the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health for an actual plan for us all. I think that would be very beneficial.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It is rather troubling when you hear members opposite, members from the government, peddling year-old quotes from Conservative Party donors.

It's very interesting. We have available infrastructure, we have world-class infrastructure in Ontario's hospitals, in ORs, which are currently sitting unused, and yet they're allowing the creation of these private for-profit clinics, re-duplicating a system that is already there, thereby allowing people to skim money off the top. It's deeply concerning.

I just want to thank you very much for your presentation, Jim. It's very troubling what we see and what the government seems to be peddling.

I'd like to turn my next question to Susan. Susan, I want to thank you for your presentation. From the sounds of it, it sounds as though aggregate mining is actually costing the province financially. Have any of the communities that you've worked with analyzed the local economic impact of the aggregate operation?

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Yes. The town of Caledon has done a fiscal impact analysis, and they've found that the aggregate mining in Caledon is actually costing the municipality. The level of road repair that was needed after all the heavy truck traffic cost the municipality, and they aren't getting enough money back in fees and taxes to cover those costs, so it's a net loss for the town of Caledon. And because of all the impacts to communities and the over-supply of aggregate that we have right now—this is why the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition is asking for the government to halt the approval of new applications.

We're asking for a moratorium going forward, and we think that the AG report certainly makes it clear that the province must pull the emergency brake and halt new applications until it can guarantee public safety and put a sustainable management plan in place. Because right now, there is no sufficient inspection enforcement. They aren't calling out violations and it is costing taxpayers. Many communities across Ontario are subsidizing an industry that should be paying its way.

I'd also like to say, while I have the floor: Why do we not treat aggregate mining the same way we treat mining in Ontario for other types of minerals? They have to have public records; they have to monitor; they have to tell us what they're doing. We don't have that the same with aggregate. It's very private-industry-focused and there's a lot of—why is it that way? It begs the question. It makes us wonder: Why is it so secretive about what the aggregate industry is doing?

If we actually want to build houses in Ontario or want to build apartment buildings, we should know what our resources are to be doing that and make a plan that is sus-

tainable and uses recycled aggregate as much as possible so that we can reduce the impact.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Susan Lloyd Swail:** Aggregate is used mostly for concrete, and if concrete was a country, it would be the third-largest emitter of GHGs in the world. So building more aggregate with concrete resources is actually causing not only a cost problem in Ontario, but it is a huge environmental cost for us, as well, and we need to really reduce our carbon emissions. Reducing our concrete in our buildings and using more recycled aggregate is a good way forward.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you very much. It seems as though this government is hell-bent on spending money and losing money, both from health care as well as the environment.

But I just want to congratulate Lyndsay for an excellent presentation. Kudos to you for standing up and for fighting for progressive change. I'm sorry that I didn't have any time to ask you any questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the questions and concludes the time for this panel.

So we want to thank all panellists, both virtual and at the table. Thank you very much for taking the time to prepare and to come and present to us this morning. We very much appreciate it. I'm sure it will be of great assistance as we move forward with the 2024 budget. Thank you again.

With that, the committee stands recessed until 1 o'clock.

*The committee recessed from 1203 to 1300.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Welcome back. We will now resume consideration of public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from the members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independents as a group.

Are there any questions? No questions.

CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

ONTARIO FEDERATION  
OF AGRICULTURE

COUNCIL OF CANADIAN INNOVATORS

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We will now call on the presenters. Our first table will be the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Council of Canadian Innovators. With that, as I said, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At the end of six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop. At exactly seven minutes, as I see it, I will say, "Thank you very much," and we'll move on to the next presenter.

We ask each person who speaks that when they start speaking, they introduce themselves for Hansard to make

sure we can attribute the comments to the appropriate individual.

With that, the first presenter will be the Canadian Cancer Society.

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Hillary Buchan-Terrell, and I'm the Ontario advocacy manager at the Canadian Cancer Society. Today I am joined virtually by my colleague Stephen Piazza, director of advocacy, and an ER physician and prostate cancer patient advocate, Dr. Anthony Dixon. Dr. Dixon has joined us to answer your questions on the importance of the PSA test and his own patient journey.

Cancer remains one of the leading causes of death in Canada, accounting for nearly 25% of deaths in 2022. According to our recent special report on cancer prevalence, over 627,000 Ontarians are estimated to be living with or beyond cancer. It was expected that over 94,000 people in Ontario would be diagnosed with cancer and 32,200 projected to have died from the disease in 2023 alone. In fact, I'm sure there are some in this room who have been impacted either by their own diagnosis and cancer experience or that of a loved one.

At the Canadian Cancer Society, we are committed to improving and saving lives. That's why we're always thinking about how we can advocate for well-rounded support for those with a cancer diagnosis, such as take-home cancer drug coverage, affordable tests and job-protected leave.

Two of the most common types of cancer in Canada are breast and colon cancer. For breast cancer, the average length of treatment and recovery is 36 weeks. For colon cancer, it's 37. Ontarians with cancer and their loved ones often worry about their employment security and how they are going to pay their bills while they undergo treatment, especially in our time of rising expenses. In addition to a decrease in income during treatment, they also face new expenses, such as medications that may not be fully covered by government or private plans, travel costs to and from appointments, parking, home care costs, assistive products and so much more.

We believe that supporting the medical, financial and employment needs of those requiring time away from work to face a chronic illness is a deeply Canadian value, a value shared by 93% of Canadians, from a 2022 Ipsos poll. In Ontario, workers facing a cancer diagnosis are only eligible for three sick days under the Employment Standards Act—three days where Ontarians are certain that they'll have a job when they come back to work from receiving cancer treatment. That means those in Ontario who are entitled to receive the federal EI sickness benefit do so at the risk of losing their employment, unless the Employment Standards Act is amended to protect their jobs while receiving treatment.

In Ontario, we must increase job-protected leave to 26 weeks, to match the federal EI sickness benefit. We need to ensure that Ontarians have a greater job security while they focus on their health. Nobody should have to choose between getting treatment for their cancer and their job.

In a similar vein, people with cancer should never worry about how to pay for their cancer drugs. Ontario is one of

the only provinces, other than Atlantic Canada, that does not cover oral cancer medication, also known as take-home cancer drugs. This inequitable policy has left people behind with worries about how they'll afford their medications if they do not have adequate private insurance. Patients often have to wade through weeks of paperwork and pay high copayments and deductibles to access programs such as the Trillium Drug Program. Conversely, people living in western provinces have their cancer drugs paid for by their provincial insurance, regardless of their age, socio-economic status and the drug's route of administration.

On top of this, the cost-of-living crisis is at the forefront for most Ontarians. They should not have to worry about choosing to pay their mortgage or their cancer treatment.

The government took a first step, committing to bringing together an advisory table to explore improvements to access for take-home cancer drugs in their 2022 budget. To date, we have not seen any progress to fulfill this commitment or work towards our recommendation, while we hear from cancer patients in Ontario who face increased delays, dollars and distress just trying to access their take-home cancer drugs.

While we urge the government to move swiftly to form this advisory table, our ultimate ask is to close the gap for take-home cancer drugs and make them accessible and affordable in the same way as IV cancer drugs. These oral medications are proven to better target and treat cancer. They also help decrease dependency on our hospitals, minimize patient-caregiver disruptions travelling to and from cancer clinics, and reduce the administrative burden on patients and our health human resources.

This is not our first time bringing forward this issue. We've advocated for this for over a decade. We were here at this committee last year advocating for the same. We also held our Queen's Park reception last March with a focus on this issue, alongside our partners in this space who collectively represent over 30 cancer patient groups, CanCertainty and Rethink Breast Cancer. The time is now to ensure cancer patients can receive the right cancer care with the most effective treatments in the right place and at the right time.

Last, but certainly not least, is another recommendation where Ontario lags behind other provinces and territories, and another that we brought forward in past submissions to this committee: PSA test coverage. When men in Ontario are concerned about their health, whether motivated by a family history of prostate cancer or being at a higher risk of cancer due to ethnicity, and are referred by a health care provider, they shouldn't be handed a \$37 bill. Our province is one of only two across Canada where PSA tests are not covered for asymptomatic men. This is in spite of the impact of diagnosing and treating cancer early, which comes with a nearly 100% five-year survival rate when prostate cancer is detected early, compared with 41% when it's caught after it has spread.

Early diagnosis improves health outcomes and benefits the health care system at large, with less invasive, less expensive treatments that often accompany later-stage cancers.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.



**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Ontario's current policy represents a barrier for men that is not merely financial; requiring them to pay out of pocket suggests this test is not important enough to cover and thus might not be worth doing. PSA testing should not be a nice-to-have; it should be an accessible tool that patients and their health care providers are empowered to use to help make informed decisions for their health.

We celebrate Ontario's recent announcement to expand access for breast cancer screening for women aged 40 to 49. The equivalent recognition for the importance of early detection of prostate cancer should follow, with improved access to PSA tests being a key part of that. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, so let's empower the one in eight in Ontario who will be diagnosed with it in their lifetime to access the care when and where they need it, in the same way as women have been empowered in their early detection of the top cancer in women.

Allowing for more opportunities for PSA testing will reduce barriers and grant men access to this early detection tool with their OHIP card, instead of their credit card. Cancer patients in Ontario deserve the financial, medical and employment support they need to navigate their diagnosis and live happy, full lives.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to answering your questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Our next presenter is the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be here today and I thank you very much for the opportunity. I'm Drew Spoelstra. I'm a farmer and the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Today, I'm here to share with you the input and perspective of the OFA and 38,000 farmers and farm families on ways that we can maximize one of the province's greatest assets: agriculture across Ontario.

Ontario's agri-food sector is an economic powerhouse, producing more than 200 farm and food products, fuelling rural communities, generating nearly 750,000 jobs and contributing over \$47 billion to Ontario's annual GDP. The province's agri-food strategy, Grow Ontario, aims to strengthen the agri-food sector, support economic growth and ensure an efficient, reliable and responsible food supply. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the budget consultation process and provide our recommendations to help strengthen our sector, our rural communities and our province.

The province has set strategic goals for Ontario agriculture and agri-food sector. At a high level, they are to increase consumption and production of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30%, food and beverage manufacturing GDP by 10%, and agri-food exports by 8% annually.

We will provide a full submission to the Ministry of Finance with our considerations for the provincial budgeting process. It includes a number of priority areas for the farming sector, but today, I will focus on only one in the time allowed, and that is investment in rural and social infrastructure.

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Our greatest needs continue to be roads and bridges, reliable broadband and cell coverage, and energy. Social infrastructure priorities are focused on investment in health care, mental health and continued investment in support of the veterinary sector across Ontario. Investment in these types of physical and social infrastructure programs will ensure retention and growth of existing businesses in rural Ontario and attraction of new businesses to communities across the province. Investing in rural infrastructure and social infrastructure will help us meet the Grow Ontario objectives.

Improving roads and bridges: Rural municipalities rely on programs like the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund for vital funding. The OMPF has faced significant budget cuts over the years which has put serious fiscal constraints on our municipalities. It is our recommendation that this be reversed and that the funding allocated under the OMPF be increased to provide adequate funding for rural municipalities to address repairs and maintenance backlogs for rural roads and bridges.

Moving to affordable energy, OFA endorses the policy recommendation put forward by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to "develop an integrated energy plan that balances reliability, affordability, and sustainability." Demand for electricity is rising rapidly. Significant investments in generation, storage, conservation and demand management will be needed to ensure access to energy remains reliable, affordable and sustainable for businesses and households.

Our recommendations around affordable energy include:

- taking a proactive approach to investing in distribution infrastructure across rural and remote regions;

- improvements such as three-phase power, in addition to enabling rural businesses' ability to invest in high-efficiency equipment;

- align with the Minister of Energy's letter of direction asking the Ontario Energy Board for proposals to improve distribution sector resilience in the face of a changing climate.

Natural gas infrastructure: We welcome the province's ongoing commitment to bringing affordable, reliable energy choices to Ontario by expanding access to natural gas in rural, northern and Indigenous communities. We estimate that the lack of natural gas access in rural areas costs businesses and residents more than \$1 billion in annual energy costs.

Through phases 1 and 2 of the natural gas expansion program, more than 17,000 families and businesses from 59 communities will be given a choice to switch to natural gas. Natural gas access will potentially save average households between \$250 and \$1,500 per year in energy costs, with a projected 30% savings for businesses across Ontario.

Supplying access to natural gas in these communities will dramatically boost economic opportunities by significantly lowering energy costs for farmers, families and business owners. We are grateful for the current projects and hopeful the government will continue to prioritize access to natural gas for rural communities.

As mentioned earlier, we asked the government to continue to prioritize and accelerate the rollout of broadband

Internet and improve cell coverage in rural Ontario. Access to reliable high-speed Internet has been a long-standing issue in rural Ontario. Farmers run modern businesses and require innovative technology and high-speed Internet access combined with reliable cellular coverage to remain competitive in a global agricultural marketplace.

We are grateful for the funding from the federal and provincial governments toward broadband infrastructure, and we are excited to see how those funds are being spent to increase coverage across Ontario. It is essential that funding is directed towards Internet expansion in rural areas and that it is equitably and efficiently allocated to those areas that truly need it most. OFA supports the Ontario government's commitment to connect every corner of the province by the end of 2025 through the Accelerated High Speed Internet Program.

Moving on, well-funded, accessible health care is very important to our farm communities, and we look to government to continue to protect Ontarians' health and strengthen health care system capacity and resilience.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** OFA is grateful for the Ontario government's investment in farmer mental health through the Farmer Wellness Initiative. This initiative provides vital support to farmers and farm families across the province, offering free counselling services and resources to farmers and their farm families in their greatest time of need.

OFA was also pleased to be part of a working group that developed the Ontario soil health and conservation strategy back in 2018, ensuring the voices of farmers and stakeholders were heard during those consultations.

Lastly, but certainly not least, we continue to ask the government to partner with the agriculture industry and veterinary professionals to address the shortage of large animal veterinarians across Ontario. Veterinarians are an essential part of the well-being of animals, the economic stability of rural communities and the safety of Ontario's agri-food system. Unfortunately, access to veterinary services—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes your time.

We now go to the Council of Canadian Innovators.

**Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas:** Good afternoon, Chair and esteemed members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. My name is Skaidra Puodžiūnas and I'm here as the director of Ontario affairs on behalf of the Council of Canadian Innovators, CCI. I extend our gratitude for this opportunity to contribute to the 2024 pre-budget consultations.

CCI represents over 150 of Canada's most dynamic technology companies, with 75 proudly headquartered right here in Ontario and many in the communities you serve. Today we are pleased to share our recommendations as part of our ongoing advocacy for innovative policies that foster job creation, intellectual property generation and commercialization, innovative procurement strategies and long-term economic prosperity in our great province.

Despite Ontario's considerable strengths, this past year has brought forth challenges from rising interest rates and

inflation to supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, health care vulnerabilities and housing shortages. In the face of these uncertainties, we believe it is crucial for the provincial government to focus on nurturing a robust domestic technology industry capable of driving sustained economic growth.

A significant cluster of scale-up companies forms the backbone of our economy, creating high-paying jobs and generating positive economic spillover effects. These companies are instrumental in attracting investments and have the potential to digitize and enhance traditional industries through intangible assets like intellectual property, IP.

I think my colleagues around the table will agree that all sectors are, in one way or another, tech sectors today. Whether you're in cancer research or you're in agriculture and farming, technology, intellectual property and data underpins all economic growth. Unless Canada and Ontario is ready to reap the benefits of the digital transformation that's happening, we're set to lose out on the wealth creation opportunities that sit right before us.

To ensure that our government remains agile in the face of these transformative economic shifts, we present a set of strategic imperatives. These imperatives focus on increasing access to talent, capital and customers for Ontario's fastest-growing companies. A fundamental aspect of our recommendations centres around the provincial government's mandate to drive economic development, recognizing that the most potent tool at their disposal is strategic procurement. When used effectively, it can act as a powerful force propelling homegrown Ontario scale-up technologies forward.

To enhance government procurement and harness its potential for economic growth, we propose the three following strategic initiatives:

(1) Procurement concierge service: Establish a procurement concierge designed to collaborate with local Ontario innovators. This service will play a pivotal role in guiding these innovators through the intricate procurement process. We suggest modelling this initiative on a successful program recently introduced in British Columbia.

(2) Building Ontario Businesses Initiative, BOBI: Continue to bolster homegrown innovation through the ongoing Building Ontario Businesses Initiative. This commendable government effort is already under way, prioritizing local firms and contributing significantly to the advancement of the provincial business landscape.

(3) Innovation pathway: Implement an innovation pathway starting in the health care sector. This strategic move aims to stimulate a responsive and integrative funding approach for innovators across the province, ensuring a dynamic and supportive environment for groundbreaking initiatives.

It is imperative to recognize that the Ontario government has already taken positive strides in the realm of government procurement. The Building Ontario Businesses Initiative stands out as a major step in the right direction. Additionally, the establishment of Supply Ontario as a one-stop shop for procurement reform is a commendable

initiative. In this regard, we advocate for the 2024 budget to further empower Supply Ontario, providing the necessary resources and support to maintain the momentum of procurement reform.

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While we emphasize the importance of procurement reform, it's essential to acknowledge that driving innovation requires a comprehensive approach. Our complete budget submission details additional proposals beyond procurement, including strategies to fuel growth through access to innovation capital, policies addressing the skilled talent shortage and broader initiatives to drive success in the digital economy. I've shared a copy of our submission with the committee Clerk.

The recommendations we bring forth today, born from the insights of our members, are strategically designed to strengthen domestic companies and align our government and economy with the demands of the digital age. As we move forward, we eagerly anticipate the opportunity to engage in detailed discussions on these strategies throughout the new year. We believe that by working collaboratively, we can shape a resilient and dynamic future for Ontario.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to fruitful discussions in the coming weeks.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations.

We will start the questions, this round with the government. MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you very much to the presenters in this round. I really appreciate the information you all shared with us.

Maybe I'll start, Hillary, with you. I appreciate the work your organization is doing. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the impact of technology and the impact it may be having on cancer. I represent Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Bruce Power has a big presence in the area. I was pleased to do a private member's motion this spring talking about medical isotopes, which are produced now by Bruce Power. I was amazed to hear about the potential that that technology may have on the treatment of cancer going forward. I don't know whether you have any thoughts on that, and whether you're seeing the role technology is playing in cancer treatment these days and what the future may offer.

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Thanks for your question. It's good to see you again.

I don't really have a lot of information on that today, but what I can say, just in terms of innovations, is that one of our recommendations here today in regards to take-home cancer drugs—most of the drugs that are coming on to the market these days are oral medications, rather than IV, so what we have is a situation where a lot of people are getting the most innovative drugs, the most effective drugs, for their cancer type and treatment as prescribed by their doctor, but they are not covered by the Ontario government. So we have a disparity in how much cancer treatment costs for patients who are prescribed an IV treatment in hospital, versus a cancer treatment that they can take at home

and help reduce the burdens on our health care system overall, as well as their own financial and logistical burdens getting to and from the hospitals, planning for home care and other expenses that come along with a cancer treatment.

But certainly, if you have more specific questions about medical isotopes, please feel free to reach out to me, and I'd be happy to get you some information about any research that we're supporting in this regard.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you. On the oral treatments, there must be an evolution to, in more recent years, more of them. I don't know whether it's dependent on which type of cancer, but can you give a little bit more on which oral treatments are for which cancer, and how those have evolved, as well?

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Sure. I'm just going to ask my colleague Steve to jump in here.

**Mr. Steve Piazza:** Thank you so much for the question. I'm Steven Piazza, from the Canadian Cancer Society. As Hillary said, over 50% of drugs currently being developed in the global pharmaceutical pipeline are in oral or take-home format, so we're seeing continued investment in this piece. They do speak to most drug categories, so when we look at the most common cancers, be it lung, prostate in men or breast for women, there are take-home drugs there.

What I'd like to emphasize for the committee: It's not as simple as a take-home option of an IV therapy that's available in hospital. These take-home drugs are often the most innovative and could be meant for very targeted therapies, so it's often a more innovative, better-targeted medication, and what we're really advocating today is to reduce the access barriers to that.

Again, Ontario is one of the only provinces where you will pay some out-of-pocket costs for these cancer therapies. In western Canada and other jurisdictions, they are looked at the exact same as in-hospital treatments.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Good. Well, thank you very much for that—appreciate it and certainly heard your advocacy on that, so we'll take that back.

Drew, maybe a question to you. Thank you for your presentation. Happy to live in a rural riding, and OFA has a big presence there. I wanted to—what I'm always amazed hearing about the industry is the productivity growth that continues generally in the agriculture industry and how the same acreage of land is producing significantly more now than it was a few decades ago. Are you seeing that type of growth continue in many of the sectors in the agriculture world these days?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Thanks for the question. Through the Chair: Yes, I think agriculture and farmers in general are always striving to do better and grow their businesses right across the rural landscapes. Certainly, we are seeing productivity growth right across every sector of agriculture, and that's driven by a lot of things, like precision agriculture and new technologies across the industry.

But as I said in my presentation, some of those things require support. They also require other things, like access to labour and having the right people in the right places to do the jobs that are necessary across the industry.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Good. Thank you, and certainly heard your comments on the infrastructure, including broadband. It's amazing the role technology is playing in every industry, but agriculture so substantially, with drones and others that can replace the process that used to be taken.

You mentioned earlier the government's commitment to continue the broadband bill, but out to 2025. Are your members seeing benefits from it? I know there is always more to do, but hopefully that there is some increased presence of broadband across your members' areas.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Through the Chair: I think in general some members are seeing the benefits, but it hasn't got as widespread, maybe, as we would like it to see yet. As I talked about, every corner of the province isn't as connected as we would like them to be.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** As you mentioned, certainly a lot of our businesses rely on broadband and better cellular coverage to drive our tractors, to collect data and to be able to export that data and use it in our businesses to try and find the best path forward.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Well, appreciate that, and we'll continue to role out that development as quickly as we can.

Perhaps a quick question for Skaidra, if you're still on the line: We were in London yesterday and heard great stories about the technology growth in that community and throughout the province, and actually someone talking about technology involved in building housing and affordable housing.

I heard your comments here, but you must be pleased with the growth of technology and innovation throughout the province these days.

**Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas:** Yes, 100%. I would also commend the Ontario government on taking steps to actually create data standards in the housing space so that municipalities have access to information in the sort of housing—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll have to catch that on the next round. Time is up.

We'll go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you to all presenters. Hillary, excellent presentation. The Canadian Cancer Society has, for the last 11 years, shown up at every budget consultation, made a compelling case for take-home cancer drugs, application of research and strategic investment in the health care system so that people don't get more ill and can recover fast. So I want to thank you for your leadership on that.

Your asks today are fairly straightforward, in particular, the need for the provincial government to get on board with job-protected leave for folks who are going through cancer treatment. I wanted to give you an opportunity to really bring home this point that if the federal government have extended the sick leave to 26 weeks and Ontario only has three days of job-protected sick leave, where does that leave Ontarians who are fighting cancer, who are afraid, who are afraid of losing their careers, who are afraid of dying and who are afraid of bring in pain? Can you please make sure that the government hears these points?

1330

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Thank you very much for recognizing that. I think what's important to remember here is that job-protected leave is really there to protect folks who don't have short-term or long-term disability with their employers. This is what we're really talking about. It's not folks like myself, or even yourself here at this committee, but really some of those underserved groups that are impacted by systems of oppression, and that are overrepresented in precarious employment and would have the least access to job protections through their employers.

We really want to see these be universal, and really, this is about not a financial investment from the provincial government, but rather just a legislative change that allows folks to apply to EI through the federal government, but have their jobs protected while they are receiving treatment. Cancer treatments, as I mentioned—there are averages for different types of cancers, but really, what we're asking for is some flexibility, as well, with this legislative change: that people can go and get treatment, and maybe there are periods of time where they might be well enough to come back to work. This also decreases the burden on employers to go out and find new employees, train them, all the onboarding costs etc.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay. So we know that the government has decided, after all of this time, to consult on this issue. After all this time, and after all the research and the evidence, and knowing where the federal government is, they're consulting on—it doesn't cost them any money to do so, right? It's just a change to the Employment Standards Act which will allow people who are fighting cancer to not lose their job and to apply for EI. Where are the barriers right now? What are we actually consulting on here? What's the counterpoint?

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** That's a good question. We haven't heard yet what the scope of the consultations will be, so we're eager to get involved there. I was pleased to be with Minister Piccini at the announcement where this consultation was announced.

But we've outlined and will be submitting our written submission to the committee as well, where we can go through those in detail. There are really four prongs. One is, instead of three days, make it 26 weeks. As I mentioned previously, it's about the flexibility and being able to take those times where you need treatment in installments. We also want it to match the eligibility criteria of other types of leave, in terms of how long you've been in a particular role at an organization. And the last one is really for futureproofing: Let's make sure that this doesn't need to be changed by legislation every single time that there's an update to the federal EI sickness benefit; let's make sure we can do it by regulation.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, those are excellent points. I look forward to getting your written submission.

But it does beg the question: Who would be against protecting cancer patients and ensuring that they have a job as they fight cancer. That's ultimately the question. Hopefully the government moves these consultations along

and we come in line with the federal government. I'm sure that other provinces have more than three days of protected leave if you're fighting cancer.

I'm going to move over to Drew. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture was a huge voice on the greenbelt issue, and so I want to thank your OFA members for their leadership. You talk about the 38,000 farmers in Ontario. It's hard to be a successful farmer if you don't have the land to farm, and some of the best land is contained in the greenbelt and is protected for farming—that soil and the research on the strength of that greenbelt, and the research that was shown to show that this is some of the best land in Ontario to farm on.

I want to give you an opportunity, please, to reference the OMPF again. You made a statement in your comments around how the downloading to municipalities has really hurt those rural, northern and remote communities from an infrastructure piece. Can you please expand on that and give us some sense as to what's at stake for farmers on this file?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Thanks for the question. Through the Chair: You're right, I mentioned the OMPF and how some of the reductions, and even not keeping up with inflation throughout the years, have been a concern for municipalities. That has certainly been a long-standing issue; it's nothing new. We know the municipalities out there are struggling. We know that municipalities are looking for new taxation and new opportunities to create new revenue. Some of that is certainly landing on the backs of farmers and rural residences, and that is concerning for us.

We also know that rural communities across the province—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** One minute—sorry.

We know that rural communities across the province are struggling to keep up. And rural municipalities are a solution to the housing crisis going forward and—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Absolutely. Thank you for saying that. That's such an important point.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:**—we need proper investments in social and hard infrastructure in those communities to get people there, keep people there in rural Ontario, so that we can access—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, AMO also has supported your statements as well around supporting municipalities. When they came to present before us, we learned that, over the next 10 years, municipalities are going to be paying \$4.9 billion for what should be delivered as provincial services. And you're quite right: That lands on the local tax base. So we are seeing astronomical tax increases because of that downloading, so there has to be a better balance there.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** That's right, yes. So—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to the presenters for being here today.

Hillary, I'll start with you. Thank you again for your informative presentation and your advocacy on behalf of cancer patients and their families. I was at one of your lobby days at Queen's Park this year, where we heard from one of your advocates, a patient advocate who expressed the hoops that she had to jump through to get the—I think it was a Trillium grant related to her take-home cancer treatments, and just the stress that that put on her and the time frame.

I wonder if you could, again, just highlight the burden of process that is really on those patients when they are applying to get reimbursed for at least a portion of the costs that they incur. One minute, if you can, please.

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Sure. Steve, do you want to jump in?

**Mr. Steve Piazza:** Yes. Thank you so much for the question. Very quickly: First, you have to exhaust your private insurance. You have to go through all of the administration to sort of access that treatment privately if you can—pay out of pocket for any copays or deductibles on your private insurance. Only then can you access any catastrophic funding from the government.

There may be disruptions in your treatment, which we hear often from patients, between those two processes. And at the end, you are left paying thousands of dollars in co-pays and deductibles for what is ultimately your cancer treatment. Again, this only exists in a handful of provinces, including Ontario. In other provinces, you don't see the costs and you don't have this admin burden that—thank you for speaking to—so many patients struggle with.

At the same time, as Hillary mentioned earlier, you're also working with your employer to see if you'll have a job to go back to, because that job-protected leave isn't there in a province like Ontario. So it really does leave patients despondent.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you so much for that.

Drew, I will turn to you now—the OFA. Thank you, and congrats on your election as president. I want to just talk a little bit about the impact of development on farmland. I know that certainly your members want to make sure that they are able to maintain their own production, but also, if they are a family farm, that they are able to potentially have their children take over their farms. And I certainly hear, when I visit farms in the province, that they are being affected by the rising cost of land and that basically agricultural land is being priced or valued as development land. Certainly, we saw that with the greenbelt and the \$8.3-billion scandal that's being investigated criminally now by the RCMP.

I wonder if you could just talk a little bit further about what kind of actions you see this government needing to take to help protect our farmland, so that children of farmers and potential new farmers can have access to land and be able to afford to buy that land to continue to provide the food that we need here in Ontario and around the world.

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** I appreciate the question, and thanks very much.

Certainly, long-term protection of farmland is a huge priority of ours and of our members across the province. We're appreciative of where the government is today on some of the changes to the policies that have been rolled out and taking a better look at protection of farmland going forward. Certainly, that is one big piece of the puzzle, but there are many pieces of that puzzle in terms of investment into some of these things that I spoke about earlier but also into planning for succession of the industry and other things like that.

1340

So that's where we're working with our members, to look at some of those three key factors around farmland, succession and how we can properly invest in the business going forward.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** We know that there are 319 acres of farmland disappearing every day in Ontario. Could you talk about the impact of that on some of your local farms?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Yes, it has got a big impact on—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We will now go to the government. MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you all for your presentations. My question is for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I'm local here—I'm from Cambridge—so I was part of some of the advocacy to expand our veterinary spaces at OVC. I did a fair bit of consultation with vets about how we get more people into large-animal rural, but I was wondering, from the farming perspective: What do you think needs to be done to try to encourage people into that particular sector of veterinary science?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** I think the struggle we often see is the fact that some folks just don't want to work in the large-animal space. It's certainly a lot easier to work with small animals and maybe quite a bit more flexible in terms of the balance of family time, work-life balance and that type of thing.

So I think one of the things we absolutely need to do is to engage farm kids right across the province who might be interested in the veterinary industry to pursue it. Certainly, in the past, universities have looked for only marks in terms of getting into those programs, but we need to take a look at some of the other factors, and not just maybe focus it on what marks you got in high school across those programs in high school. You need to take a holistic approach on how to get more people engaged in the industry.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Do you think that the concept of going into veterinary science as a career is something that the farm kids you talked about see as an option, or is it something that we could be talking with OVC or Guelph about, doing some more rural-area outreach programs to connect?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** I think there's always outreach that can be done to improve the program going forward. There are also different funding streams. It can be a daunting experience for someone, just getting into university and then having to do another four years or whatever of vet school after the fact. Nowadays, it's very costly to go through those programs, and if there are opportunities to link that type of thing to ensuring that those graduates

will work in the large-animal space or work in a remote and rural area, I think those might be beneficial going forward.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** One of the things that I heard and that I was trying to pitch internally was the idea of loan forgiveness or grants for students who are willing to commit a significant period of time—like, four or five-plus years—to working in a rural community in that area. From your interaction with farmers and vets, do you think that's something that might help?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** I think it is for sure, and some of those things, I believe, have been floated already. Those are good initiatives that I'm sure we can work on further going forward. From our end, we can partner on some of those things too and really look to increase the capacity and some of that outreach to the farm kids, I'll call them, and make sure that everyone is aware of some those initiatives going forward.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair. I'll turn it over to MPP Dowie.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank all the presenters. Thank you for your contributions to today. You've given us lots to digest.

I wanted to start, actually, with the Council of Canadian Innovators. You mentioned the access to procurement and the BOBI initiative. Given how we're still somewhat in the infancy—the strategy was announced back in March 2022; now we're getting up to the two-year mark. But I know Supply Ontario and the then-minister came down to my community and met with a number of local businesses that wanted to contribute to provincial procurement.

I wanted to get a sense from you as to any comments that you have of the process so far to reintroduce that procurement to small business. You mentioned the concierge service to help those that just don't have the infrastructure to really understand what needs to happen. I'll certainly take that back, but I'm wondering: What's your take on how things are progressing with the new BOBI initiative?

**Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas:** First, thanks for your questions. I think just the very essence of it is consulting with local vendors, local technology companies, local innovators and, in many instances, going externally for procurements that are almost not consulted with local capacity at default.

I think that it's also really important to look at what Supply Ontario is doing and look at the growth of this agency that really will be integral. They have made some commitments to actually create a one-window access point for all procurements across the Ontario government. If that is true, we would be really big champions and amplifiers of this because so much of procurement is really just a frustration with the process, a frustration with understanding where businesses are in the bidding process, a lack of feedback once a successful vendor is chosen, and what that feedback is to vendors who are unsuccessful and want to continue to improve their process and their strategy moving forward.

These are some of my comments when I'm thinking about this.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you for that.

Chair, how much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One point two.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Just a last question for you in the remaining time: One of my local businesses, Harbour Technologies—made-in-Ontario, robotic-made medical gowns—can't get their price down below a Chinese import that doesn't have the same quality. Therefore, it seems like they are cut out from procurement. I'm wondering how many other cases like that you might be aware of and recommendations for resolving that.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas:** Yes, I think, again, it's really thinking about long-term spillover effects and really thinking about boosting the economy. So it's not just looking at, face level, the cost of production, but it's also thinking about how many jobs are being created, how many partnerships with local universities and local think tanks, and really thinking about contributing taxes to the economy and just looking at things beyond that sort of surface value-for-dollar speak and rethinking value and rethinking, "Where does the IP live with this company? Are they being patented in Canada?" So many other considerations—the intangible aspects of a business, data sharing and so forth.

It's really thinking about things beyond the surface level and really questioning: If most of our gowns are being imported by China, is this a good move for Ontario moving forward? Can we think through this more strategically?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I just wanted to ask Skaidra a question. We have actually introduced legislation to diversify the procurement chain—it was my private member's bill—and to make it more transparent. The government, unfortunately, voted against that.

But my question for you is simple: When governments offer sole-source contracts with a lack of transparency in how contracts are being awarded, what impact does that have on the innovation sector?

**Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas:** A huge impact. Thanks for your question. I think, ultimately, it sends not the greatest message to local innovators in terms of opportunities that exist in the province and opportunities for growth and job creation and so forth. So I think all the more opportunities there are to diversify and give other channels of bidding an opportunity to our local and headquartered companies that really do want to grow and prosper in this province is extremely, extremely important.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much. That was a perfect answer. We certainly feel the same way about Staples and Walmart getting contracts to offer ServiceOntario kiosk services in those locations.

Chair, I'll pass it over to my colleague MPP Kernaghan.

1350

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters here today in person as well as virtually.

I'd like to begin my questions with Hillary. Hillary, it's quite an alarming statistic that one in eight will get prostate cancer, and it should be an easy ask of the provincial government to add this to the standard requisition form, given that it's only \$37.

I want to thank you also for your point about the lack of access to pharmacare. I'm sure you know that this is something that the opposition has been raising for decades. Can you give the committee an idea about how expensive the diagnosis of cancer could be for someone in Ontario?

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Thank you for your question. That's a big one, just starting from your last question. But what I will say, and I want to give our patient advocate here a chance to speak on PSA testing, the \$37 is the cost to the patient. When the government bills for this test, it only costs \$9.50. And so when you talk about overall cost, we had some estimates that put it in the range of about \$3 million annually as a cost to the government for PSA tests.

So I'd just like to pass it over to Dr. Anthony Dixon virtually here to talk about his experience with the PSA test.

**Dr. Anthony Dixon:** Hi, everybody. Thank you for allowing me to be with you today. My name is Anthony Dixon. I'm an emergency medicine physician in Chatham, Ontario, and I have prostate cancer. I can't say I'm prostate-cancer-free yet because I haven't made the five-year mark, but essentially, a PSA test that I paid for myself saved my life.

There's a sense that because that PSA testing is not covered, it's not important. To give a sense of things—I've counted 10 men around the room today—if you look at real numbers, if we can detect prostate cancer before it spreads, 100% of you will still be alive in five years. If prostate cancer is detected after it spreads, only four of you will be alive in five years. So for \$100, which would be the cost of 10 PSA tests, you could save all those lives.

So I've become a strong advocate in my recovery and my survival. With this, it's still a long journey. It was a terrible journey to go through, but I'm here now and well. I'm here to put my hand up and say that we have to create change and look after the men of Ontario.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you, Dr. Dixon, and thank you for sharing your story and all the best to you on beating this pernicious, awful disease.

It's also a very scary point, however, that you brought up that somebody might lose their job with only three days of protected leave. I wanted to know, and this might sound flippant, but it's a serious question: Do you know of anyone who has beaten cancer in three days?

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** I certainly don't know. Maybe Dr. Dixon might have a better idea of that from his own experience, but no, I don't think so. I'd say the average lengths are quite long: 36 for breast cancer and 37 for colon. So that's a long period of time, and that even exceeds what we're asking for here. But making sure that people can take that time off gives them that time to heal.

Just further to your point about pharmacare and the cost to cancer patients, this is going to be a real focus for us, and all of our recommendations today are about that, really, the cost of cancer to patients. There's a tremendous amount of

out-of-pocket costs that patients have to pay and their caregivers in order to receive their cancer treatment.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. I also wanted to commend you for continuing the fight for take-home cancer drugs, for oral suspension cancer drugs. It's something that we have brought forward to the floor of the Legislature. Unfortunately, the government did vote no on that, but we look forward to the day when they will finally vote yes. It's something that was unfair, so please continue your advocacy.

I'd like to move over now to the OFA with Drew. Drew, it's good to see you. I always love presentations from the OFA. They're always thoughtful and well-considered. You touched on a number of different things, and it makes me think of what comprises a thriving rural area: a local school contributing to the neighbourhood identity, the community identity, as well as health care, where some of the presenters at the committee have been very concerned about the privatization of health care, and especially how that will impact health care delivery in rural communities.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** In my community in London, we're surrounded by amazing farms, great producers. I just wanted to ask you about veterinary shortages right now. The London Humane Society has a partnership with Fanshawe College, trying to design an on-site training program that supports animal care and training for more veterinarians. Do you think partnerships of this kind will help with large-animal vet shortages as well?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Certainly, I think partnerships are going to be part of the solution going forward, but it's going to take a lot of short-term and long-term strategies to really solve the problem and the shortage of veterinarians across the province. What we as an industry, I think, really want to focus on is the large-animal sector, because that seems to be our biggest struggle right at the moment.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. I just wanted to thank you for bringing up the Farmer Wellness Initiative. I think it's a brilliant program, incredibly important. Do you have any idea, if I have a couple seconds, how much you would like to see to make up for the cuts to the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** I can't give you a number right now, but there are significant dollars that need to be invested—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Everyone, thank you very much for coming in and presenting very detailed presentations.

I want to spend some time with the Canadian Cancer Society. This is very close and dear to my heart. Anyone on this committee, if you know someone or a family member who is affected by cancer or died because of this horrific disease, then you will know what I am relating to.

I lost my mom within three weeks of her being diagnosed with cancer. My sister ended up having that same cancer, and we fought. So I'm not understanding the shortness of recovery time. It's horrible. It took her 18 months to get

back into society and to be working again, and that's with my whole entire family and her family just being with her, helping her. This impacts our mental capacity, our physical capacity, financial capacity, and so I hear you on the issues that you're coming forward with today.

I want to thank the Canadian Cancer Society for continuing to advocate for better health care funding, access to cancer diagnosis and medication, and work leave for cancer patients. Please, to the government: We need to extend that. We need better policies for that, and access to caretakers and palliative care.

My question is: Health care funding per capita is lower in Ontario than all other provinces. What impact does this underfunding of health care have on cancer patients, and what investments should the provincial government be making to bridge this gap? Can you be specific in your explanation?

**Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell:** Sure. In terms of financial investments, as I say, talking about take-home cancer drugs, it's not a large investment in the grand scheme of the health care budget. We're talking around \$30 million a year, but this is for people to get the best treatment for their cancer and to be able to go on and live healthy, full lives.

I'm really sorry to hear about your family members experiencing cancer, and I hope they're doing well now.

I'll bring Steve in here to talk about some other ideas.

**Mr. Steve Piazza:** Excellent. Thank you so much for the question, and again, I do hope your sister is now doing well.

To be specific, I think it is the issues we're talking about, so take-home cancer drugs, job-protected leave and the PSA test. When we look at an issue like take-home cancer drugs and we compare Ontario to the rest of the country, we know that approximately 20% of underinsured people in Ontario are underutilized in take-home cancer drugs. So with that additional investment, we're not only reducing out-of-pocket costs for people who are prescribed take-home cancer drugs; we're increasing utilization so that more people could access these medications in Ontario compared to the other provinces.

To answer your question, in general what our themes today are about is accessing cancer care, and that's really where we see the underinvestment in Ontario. We want to promote access to the high-quality cancer care you get—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Steve Piazza:**—from professionals like Dr. Anthony Dixon and so many working in our health care system. So we need to remove those barriers, so that you can access Ontario's health care system, and that's really where we'd like to see those investments, be it take-home cancer drugs, job-protected leave or the PSA test.

1400

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you very much.

Do I still have time? I have a minute?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Forty seconds.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** My next question is to Drew. I want to just to practise it very quickly. We need to keep our farmers healthy. Health care in Ontario is in a crisis,



as we all know, particularly in rural areas, where underfunding and understaffing have shut down numerous emergency departments. What specific investments into rural health care do we need so that farmers can continue to be healthy and get the health care that they deserve?

**Mr. Drew Spoelstra:** Well, I think investments into mental health is certainly critical going forward, not only for farmers but for farm workers and people on farms, but those—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That's the end of the time.

That is also the end of the time for this panel. I want to thank all the participants for the time you took to prepare to come and talk to us today and for your great presentations.

NITH VALLEY ECOBOOSTERS  
YMCA OF THREE RIVERS  
ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY  
ONTARIO

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** While we are changing the tables, I just want to introduce the next panel: Nith Valley EcoBoosters, YMCA of Three Rivers and Kae Elgie. As with the other panel, we would ask the members to not have conversations at the table so we can start with the new one.

We will have seven minutes for your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." At the end of the one minute, I will say, "Thank you." With that, we ask each member, as you make your presentation, to start with your name to make sure we get the comments attributed to the right delegation that's here with us.

We will start with the Nith Valley EcoBoosters.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and guests, my name is Dorothy Wilson. I'm an officer with the Nith Valley EcoBoosters, a citizens' group that has been active in Wilmot and Wellesley townships in Waterloo region since 2015. We organize public educational events, collaborate with various organizations in our region and beyond, and advocate on issues related to achieving and supporting a long-term healthy environment in our community.

My presentation this afternoon will focus on recommendations for the next provincial budget that relate to addressing climate change. The recent UN Climate Change Conference, COP28, signalled the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era. Negotiators at the conference recognized the importance of a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels as a critical step in addressing the existential threat of climate change. All levels of government also need to recognize this fact and take appropriate action. We want the province of Ontario to make substantial financial investments to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

In the past few years, the Nith Valley EcoBoosters has hosted webinars on electric vehicles and your home's energy use, with hundreds of registrants, not only from the townships but also from locations across Ontario and beyond. Both of these topics provide numerous examples of how the

provincial government can provide incentives to reduce the use of fossil fuels, and here's a list:

(1) Reinstate the electric vehicle rebate to match the federal government rebate of up to \$5,000 for qualifying EV purchases. British Columbia, Quebec, all the Maritime provinces, the Northwest Territories and Yukon all provide rebates for EVs. BC's rebates are geared to income, definitely a benefit for those who are less affluent. In addition, some jurisdictions provide rebates to assist with the cost of installing home chargers. According to the plugndrive.ca website, the average Canadian driver can reduce their car's greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 90% by switching from a gas-powered vehicle to an EV.

(2) Reintroduce the grant for home and condo owners to install home charging stations. The grant should include assistance with the cost of making any necessary alterations to the home's electrical system, such as upgrading your electrical panel and possibly adding a new line from the street. For your information, the majority of EV owners charge their cars at home, at night, when overall electrical usage is reduced.

(3) Provide incentives for owners of existing apartment buildings and businesses to install charging infrastructure. Ideally, legislation would ensure that all new multi-unit residential buildings have charging infrastructure installed during construction. This would include the main electrical cable, as well as the wiring needed for electronics to manage payment for usage.

(4) Install charging stations in government-owned parking areas. For example, reinstall the chargers in the GO train parking lots and add more. Also, continue to provide incentives through the EV ChargeON Program to install chargers in Ontario communities outside major cities. This program, which is currently available for businesses, not-for-profit corporations, municipal governments and Indigenous communities, has an application deadline of January 31, which should be extended. Locations such as municipal buildings, sports complexes, auditoriums, concert halls, courthouses, and shopping and restaurant areas are all ideal for chargers.

Chargers for EVs need to be as available as gas stations. Recently, the provincial government has grasped the importance of investing in EV and battery manufacturing; now, they need to help Ontario's citizens join the EV revolution. A robust EV ecosystem here will help bring additional manufacturers.

(5) Provide incentives for hydro utilities to increase the capacity of their grids. There have been cases where individuals and organizations have been prevented from installing chargers or solar panels because of limited grid capacity in their area.

(6) Assist municipalities and municipal contractors to switch to electric public transit vehicles; for example, municipal buses and school buses. Once they are purchased and the charging infrastructure is in place, the cost of running such a fleet would be much cheaper than with diesel buses. In addition, no-emission school buses improve the air quality around our most vulnerable citizens.

(7) Provide incentives for businesses to also switch to EVs. They are ideal for delivery vans that drive short dis-

tances and burn a lot of fuel while idling as the driver takes packages from the van to the final destination.

I would like to switch now to talking about home energy use. This is also an area where the provincial government can effect change to reduce the use of fossil fuels. The federal Canada Greener Homes Grant program currently provides grants for upgrades to homes, mixed-use residential buildings and low-rise multi-use residential buildings in Ontario, in conjunction with Enbridge Gas's Home Efficiency Rebate Plus program. The federal program is slated to end in 2027; however, because it has been so popular, it is anticipated that it will end sooner.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** We recommend that the provincial government prepare to fund a similar program as soon as possible. This type of program enables people to significantly reduce their use of fossil fuels by replacing gas or oil heating equipment with ground- or air-source heat pumps, or at least by making their homes more energy efficient through added insulation, high-performance windows and doors, smart thermostats etc.

Along with grants and incentives as suggested above, the provincial government really needs to prioritize spending money on public education regarding the need to transition away from fossil fuels in our daily lives. The public needs to be fully informed on the critical need for this change to take place in order for us and future generations to have a healthy environment.

In conclusion, we strongly recommend that the provincial government pay particular attention to the necessary transition away from fossil fuels when designing the upcoming budget.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now hear from the YMCA of Three Rivers.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Good afternoon, MPPs and community partners. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Mike Ennis. I'm the CEO of the YMCA of Three Rivers. My pronouns are he and him.

The YMCA of Three Rivers is a collection of three former YMCAs that merged in 2020: the YMCA of Stratford-Perth, the YMCA of Guelph-Wellington and the YMCAs of Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo. The YMCA of Three Rivers is now one of the largest Ys in Canada. We have been in this region for more than 150 years. We operate in over 75 locations in the region and have 2,000 staff and volunteers in this region. We help people of all ages and backgrounds to lead healthy, active lives by providing them access to programs and service that contribute to their livelihood and well-being. We also work as a collective of YMCAs across the province and country. Our experience as front-line service providers in communities like Cambridge and surrounding areas give us a window into how Ontarians are doing and what they need to thrive.

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Two words that I hope you take away from the presentation today are viability and sustainability. We need to make sure that as we continue to recover from the pandemic, community organizations like ours are financially and

operationally viable and sustainable so we can continue to provide the services that Ontarians need.

Right now, our biggest concern is child care. YMCAs in Ontario are the largest provider of licensed child care spots in the province with over 76,000 licensed spots and 5,000 licensed spots right here in this region. We have over 52 child care locations in this region.

We're committed to delivering high-quality, affordable and accessible child care and are working together with the province to deliver the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan. However, now that we no longer have the ability to set fees, we are reliant on government funding to ensure we can maintain our programs. With this change, many Ys across the province are finding the current approach is insufficient in not covering the true costs of program delivery, leaving us with funding shortfalls and creating uncertainty going forward.

That's why, as part of budget 2024, we urge the province to deliver on the commitment to develop a new child care funding formula built on full cost recovery and ensure that our funding for 2024 is enhanced so programs can succeed. If the child care system is not properly funded, our child care programs will be at risk. This could mean losing valuable child care spaces in our community that parents depend on to go to work, which would impact the everyday livelihoods of families in Ontario and our economy as a whole.

YMCA has been working together with the province on the development of a long-term funding formula that ensures all of our costs involved in delivering high-quality child care are covered, but the release of the formula continues to be delayed and, frankly, we can't wait any longer. We urge the province to move forward to release the new formula as soon as possible in order to bring certainty to us and others in the sector.

We also are seeing huge challenges in child care with regard to workforce. Workforce shortages are making it difficult to keep current programs running and to consider expansion in the future. We were pleased to see the province release the child care workforce strategy recently, which included enhanced pay for registered early childhood educators, but more needs to be done. We would love to see the province name early childhood education as an in-demand profession in Ontario. We'd also like to see greater investments in training programs and compensation levels for early childhood educator assistants, who we rely on greatly in order to run our programs.

Another area we're seeing workforce shortages is in aquatics. I'm sure a lot of folks have a Y story of how they learned to swim at the Y. COVID had a stop in lessons and also people learning how to become swim instructors for almost three years. Water safety is therefore a growing concern in our communities and really integral to working and growing and living in Canada.

We're proposing the government fund a program to train young people to be lifeguards and swim instructors at no cost. That would help young people skill up to become lifeguards and swim instructors and provide more families with access to swimming lessons, improving water

safety for decades to come. For an investment of only about \$500,000, we could train 250 young people to be lifeguards and swim instructors this year alone. We'd be happy to explore this idea further in coming months.

Another issue we're seeing in our communities is the rising cost of living. As a large community employer with government contracts, we urge the province to consider the pressures of inflation and other cost escalations in all provincial funding agreements so that we can continue to compensate our staff fairly and serve the needs in our community.

The Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, funded by both feds and province, is a great example of a government-funded partnership that is being impacted by inflation. A lot of these infrastructure projects were agreed on pre-COVID. We have multiple projects right in our very own region here that really just cannot keep up with the demand of inflation.

The Y is eager to continue to be a solutions-orientated government partner and we are grateful to be included in the budget consultation process. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this conversation today.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you.

Our next presenter is Kae Elgie.

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** That's right, thank you. Yes, I'm Kae Elgie. I live in Waterloo, and today I am here on behalf of Architectural Conservancy Ontario.

I have a really simple request, but I'm a little nervous about making it because it's just going to feel like nagging—like that parent or teacher you thought was too strict and kind of out of touch, who would preface things by saying, “But I'm just doing this for your own good.” Anyway, here goes.

My first slide—we'll move to that. This is our budget request this year, just to maintain the provincially significant heritage properties that we Ontarians own. They range from things like the Josiah Henson Museum of African-Canadian History that's in my home community of Chatham-Kent to the Niagara power generating station, Barnum House and the Aurora train station. There's a list of about 50 of them all together that the ministry of heritage staff put up for me. These are all properties that have been designated under the Ontario Heritage Act as being significant, not just for people in Cambridge or Waterloo region but for the whole province. They're really important to everyone in the province, and we feel they need proper maintenance.

Next slide, please. I guess we're not seeing those slides anymore. Oh, well.

**The Clerk pro tem (Ms. Lesley Flores):** It will come back up.

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Okay. It was a list of pages.

My next one is why this was an urgent request. Well, it's because of two properties that have been in the news a lot lately: Ontario Place and Ontario Science Centre, particularly the Ontario Science Centre, where the degree of neglect was really quite shocking for a lot of us. This award-winning architectural building that just—now they want to tear it down.

So our request is quite simple. Okay, we're down to a couple of more slides; it says, “ACO's budget request.” We just want a maintenance budget to be allocated to the list of designated provincially significant heritage properties owned by the citizens of Ontario. And we want this budget to be sufficient to ensure that annual maintenance is actually funded and performed, like it wasn't for the science centre or Ontario Place and probably all the other ones on this list. Furthermore, we feel there needs to be funds to catch up for any past deferred maintenance that we would like to see done within the next two years, which, incidentally, is just before the next election.

Why is this important? Well, among other things, it will create jobs for people. But let's move on to the next slide.

I think the real reason it matters to me is because it's so good for the environment. It's so much better to maintain the buildings we have, especially ones that have been deemed to be really important to us culturally. But it's much more important even than replacing them with very highly energy-efficient buildings, even if it's a passive house. It can take up to 50 years to make up for the greenhouse gas emissions that happen when you build that new building. When you think about, “Okay, we have to get the iron ore up north and then we have to refine it and bring it down to Hamilton, then move it around.” It all adds up and it makes a huge difference to our climate.

On top of that, our landfills are running out of space. We're just filling them up with these buildings. I see that all the time in Waterloo and it just makes me crazy.

There's also—we should be two slides ahead right now, if we can. Let's go up. Next one—yes. That was the one about climate change and the next one is just about the economic and community benefits. These are tourist attractions, a lot of these buildings; that's why they're important. So you can build tourism economies around that.

There are a lot of studies done in the United Kingdom—there's about 75—showing that it really makes a huge impact on people's mental health and their community well-being just seeing these buildings, or even just spending time in them. It's astounding, the research that's been done on that.

The next slide: This is not a new request for us, sad to say. We've been making this—this was 2017. We were asking for a policy change that would make a priority for maintenance. We did a special meeting when we met with MPPs in Queen's Park in 2017. We focused on school buildings. We said, “Can you switch the way the funding formula for schools is, so there's a higher priority on maintenance instead of just capital, so you don't have to tear down a school to get a better one?”

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In 2021, we made another budget request for parity funding for public infrastructure but we're asking again this year. And I must say, I'm really influenced by this report that just came out by the Financial Accountability Office, which pointed out that we really need to be preparing our buildings for the effects of climate change and that it will cost us \$4 billion. We can expect to have \$4 billion gone by the impacts of climate change in the next few years, but

we could save \$1 billion if we started properly fixing them right now.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** This is my last slide, and that's the request: Maintain provincially significant heritage buildings Ontario owns. I'd just like to point out that there's no red tape involved in this. Just do it, and it will be good for you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations.

We'll start the questions this round with the official opposition: MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks to all the presenters. Good to see you here. Thank you for making the effort.

Kae, you started off your presentation by saying you felt like you would be nagging. All of your requests make perfect sense. Basically, your theme for me is, "Try not to do any more harm," so, "Do no harm." Your point about maintenance funding—it actually should be built into the operational cost, because why would we let a building fall into disrepair? It's poor fiscal management. It's irresponsible, as you point out, and if the government has \$600 million to fund an underground parking lot for an Austrian spa, then they certainly should have enough money to maintain the current infrastructure that they've already funded. So I want to thank you for bringing forward some common-sense solutions.

Mike, very good to see you. Your presentation mirrored the one that we heard in Oakville from the YMCA of Oakville, from Kyle Barber. Ironically, during that session, the rain had come into the ceiling and the ceiling fell down; it was very symbolic, I thought, of where we are right now with child care.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** He made the point of the challenges that YMCAs are facing, because your business model has fundamentally changed, right? And obviously, you touched on the importance of staffing and valuing those ECEs, to make sure that we can actually offer those programs.

What's ironic, I think, is that this \$10-a-day child care program was supposed to expand those spaces and we're actually seeing a contraction of child care spaces in Ontario. I just wanted to give you the opportunity to make that case for a new funding model for child care and that new relationship that you have with the province, and perhaps break it down to an example of what it means for you, but also parents and the children in the system.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** For sure. Thank you very much for the ! getting a child care spot right now, it's going to be very challenging. Right now, to think about if you were pregnant or if you have your child, to get that child care spot is challenging.

We at the Y are fully supportive of affordable child care. It's an incredible experience for the kids, for the families and for our economies. What the \$10-a-day has done has driven the demand up, but there was already a wait-list before \$10-a-day, so that wait-list increased, and without the staff to provide the experience and the care for the children, we can't add on any more spots. So it's not just about the capital side and increasing the spaces and the

infrastructure; it's the staffing that really is the ability to serve those kids and families.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** And so what is needed to change that relationship? I mean, where specifically is the funding needed to go?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** We're very encouraged by the new legislation that's coming out to change and to increase pay, but the reality is that it will be more and more in terms of education and just industry respect for our child care folks. The pandemic was really challenging; during the three years, there was no shutdown—there was one shutdown for child care. And so, for the rest, they kept going with the protocols to make sure that we have that emergency child care in our different regions.

So the profession is coming out of that tough time, and making that profession—with pay, with development, with all those different things that come with it—an attractive career is really needed right now. And the funding formula being solidified allows all operators to be able to have certainty moving forward on how to support the staff.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** From a cost-recovery perspective, can you give us an indication of what's the differential for your particular YMCA? What's at stake, dollar-wise?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** This affects Kyle Barber in Oakville and all across the province, differently in every area. Some areas in the province, you will see half the room is empty. Half of the spaces are completely empty because we don't have the spots. Some areas—more rural areas—will be the same. Every area is a little bit different, but there are empty spots across the entire province that aren't being filled because we don't have the staff, not because we don't have the space.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, it's a common theme. I mean, we can build all the hospital beds we want, we can build more classrooms, but if we don't have the people and we're not valuing those people to draw them into that field, it's having the exact opposite effect of what the \$10-a-day child care system was supposed to bring forward.

Thank you very much though for the work that you do. I mean, the YMCA of Three Rivers—the merging was very innovative, I do want to say. You've built your capacity and stretched those dollars, I think, as far as you can.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** And now it's time for the province to step up, I would say.

I'm going to move over now to the Nith Valley EcoBoosters. Dorothy, good to see you and thank you for being here. You make some important points. I mean, we hear a lot about the subsidies that have been made to EV manufacturers. This is coming out of a cycle of confusion, I think, for the government. When they first were elected, they cancelled the EV rebate immediately—within 10 days, I think. Those charging stations were ripped out of the GO stations.

They seem to be making a bit of a turnaround, so the timing of your presentation is quite good today. So with regard to new builds and possibly retrofitting—because there are good jobs to be had in this field—are you suggesting that the building code needs to be changed and altered to be inclusive of EV charging stations?

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Yes, that's exactly one of the recommendations. And I believe that previously to the current government being elected, there were some incentives—or not incentives; there were legislated rules that new builds should have the capability of having EV chargers in the building. So that definitely is something that needs to happen.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, and you've made the connection, right? If you're a consumer and you're looking to purchase an electric vehicle, you want to make sure that you'll have access—easy access—to charging stations. You know, my son is an electrician. Even getting those local, personal charging stations put into your building or home is very challenging. So streamlining this whole process would actually, I think, incentivize people to buy more electric vehicles.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Yes, absolutely. Particularly for people that are buying a condo or going into an apartment building, they need to know that they're going to be able to access a charger.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes. Well, thank you very much for being here. It's, once again, all presentations—good comments—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We go to the independent, MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here. I only have four and a half minutes, so I need to be quick, but I just want to say, I'm with you on all fronts.

In that sense, I don't know where to quite start, but I'm going to start with Kae because you talked about Ontario Place and it's very close to my riding in Don Valley West and I've been very active on talking about this file, including the recent Auditor General report that came out and said that the business case was basically a sham. And so, as a chartered accountant, I look at those kinds of numbers and say, "Yes, this is a problem." Certainly, that kind of money that they're planning to spend on building a new one could be significant—instrumental in not only rejuvenating the existing science centre, but also maintaining other buildings that you've talked about in our province, so thank you.

I just wanted to ask if you could talk about the view of those of you in this advocacy group who see the potential for the demise of the Ontario Science Centre and how devastating that would be for our province.

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**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Well, it really is, because the proposals are to put it in a smaller space and really diminish the impact that it has made over decades on children and inspired them to love science and so on.

I'll just go back to my environmental hat: I just hate the thought of the demolition. I hate it when I see a two-storey house torn down and replaced with another two-storey house. This is even more devastating, but the cultural impact can't be talked about, really.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** That's great. Thank you.

I will turn now to Dorothy. Dorothy, I'm sure you're familiar with the climate change impact assessment report

that came out this year. It was actually delayed. We're not sure it was ready in January. It didn't come out until August. It was delayed by the government. Basically, big red flags everywhere: in terms of the impact on agriculture, on our soil, on our air quality, on lots of different aspects of the environment, and of course, emissions. So I wonder if you could just, again, share with us for one minute your reaction to that report, if you're familiar with it, and some of the finding that you want to just drive home for the government.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Well, I think the main thing is that we're really not paying close enough attention to what we need to do to try and mitigate climate change. We're going to have some of it, so we need to know how to adapt to it as well. I think it's just not on the radar for a lot of people. We really advocate that the provincial government needs to be spending money to not only educate people so that they know what a critical issue this is, but to do whatever they can to, for example, get people to reduce their fossil fuel emissions. I think that's about all I can say.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Yes. Certainly, in last year's budget, I think the phrase "climate change" appeared only once. We have a government that seems to be reluctant to use that word.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I think about, yes, we do need increased capacity. Our province is growing. We have high demand, but we need to be doing everything we can.

In Quebec, they're looking at actually paying for the cost of the heat pumps because that is actually cheaper than building new capacity, and of course it's better for our air quality.

Very quickly, talking to the Y—thank you again for being here, Mike. We know the impact. We know that you're losing \$10,000 to \$13,000 a year if you're caring for an infant because the cost-recovery model has not been implemented, and you don't know that the new policy is. You can't operate like that. You can't, even as a not-for-profit, be tapping into your own reserves, if you have them, to be subsidizing that.

What is the impact right now in terms of—you talk about some of your rooms being only half-full. How quickly will you have to start closing more spots?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That's the end of the time.

We now go to the government side. MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank all the presenters.

Actually, I'd like to start with Nith Valley EcoBoosters. Dorothy, I'm an EV owner, so I feel your pain of sorts of the charging infrastructure. I found a case where I was visiting, actually, MPP Kernaghan's riding a few months ago, and my hotel had a charger—several chargers actually—but they were all used overnight, because people there overnight and didn't unplug them because they were sleeping. And so inevitably—you mention the GO stations. I can see it happening there because if you're going to work, parking and plugging in, the car stays there all day, and you don't have access to that charger for eight-plus hours while people are working.

I guess I wanted to explore this with you, as to how we can best position charging infrastructure so that this doesn't happen: that it's not a long-term charger; it's meant to be transitional, just like on-street parking would be, where you pay the meter, for example.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** I think what's going to happen there is that if this kind of situation is happening often enough and people are complaining, then there's going to need to be more availability of chargers in those locations, at the hotels, at the GO station. I think the government can assist with that by providing incentives to both businesses and also by paying for the chargers on the property that they already own, like the GO train parking lot. So I think it's going to be an issue of supply and demand. If it's found that this is a serious problem, then there's going to have to be some action on it.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** So just to confirm, for my knowledge, the intent for those chargers is for them to be occupied all day, instead of just the amount of time it takes to charge the vehicle?

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Well, if you're looking at a level 2 charger, which you are in a situation like the hotel or what used to be in the GO train parking lots, those chargers do take quite a number of hours to charge the car. So they're designed for somebody who's going to be plugging in and leaving their vehicle for a number of hours.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay. That's what I've got at home. I've got a level 2 charger. It does take six-ish hours, if I could call it that—

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** And you charge it at night when the electricity is cheaper, right?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Yes, I do, but also charge it because that's when I'm at home. I don't charge during the day, because that's when I'm travelling, driving, for this position.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Most EV owners do charge at home.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to move on to explore the rebate question. You're probably aware the government has made a commitment to manufacturing of electric vehicles and the ecosystem in the province of Ontario on the premise that, if we don't land the investment in Ontario and if we don't offer the funds we have allocated to EVs to the production side, we're going to lose out on that investment and the economic spinoff, but also the kind of social justice aspect of it where—we don't know what China is doing for environmental controls. Teslas are made in China, for example. In the United States, different states have different environmental controls. They still burn coal, for example. So we can have a cleaner production and one that's more reflective of human rights in the province of Ontario.

But if we don't land those EV assembly jobs here in the province, those manufacturers will go elsewhere. We need to use the resources of the province to attract those manufacturers. So that's why if we carve up the pie and divert to Chinese-built EVs to be subsidized, for example, we're not going to land those assembly jobs, because our package won't be rich enough for that company to decide to locate here.

So I'm wondering if you might have some thoughts as to what that—if we're going to go down this road, how

much assembly should we have if we're not going to be all-in on assembly?

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** I think you need both, because you need the subsidies for the manufacturing, which also brings other benefits, but it also will show individuals that you're really serious about going to electric vehicles and other measures to reduce our fossil fuel use. So I think it's not an either/or in my opinion.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay, so we should be subsidizing products imported from Asia in lieu of subsidizing—

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Until we get the Canadian cars made, right?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** But will it ever be that way? I mean when you look at Ontario-built vehicles today, I wanted to buy one, and they're just aren't enough name plates that are made here. A lot of them are made overseas now.

I think, aspirationally, we'd love to land so many, but realistically, there will always be a lot of production overseas. So the government is working hard to the Driving Prosperity strategy to land those jobs here and the EV production so we can have that environmental control, have that human rights aspect to building them. If we don't make those investments, someone else is going to land those investments and not be bound to the same standards that we operate by.

So I hope that gives a bit of an explanation as to why the government has made the decisions that it has made.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** I don't have anything else to say.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** All right. So, with that, in terms of the availability—you mentioned the ChargeON program. It's available to rural communities, predominantly, and the purpose of that is that there are so few EV charging stations in rural communities, quite frankly. Like, there's just—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

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**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** So in terms of the scaling up of it and making it available, are you saying to just put it wide open, or do you want to match the demand or the lack of supply to the incentive? What's the vision that you see for those funds?

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** I guess, because I think it's a good program, I would like to see the date of it extended, so that more communities could take advantage of it. I think it would also be good if it was a higher incentive, as well, because it still requires the municipalities to pay a significant amount of money. I was at a town council meeting on Monday, and they were saying that it's going to cost \$50,000 each for two level 3 chargers, so even with the rebate that the government is offering—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll go to the opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to all our presenters here today. I'd like to begin with Mike from the YMCA. Mike, I think your comments about viability and sustainability are ones that I hope members of the committee will all take to heart. Recently the province stripped a series of checks and balances from the funding rules for daycares that join the national program, including the

restriction on undue profits as well as the removal of ineligible expenditures, which would have prevented operators from using public money to finance mortgages and pay executive bonuses. It almost seems to reinforce an ideological adherence to profit instead of care, and using money for a few pockets rather than for the betterment of all and for actual service.

On the CBC earlier this week, Carolyn Ferns, who I'm sure you know, from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, said that operators should be able to submit budgets, and if those costs are reasonable, they should be covered.

This committee has gone back and forth about how stressful it can be for community organizations to have their core needs funded, many of whom are forced to fundraise to meet basic needs; otherwise, they could be in a situation where they're forced to cut services. Just to pick up your words, it's not a sustainable situation right now. Is there anything else you'd like to add for the committee about how the funding formula and lack of sustainability go hand in hand?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** I think I would just maybe re-emphasize the promise that there's a new funding formula coming and ask for that to continue, for the speed of that to continue.

One of the things that is challenging—I appreciate the comments about the YMCA of Three Rivers here in this region. Merging Ys in different regions, and any organization, can be challenging, and we have seen a lot of benefits from that. One of the things from working in all the different regions, as well, is that there's a different model in every region. And so not only are we trying to figure out what the model looks like from the country to the province, but at our Y alone, we have three different municipalities that are looking at costs and what you can submit and what you can't submit differently. So the administration behind that is really challenging.

I think the only thing I would add is just that certainty for all Ys, but I think all operators, to be able to properly plan. The point I'd put on that is that if folks come out right now and we want to open a new child care centre, I would think not just for the Y, we really have to think, "How are we going to staff that? How are we going to fund that? What does the sustainable model look like?"

So just to reiterate, the understanding of the new funding formula is critical to continue to grow.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. And thank you for your advocacy for early childhood educators, because they're talented, they are excellent and we need more of them.

Next, I'd like to move over to Kae. Kae, I just want to thank you. You're not nagging at all. I strongly believe that this government really does need someone looking over their shoulder to keep them on the straight and narrow.

Heritage properties, as you've outlined, provide a sense of place, a sense of space, a neighbourhood identity, a community identity. But I think, in addition to that, they're also a key economic driver, and that's a good reason to preserve them. I think of, in my area, Film London, for instance, who are able to film in wonderful heritage loca-

tions and how that can reinforce other different, connected industries. It's phenomenal. There's a huge impact.

I believe that the most recent research I was looking at was that 40% of landfills are full of building waste right now.

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Yes. We've been trying to do a little informal study, because we can't seem to get actual statistics on it, to find out how much construction waste and how much waste is in the landfills. But those are estimates from the States around that.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. And I believe some of the science and research I was looking at was that heritage windows, when treated properly, can actually have a better R-value than the most modern window.

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Yes, and they last for 200 years, compared to 25, so again, we're keeping stuff out of the landfill.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. We may as well use what we already have, rather than—

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Well, exactly, yes.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** You mentioned also that the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario has been asking the provincial government to increase the building maintenance budget for seven years. You told us that neither the Liberals nor the Conservative government have heeded your advice. What hope do you have that 2024 budget will finally include adequate public infrastructure maintenance?

**Ms. Kae Elgie:** Well, I hope that the growing awareness and sensitivity to climate change will prompt some of this. I think that's a big driver. I also look at the right-to-repair movement and that private member's bill that passed unanimously federally, and think that shows that there is some idea that we should keep what we have and make it last, instead of just having a throwaway society. And I would love to think that the economic pressures, the inflation, are making people think twice about whether they'll replace what they have, as opposed to repairing it.

So I hope times are changing. It feels like a broken record, but I hope that those combined things—and this Financial Accountability Office report is really important too. There are so many reasons to do it. But I know it's always easy; just like at home, it's always easy not to clean up or not to fix that broken latch on the door or something. So I think we need to just think of the money we can save. Think of the money we can save by doing it now.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. I think people, once upon a time, had an idea that resources would never end, and maybe that was reinforced by the amount of free wilderness that we had here in Canada. But we know that that is shrinking, and shrinking day after day.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to next go to Dorothy with Nith Valley EcoBoosters. Thank you for your presentation, Dorothy, and thank you for all of your incredible comments. I did want to ask: How are we going to provide all the electricity that will be required for the transition?

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** That's a good question. I know it's a valid concern. One thing that's happened recently is that the provincial government has made a call out to wind, solar and bioenergy projects. I think that, hopefully, if there

is response to that and the provincial government can show that they're in it for the long term, then that should add to our electricity capacity and, hopefully, help us to be moving away from the reliance on gas power—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Good afternoon. Thank you, all three of you, for coming in and presenting today. As my colleague said, we've got 4.5 minutes, so I am going to be as quick as I can.

I want to start with the YMCA of Three Rivers. Your sister and brother associations came in, they did their presentation, and unfortunately what you've pointed out in your presentation—it was very detailed, as well—it's not new to us here at this committee. But thank you for detailing your presentation. I want you to take a minute or so and elaborate on your 2024 key—and I'm talking about "key"—budget priorities. And also, if you can touch on how the Waterloo region has an approximately 8,500-long wait-list for child care. Is that number correct?

1450

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** I haven't seen it today, but it's long, yes, for sure.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** What morale has this on the community?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** For sure. High-level budget priorities—our Y and YMCA Three Rivers is at \$75 million a year in revenue. Half of that is child care, just to give you a perception of how important child care funding is now to our Y, and I think that would be really indicative for the province and the country. So it's a high-level priority on the funding formula and what that looks like and everything that goes with child care.

I would say, overall, the ability of us being a larger Y now has given a lot more support and resources to our staff to be able to understand what this new program looks like and support our staff on the front lines. I would say morale is better now than it was a year ago and, hopefully, it will be better a year after that.

If you think back to COVID, for our child care workers, it was eight and a half hours a day of masks, goggles, tons of protocol and, quite frankly, working with people who weren't that happy with dropping their kids off. Just in general, it was a really tough time. They're coming out of that. It's the industry as a whole that is rebounding, but that's why all of the things we speak about are important to help them to do that.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Have you fully recovered from COVID effects or are you facing other effects? And I want to get down to it: How did Bill 124 impact your staffing?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Because the Y—I would take way more time—we have eight different areas we serve folks. In most of them, the demand is back, but the financial recovery is not where it needs to be.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Okay. Thank you for putting that on record.

I want to go to Dorothy. First, I want to say thank you for supporting my colleague Mary-Margaret McMahon's

legislation to promote flood awareness. There's a lack of government funding for flood prevention. It risks our safety and risks increased infrastructure and insurance costs down the line. Can you share your viewpoint on that for us?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Dorothy Wilson:** Well, I guess I would say yes to that question, but I think that a lot of people don't really realize how floods can be a major issue for us as the climate changes, and we certainly need to be addressing ways to prevent it. Protecting natural area, wetlands, is certainly one way to do that.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you for the record. Thank you. No more questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We now will go to the government side. MPP Smith.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Through you, Chair, first I want to start by saying thanks, all, for being here today. I'm going to start my remarks and my questions with Ms. Elgie. So I respect what you've said. I too love the Ontario Science Centre. It has inspired a love of science and technology. I was a member of the science centre just a couple of years ago with my family. It is still a wonderful place to go. But moving to the Ontario Place location will become an anchor within that tourism sector, and relocating the Ontario Science Centre is the most cost-effective way to modernize that location. The move will pay Ontario taxpayers \$257 million over 50 years compared to the cost of it remaining at that location.

I should also add that that includes our love of the Cinesphere, which will remain; that beautiful pod, that iconic appearance, will still be there. It will also provide 275,000 feet for exhibits and a lot of walking space for public community. So I just wanted to get that point in there because I think that's relevant to the conversation.

I wanted to swivel back to Mike Ennis. Thank you so much for your contribution. You talked about so many interesting subjects. You talked about wages, which are so important to increasing employment in that area and getting that child care funding formula together. You're correct: The new wage will make registered ECE workers the fourth-highest paid across the country. But what's happening right now is three quarters of the ECEs currently working in centres are part of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, which I'm sure you're aware of.

The work that's being done includes an innovative fund that will establish the ECE school, work and planning partnerships to support local working challenges, because we all saw this coming and we realized that we need to bump this up. I have to give kudos to the Minister of Education for moving on this initiative so quickly.

But anyway, getting back to the question: Talking about this legislation and the plans and the formulas you talk about, can you talk about what this will do for the labour market and how, hopefully, you can provide any comprehensive impact or support—or we can provide any support in that area to get that going?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes, what would the impact be? More kids that are in care—that experience that preps them



for school, that sets them much further apart when they start, with parents back to work. There are a lot of parents right now who are figuring out, “We can’t get a spot while our child is between zero to four, so how do we do that?” One stays home; one goes to work. They work at home. They figure that out.

The impact for the kids is large and, of course, the parents going back to work and the economy as a whole, as we continue to figure out all those new additions that you talked about, for sure.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I was going to ask you another question because so much of my work in my previous life—I worked with different schools. First of all, I’m going to ask a similar question: Do you have an after-school program at your particular location? I’m not completely familiar with—

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes, we have 52 different locations. Some are stand-alone child care; some are after-school. So that’s a combination of both.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Okay. So at your particular location, though; I’m just looking at—

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yep.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Okay. I was just going to say, talk about the impact of food. I know this has come to my attention: snacks, after-school delivery of—can you talk about that a bit?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes. It’s critical. Actually, why the funding is so critical is because you wouldn’t want—we pride ourselves in providing healthy, nutritious snacks. If we start cutting in some areas, food is usually one of the first ones to go. So it’s critical to after-school, before and also our student nutrition program that is funded. It serves over 100,000—that’s outside of child care, but it serves 100,000 kids in our region and is critical to their development and their experience.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I think the government provided funding for that, snacks to schools.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yep.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I understand that.

I think access to nutritional food is key to economic success. It’s funny because you’re bringing up so many topics that are very warm in my heart, because sometimes those meals that those kids got at those programs could possibly be the only significant meal they got that day.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Absolutely. Correct.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** So that’s something that I found in my discoveries as I’ve done the work that I have. Okay, so thank you.

Just time?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have two minutes.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Okay. I’m going to defer over to MPP Babikian.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you to our three presenters for their detailed inputs and advice.

My question is to the YMCA representative, Mike. What government investments have you seen have the most direct impact on communities, and what are the areas that need more support?

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Yes, for sure. At the YMCA, we really serve zero to 100. We’re very lucky to do so in a lot of different areas.

To highlight a few government investments that have been so impactful, I’d start with our EarlyON programs that the YMCA operates multiple in this region. They provide that experience for caregivers and kids.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** It’s different than child care, but if you don’t have child care spaces that experience is critical. Our employment services are funded, and those are fantastic. We just touched on student nutrition. And a language assessment program: This region is either number one or two in the province for the largest newcomer population, and that language assessment program is critical to be able to support their needs in the community.

I would say that the biggest need is child care, as we’ve identified, and to continue to figure out how we do the funding formula.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** What are the areas where the three levels of government can co-operate to provide more service to achieve the mission and the goals of the YMCA? 1500

**Mr. Mike Ennis:** Again, child care is half of our business. I also think continued partnership in employment, given everything we’ve talked about and you’ve heard today, helping and serving our newcomers to be able to be finding jobs in their community—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time, and it also concludes the time for the whole panel, so we want to thank all of the presenters for taking the time to prepare, and the time to be here and bring us your message. Thank you very much for that.

PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO  
ONTARIO COLLEGE OF FAMILY  
PHYSICIANS  
COMMUNITECH

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** As we’re changing the guard here, our next panel is Parks and Recreation Ontario, the Ontario College of Family Physicians and Communitech, if they will come forward.

As with the other presenters, we will have seven minutes of presentations from each presenter. At six minutes, I will give notice that you have one minute left, and at the end of the one minute, I will thank you for your presentation and move on.

With that, we do ask each one of you to start with your name. If anyone else on the screen or in the audience is going to speak, we also want the introduction before we hear you speak. We want to make sure we get the right name with the presentation in Hansard.

With that, we’re going to start with Parks and Recreation Ontario, and the floor is now yours. It looks like it’s from the screen, so there we go.

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** My name is Kim Gavine, CEO with Parks and Recreation Ontario.

Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to present today. I am Kim Gavine, chief executive officer of Parks and Recreation Ontario. We are a non-profit membership-driven organization of more than 6,500 sector professionals across Ontario who serve more than 85% of the province. Along with our members, we champion the health, social, economic and environmental benefits of parks and recreation.

We envision a future for Ontario where every person has equitable access to vibrant communities, sustainable environments and personal health. PRO acknowledges with gratitude recent investments that are positively supporting our sector and are already making a marked impact. These are highlighted on page 3 of our submission document. We encourage regular and meaningful increases to funding programs and remain dedicated to collaborating with government to provide vital recreation opportunities for all Ontarians.

Throughout our written submission, you will also note real-life examples of the challenges communities are facing across Ontario in delivering quality parks and recreation services. While these are only a few examples, we hear from our members regularly that they are not isolated. In fact, these issues are widespread provincially.

As the province works towards building 1.5 million new homes, it is vitally important that recreation infrastructure is provided to ensure the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Our budget recommendations will help kickstart economic growth, create rewarding jobs and, most importantly, support healthy, livable and complete communities complementing the supply of new housing options for Ontario families.

Recommendation number 1: Recreation infrastructure in Ontario is in a state of significant and unparalleled physical decline, with one in three recreation facilities requiring investment in the next decade. These facilities service critical community infrastructure during times of crisis response, and provide safe refuge, including to the unhoused, and essential services to ensure the health and well-being of Ontarians.

Since 2007, Ontario's estimated recreation infrastructure deficit has grown from \$5 billion to \$9.5 billion in 2021. Ranked second only to roads, recreation facilities have the highest provincial infrastructure backlog in terms of investment. Additionally, Ontario's recreation infrastructure assets are ranked first for repair or replacement, with 58% of assets identified as not in a good state of repair. Previous infrastructure cost-sharing funding programs, offered collaboratively by all levels of government, have supported communities in successfully renewing or rebuilding critical community infrastructure in Ontario.

PRO recommends a dedicated investment of \$1 billion annually for 10 years to support renovation or replacement of existing community recreation facilities. Additionally, PRO respectfully requests that recreation be included in the definition of "community infrastructure" to benefit from future monies disbursed via the newly created Ontario Infrastructure Bank.

Recommendation number 2: The parks and recreation sector is expected to have a significant labour shortage by

2030. Ontario data demonstrates that job vacancies have increased by 18.6% since quarter three of 2022. This increase currently ranks higher than vacancies experienced in skilled trades, education or health.

PRO has consistently received feedback from our members, outlining the challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. This has resulted in fewer program offerings and lost recreation opportunities. Solutions must be multi-pronged and address the full list of barriers to employment in this sector. These include province-wide collaboration with school boards to include recreation leadership programs as earned credit to incentivize training and lower the financial barriers.

PRO recommends a \$2-million commitment to support the retooling of the Ministry of Education's Specialist High Skill Major sports program to encourage high school entry into the recreation sector. Our sector is a major year-round youth employer. We provide opportunities for young workers to gain valuable employment skills that set them up for successful careers both in the parks and recreation sector and beyond.

PRO recommends a \$5-million expansion to the Summer Experience Program, with a focus streamed specifically to support the parks and recreation sector. We ask the province to help us close the dire employment gap that exists in our sector, and we are ready to work together with you on this.

Recommendation number 3: The pandemic highlighted a new appreciation for parks and green spaces as critical public health infrastructure. PRO strongly supports government action to address the Ontario housing crisis. However, housing supply cannot be built without appropriate planned and funded infrastructure, such as parks. Under the More Homes Built Faster Act, municipalities are now responsible for providing services to a greater number of residents with fewer dollars per capita.

Parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu policy changes have resulted in less funding for parks and green spaces. This will have social, economic, environmental and health implications across the province. The creation of accessible green spaces contributes to overall well-being through access to opportunities for physical activity and positive mental health, making communities better places to live, work and play.

The loss of reliable and consistent revenue will result in local governments being unable to fund parks and recreation projects that will serve growing communities in equity-deserving groups.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** This will challenge equitable access to parks and recreation services across the province. PRO recommends the establishment of a resilient parks funding program, with an initial investment of \$500 million over five years, to assist municipalities with critical park plan and green space development to ensure individual and community health and well-being.

Investing in parks and recreation makes economic sense. The average Ontario household spends over \$4,000 annually on recreation. That's a \$22-billion infusion into the provincial economy each year. A strong provincial economy can only be supported by vibrant communities where On-

tarians can live, work and play and where businesses can thrive.

As a strong and diverse provincial association, Parks and Recreation Ontario are well positioned to work collaboratively with the government in rebuilding the economy through critical infrastructure projects and getting young Ontarians into the workforce.

Thank you. Again, we would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

Our next presenter is the Ontario College of Family Physicians.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Mekalai Kumanan, and I'm the president of the Ontario College of Family Physicians. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians, or the OCFP for short, represents more than 15,000 family doctors across Ontario who provide care to their patients in each region. As a family doctor in Cambridge for over 15 years, I wake up every morning knowing that I have the privilege of knowing that I make a difference. I love my work, and I care deeply for my patients, but over the past several years, being a family doctor has become increasingly difficult.

So today, we stand at a crossroads. Over 2.3 million Ontarians are lacking access to a family doctor. This number is projected to grow to 4.4 million by 2026 if immediate action is not taken. As of September 2022, in Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge, nearly 100,000 people did not have access to a family doctor, and our forecast predicts that that number will nearly double to over 185,000 by 2026.

1510

The reasons for the shortage are complex and have far-reaching implications not just for patient care, but for the entire health care system. Life without a family doctor means patients might delay getting the care that they need, or they may visit their local emergency department for care instead, often waiting hours to be seen. This can be harmful to patients because cancers may go undetected, patients can experience delays in disease detection, routine immunizations are often missed and people who live with chronic illnesses like diabetes are often not receiving timely treatment.

Our family doctors are overburdened with duplicative and time-consuming administrative work. Ultimately, this means less time with patients. Family doctors are seeing more patients than ever before and many more with complex needs. On average, patients are older, sicker and their care requires more of our time. I do my best, but like most family doctors, I'm struggling to keep up with the demands.

Due to the unrelenting challenges family physicians are facing, nearly two thirds of us are considering either reducing our hours or leaving practice altogether, and that would be in the next five years. And because of this, it's become more and more difficult for patients to find a family doctor.

The OCFP and its members want to work with government so that patients can access the right care in the right place and have faster access to that care. To address these challenges, the Ontario College of Family Physicians proposes several key initiatives. While we recognize the government's actions to date, we are running out of time and more needs to be done.

First, we need to ensure that Ontarians have a family doctor that is working with a team of other health care providers so that patients can get the help that they need faster. When family physicians work directly with other health care providers, such as nurses, social workers and pharmacists, all under one roof, patients can get the right care from the right person and family doctors can care for the patients who need us the most.

In my practice, I'm fortunate to work as part of a team—just down the road, in fact—and when I'm not there, my patients can access care from other doctors and from other health care providers on my team, when needed.

Recently, I saw an elderly patient who is experiencing falls in her home. She was able to be assessed by our occupational therapist, who helped determine the best walker for her, which allowed her to remain independent in her home. The patient was also provided with support from social work to deal with the grief that she was experiencing from the loss of her husband.

The challenge is that over 70% of Ontarians unfortunately don't have access to this type of team-based care. Last February, the government committed to funding more team-based care. This is certainly a positive first step, but more needs to be done. Ontarians deserve access to a team of health care providers under one roof with shared access to their medical records. That's what it means to have connected care for our patients.

Second, we must increase the amount of time that family doctors can spend providing direct patient care. Currently, on average, family doctors spend over 19 hours per week on administrative tasks. That includes unnecessary paperwork, like writing sick notes for employers and completing lengthy insurance forms. We're often required to send specialist referrals multiple times on a regular basis because of the lack of access to a centralized referral system, and we know that's time that could be better spent with our patients.

While we appreciate that government has identified this as an issue, we need to see action urgently. If we take the right steps, we know that we can free up valuable time for family doctors to spend directly with our patients.

And finally, investments in primary care networks are crucial. The government has made some initial investments in primary care networks and now is the time to accelerate the implementation. These networks, we know, enhance the efficiency of our health care system, ensuring that more patients have access to family physicians.

Ontario's family physicians care about our patients and we play a critical role in their lives. We don't just support our patients, though; we support their families, our communities and our health system partners. But we are at a pivotal moment. The 2024 budget presents an opportunity to make meaningful changes that will have a lasting impact

on the health and well-being of Ontarians. Investing in these areas will not only alleviate the burden on hospitals but will also empower family physicians to provide the best care to their patients. The OCFP is ready to partner with government to make this possible.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Together, we can build a better-connected health care system in this province.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to building a strong health care system for the people of Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you.

Our last presenter is Communitech Technology Association.

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jennifer Gruber, and I'm the chief financial officer at Communitech. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would particularly like to thank MPPs Dixon and Harris for the invitation and for their ongoing support of tech companies in the Waterloo region.

Based right here in Waterloo region, Communitech is Canada's tech supercharger. We help founders hire and retain the smartest, brightest and most experienced team; access growth capital at every stage; sell to the biggest customers at home and around the world; and connect the right people at the right time to peers who have been there before, coaches who can guide them through the difficult spots and partners from all over Canada.

We could not do what we do without the support of the province of Ontario. I'd like to thank the province for its long-standing partnership and confidence in our work.

And it isn't just Communitech; the province invests in 17 regional innovation centres which support entrepreneurial growth at the regional level. In Waterloo region, the provincial investments have allowed us to support founders with things such as helping founders access talent and Ontarians get hired through our job board, workintech.ca. We also maintain The Help List to help displaced talent land on their feet at the Communitech member companies.

We help member companies reach 17 international markets through our Outposts program and connect investors with companies on a daily basis, leading to hundreds of millions in new investments.

We support women-identifying and non-binary founders start and grow successful businesses through our Fierce Founders program.

We ran a Canada-Ukraine collaboration that set challenges for startups in Ukraine and Canada to work on national security challenges.

Our Fast Track Health program focuses on challenges identified by health care partners, with the end goal of commercialization and creating Ontario-based innovation in health care.

At Communitech, we know from our work with over 1,000 companies each year the importance of the tech sector to the overall success of Ontario. Tech continues to be a major economic driver for the province, and Waterloo region is a big part of that strong growth, reaching 30,000 tech employees and becoming the 18th best tech ecosystem in North America, according to the CBRE annual report.

A strong tech sector is vital to the success of the Ontario economy, creating jobs and prosperity in key sectors of opportunity. This is why Communitech is focused on supporting company growth and success in areas such as advanced manufacturing, EVs and semiconductors. These are the areas of focus that not only generate economic growth and prosperity but also generate a groundswell of innovation across all aspects of technology. By continuing to develop and strengthen these industries, we will enable smart growth as our community grows from 600,000 people to an estimated one million by 2051.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you this afternoon. Please count on Communitech to help you in any way we can in supporting and growing the tech sector here in Waterloo region and across the province. We appreciate your ongoing support and partnership as we continue to support companies as they start, grow and succeed.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for your presentation. That concludes the presentations.

We will now start the questions in the first round. We start with independents. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here today.

I will start with you, Dr. Kumanan. Related to our health care system, you said, "We are running out of time and more needs to be done." Firstly, I'd say that that applies to a lot of the things we're hearing both today and other days at these hearings related to the environment, child care, housing. We need to make sure that the government is listening and taking action quickly to address these crises. There are crises in virtually every file. So thank you for persevering in your work as a family doctor and speaking today to the issues.

One of the observations in your submission that is of real interest to me is the administrative burden placed, because that is one, to me, that is maybe one of the most straightforward both to understand and to implement some solutions for related to virtual assistants and other things that would have a very meaningful impact very quickly. For example, you said that freeing up 20% to 30% of the admin burden could add 3.8 million appointments, and with 2.3 million Ontarians not having a family doctor, that could probably cover at least half of them, or something to that effect.

I just want to ask if you know what the barriers are to getting those things done. Do you see any movement? And what can you say today to reinforce to the government that that would be a really great idea to act on as soon as possible?

1520

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** That's a great question. Thank you. I'll start by saying we are spending over 19 hours per week, and that actually makes up about 40% of our work week. So really, when we're looking at increasing capacity in family medicine, I think the administrative burden is a key area to address.

I will just touch on—you commented that you're hearing from a lot of people today, and, certainly, I'm sure you're hearing from a lot of important voices. I will say that when we look at family medicine, we have so much evidence to

support investments in primary care. I know our whole health care system is struggling right now; investing in primary care will allow us to help support hospitals and long-term care.

We see very clearly from our data, and we see this across the world in the strongest health care systems: When there is high attachment of patients to family physicians, we see reduced costs overall to the system, because we know it's a much more cost-effective way of running health care. We see improved patient outcomes, reduced rates of emergency room visits, reduced rates of hospitalizations and patients live longer, so it definitely is the right way to go.

There are number of areas that we can tap into in terms of reducing that administrative burden, and I think one of the most important parts of that is we know it can also help to reduce burnout amongst family physicians. We see very high rates of burnout, and part of it is that we signed up to see patients; we didn't sign up to sit behind our computers and do paperwork. If we can reduce that burnout, I believe we can actually help improve our recruitment and retention overall in family medicine, but also increase capacity by freeing up that time.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** That's great; thank you. I hear from a lot of doctors in my riding in Don Valley West about retirements. They're trying to find someone to replace them, and they're struggling, because young doctors are saying it's a practice area that's just too burdensome and they're feeling no incentive to go into it. So I certainly appreciate your work to try to reverse course on that worrying trend.

I want to talk to Communitech Technology Association now. Thank you, Jennifer, for being here. I know you guys do great work. I know some your board members. In past discussions, I have heard the phrase that a government contract is worth more than a government grant, and I wonder if you could just speak a little bit about that terms of the impact of procurement practices of the government to make sure that innovators here in Ontario are getting access to some of those contracts and grants so that they can expand their business and expand globally as well.

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** We have worked closely with Supply Ontario to try to improve the current processes and streamline it, particularly for Canadian innovation, because we do hear from our innovators that it is easier for them to sell overseas and particularly in the US, given the procurement guidelines here in Ontario.

We have partnered with CAN Health, which is a network out of Toronto, to help source founders to address health care challenges identified by hospitals. There are 27 hospitals in this network across the country. They issue a call for innovations, so whether it's—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you to all the presenters for sharing your thoughts with the committee this afternoon. It's very much appreciated.

I wanted to start with the Ontario College of Family Physicians. Thank you for your presentation and your material. I wanted to ask, first, about your first recommendation,

access to team-based care. I was involved in a community health centre organization, on the board there before the election, and so I know that model very well. Is that something that you see potentially working more with that type of model, or are you talking about family health teams themselves? Can you just expand a little bit on the team-model concept, if you would?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** For sure. I think when we're looking at team-based care, that might vary depending on the needs of the community, and it could range between FHTs, CHC, or a different team-based model. I think the idea is that it overall helps us to increase capacity in primary care, and it allows family physicians to work with other team members so that our patients are then accessing care from a range of providers.

We see a number of clear benefits. I think the first is that it gives patients that front door and one entry point to the health care system. If you've been involved with a CHC, you'll be familiar with that, where it becomes much less confusing and a lot easier for our patients to navigate the health care system. We also find that when providers are working together under one roof with a shared medical record, it improves communication between providers, so patients then don't have to repeat their stories over and over again. They get that continuity of care from a number of providers in one place.

We also see significant benefit particularly for our patients with complex medical issues like heart disease or diabetes. If they're able to receive care from a team of providers, we again see reduced rates of emergency room usage. So I think the model can vary depending on the needs of the community. It can range with a number of different providers. Often, we think about family physicians leading a team of nurses, social workers, pharmacists, dietitians etc. Again, I think those professionals will depend on the needs of the community and the population health needs.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** That would include nurse practitioners, as well, being part of that model?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes, so in my family health team, I work closely with a nurse practitioner. I think many of us do, and honestly, it's a really lovely way to work. I think we all work really well together. Ultimately, day in and day out, I see my patients benefiting from this model of care.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Got it. Thank you. On the administration, I've heard this point before, and I understand it. I guess I was curious as to whether that admin support—obviously, the funding model is a procedure-based funding model, so the Ministry of Health needs some evidence, if you will, that a procedure was performed. So I get it, but do physicians need to be the ones doing that admin or can you leverage that to other members of the team? Is that possible, to reduce the admin burden on doctors themselves?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** I think you've hit the nail on the head. I'd say it's probably a multi-pronged strategy. Definitely, a lot of the work that we are doing doesn't require the eyes of a physician. Some of it does, and certainly there is going to be some paperwork for family physicians, but I think there are also a lot of inefficiencies in the system.

Again, right now, without having a centralized referral system, as one example, it really is up to me, the family doctor, to find the right specialist, refer my patient and hope that the specialist will accept the referral. Often, because they're swamped as well, we get declined referrals back, and then, really, I'm back at square one for that one patient and one referral.

So I think there are very clear ways we can build efficiencies in the system; that's just one example. And I think when we build out team-based care, we're able to free up some of the time for the family physician to see patients.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Well, that's great. I think it's very helpful, and I think to the extent that the industry can give these suggestions in to the Ministry of Health, as I'm sure you have, we'll sure listen to what you have to say to try and make it more efficient. So thank you.

Jennifer, I wanted to ask you about your organization and what you're seeing in the market. Clearly, we're in a technology—you know, Waterloo area. I was never smart enough to—I went to U of T, not Waterloo, blah, blah, blah—anyway.

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** I won't hold that against you.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you. I appreciate it. We were in London yesterday and heard as well about the growth in technology that's happening in these communities and across the province. It's exciting to hear, and you see that evolution continuing and really changing the way businesses are working and homes and families are working here in Ontario.

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** We do see—it is a critical time for our founders. Our founders are facing a serious capital crunch going into this year. There are a lot of macroeconomic factors, and the access to capital has been difficult for them. So we feel like it's important for the—the partnership with the province allows us to continue to support them in meeting different venture capitalists. In particular, Canadian capital, non-dilutive Canadian capital, is an important source of financing for our founders.

We also think it's an important time to invest in these critical technologies. As you know, EV plants and battery plants are becoming a popular topic of discussion, because not only is the battery the heaviest component of the car but you need that supply chain around the plant. If we can do that, that would continue to be a gravity well that would bring top tech talent here and be competitive.

The other thing that we're focused on is building a vibrant community. We want to attract and retain the top talent and the top students, and we need to create a place where they can live, work and play. So having access to family health care providers, housing affordability and public transit are also top concerns that we're hearing from our founders. If we can continue our partnership and the province's investments in those key areas, I think Waterloo will continue to be a thriving tech sector here in Waterloo region.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** That's great. Totally agree that all these factors need to come together. I heard a presentation this week about someone who is using technology to get into the affordable-home-building area. It was quite something—

you know, robots can build a house in a day, effectively, and the evolution of technology. So the work of your organization is very much appreciated.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** The access to financing that you mentioned for founders, has that been a common challenge or is that something that's been more recently a challenge for those folks?

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** I would say probably the last 12 months, it's been a challenge. I think from 2019 through to 2022-23, there was more money they could spend. We saw rapid investment, rapid growth, huge valuations and exits. I think the pandemic has really reset—I think the collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank and the pulling back of financing. The model for our Foundry used to be grow, grow, grow, spend, spend, spend, and now investors are looking for runway and growth in constricted capital. So we really need to double down on those top-potential companies to enable them to scale and grow effectively, I think, in the next couple of years until the economy rebounds.

1530

I think people are also adjusting to the withdrawal of the pandemic-era support, right? So they're adjusting to that new reality at the same time.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much. Thank you all for the presentations.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you to all presenters.

Dr. Kumanan, I would like to start with you. We did hear, last year, through—I think it was Dr. Bondy who presented to us in Windsor. She was so clear on where the savings could happen for the system, but also what's needed by way of investment. You talked about the administrative burden that doctors face each and every day, each and every week, and the potential to alleviate that burden so that they can take on new patients. She had talked about funding a scribe, a dedicated position, particularly in family health teams, to maximize the value of that community—really, community of care—that family health teams provide. Can you expand a little bit on the value of that strategic investment into health care to help address the 2.3 million Ontarians that do not have a family doctor?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes. Thank you. I think, again, we spend so many hours each week, as family physicians, dealing with the administrative burden, and it certainly is a significant contributor to burnout.

We know AI scribes are—we're seeing more and more use within family practice. We know that our charting and our inbox is sort of a significant contributor to that administrative burden, so certainly that is one option in terms of reducing the admin burden and helping to alleviate it.

Sorry, I had one other thought—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** How many hours a week did you say that doctors spend doing the paperwork?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** We spend 19 hours per week. That includes our charting, dealing with our inbox, dealing

with referrals, filling out forms, writing sick notes. So, really, when we're looking at reducing the administrative burden, I think it really does need to be a multi-pronged approach; it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all. I think scribes are a good option to help reduce the burden that we're facing in terms of the charting.

Really, a lot of that time is spent at the end of our day. We take our daytime so we can actually see patients and then we bring a lot of that work home with us or we're sitting in the office late into the evenings, sort of picking away at it. Anything that can help us be more efficient during the day would make a big difference.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** We heard a presentation in Hamilton last week from a family health team there, which indicated that it's hard to retain staff within that model and recruit into that model because the funding hasn't been updated for years. Can you talk a little bit about that please?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** I think you're speaking to the family health team model and funding related to it. Yes, I mean, I think there are a number of issues. So, in primary care, we often find we are competing with other sectors—and that includes the acute care sector—where it can be challenging to retain staff. That can be in a family health team. That can be four family physicians sort of running our independent business, as in trying to hire staff.

Then, when we're looking at family health teams alone—I mean, Hamilton is fortunate because they have one large family health team. But when we look at family health teams and their distribution, there's inequitable access both for family physicians and for patients. Right now, we see over 70% of our population doesn't have access to a family doctor who is working in a team-based care setting, so I think there are a number of issues there that could be teased out.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I think that there's a healthy appetite, not only to have access to a doctor but to be part of a family health team, because it's multi-modal and people can actually access the care that they need without navigating a very messy system. So thank you very much for your presentation today.

Moving over to Communitech: Some interesting points—I mean, the tech sector is seeing some hits recently, I have to say. We did see, in 2019-20, the Ford government reduce funding to Communitech by 30%. I think it took the community by surprise a little bit at the time because Communitech has always punched above its weight. The return on investment around commercialization of research and creating good local jobs, keeping them here in Ontario—I think the research and evidence with regard to Communitech has been very clear.

At the time, Communitech lost 15 full-time jobs because of that reduction, but at the time, the government had promised to do a review of funding tech ecosystems like Communitech. Can you give us an update on whether that review happened, if you were part of that review, or is that still pending?

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** Thank you for the question. I would like to add to your point that for every dollar the province has invested in us, we've returned that investment twelvefold. So for every dollar put into Communi-

tech, there is a return on investment of \$12 for the province of Ontario—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** And also half your funding comes from the private sector, does it not?

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** We strive to be 50-50 sustainable, yes. We derive 50% of our funding for our base operations from the private sector. We also have struggled with that in recent years, as tenancy has slowed and sponsorship dollars have been short, but we do strive to match our provincial funding with federal and private sources so that we can leverage that dollar into \$2 or \$3 and make a greater impact for the province.

The province did commit to a review of ONE, which is the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs, and the RIC network, which we are a part of—one of the 17 hubs that serve the province of Ontario. I believe that review is still pending. We are currently negotiating a new transfer payment agreement for the RIC network that will go live April 1, 2024. We are grateful that our funding appears to be stable going into the next three years—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So is that what you're asking for today, no more cuts? Or just stable funding?

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** Well, if there was room to ask for more funding, we would always appreciate that and we would look for ways to partner with the province of Ontario, even to advance initiatives in advanced manufacturing, because that is an area of particular strength here in Waterloo region. We came primarily to thank you for your support and to shore up support for, yes, that funding to remain stable for the next three years. We would be—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, so that's an important piece. You already sustained a 30% reduction in funding. Clearly, that had an impact on your capacity to grow and to retain.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** And I will acknowledge that we went through the pandemic and that was a difficult time for the tech sector, although I think the tech sector was uniquely positioned to adapt to some of the changes that happened during that time.

Also, thank you very much for referencing the fact that our entrepreneurs, through a procurement process that needs to be stronger, I believe, in Ontario—Supply Ontario has seen massive turnover in their staff. This was supposed to be concierge, one-stop shopping for procurement. We need to get procurement right and I'm very interested in working with Communitech to do that.

Thank you very much for your time today. No more questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We now will go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you to everyone for coming in and presenting to us. Very well done.

I am going to ask my question to the Ontario College of Family Physicians and Dr. Kumanan. Did I get that right?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** You did, yes.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** I just want to be so respectful of your time. You had to leave your patient care to come in here and to present and advocate for those 100,000 people

of Waterloo that are without a family physician. So that's just one facet of our health care crisis.

The next facet, as we're asking you the repetitive question, is the administrative task of the doctors. How do you see this ending? Is there an end or something positive that we can do to turn that around very quickly? Because we are in a time of creating efficiencies, and so what impact, if we create efficiencies, will that have on the health care system?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** I will say that I think it can be hard to hear what we're dealing with in family medicine. I can tell you, family physicians are willing to stick it out despite the large numbers who are considering leaving. I think many of us do have hope and we really care about our practices and want to continue in practice.

What's interesting is that to us, it seems clear what the solutions are. We see where the issues are day in and day out. We see the inefficiencies. We are also people who like to be efficient and plow through what we need to plow through.

I think there are a number of ways that we could address the administrative burden. A centralized referral system, I can't say it enough, would make a huge difference in family practice. You'll see in our submission that we touch on virtual assistants. Through the eHealth Centre of Excellence, there are virtual bots who can help us to look through our patients' charts and help us with things like updating health information, making sure we're using correct terminology, and finding patients who are due for preventive care testing and contacting them. So I think there are a number of ways we can do things to reduce the burden.

1540

We've asked, as well, for consideration of the elimination of sick note requirements. Writing a sick note can be tedious; it's not always tedious. I think what's more compelling with that issue is often we have patients come in for a medical appointment when they're unwell when they wouldn't otherwise come in because their employer needs a sick note. So we're using health care resources in ways that are not always needed because we don't have those efficiencies built into the system.

I think there are a number of strategies we could look at. Honestly, if you asked any family doc, I think we could tell you where the pain points are with the administrative burden and ways that could help to improve them.

With the Ontario College of Family Physicians, we are also working with other stakeholders to try to help address the administrative burden. We're working with the pharmacy sector to look at ways to improve continuity of care when patients access care either in a pharmacy or in family medicine. We're working with Ontario Health and other stakeholders to look at how hospitals send information to primary care, because we know that is also burdensome.

So we're doing everything we can do. I think, again, it's one of those pieces that will require a number of different strategies to address the issues.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** I want to address you—and I want to get this right. You're facing this crisis. You're seeing the patients. You're talking to your doctors, other colleagues. How are you guys managing? You're here.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** It's really tough. I don't know that we've seen it the way it is now, and it's heartbreaking to have to say no to people who need a family doctor and we're already overburdened and overworked. We love what we do. We love seeing patients. We know we make a difference. We make a significant difference in the lives of our patients. We're doing our part in the health care system, but really, it would be nice to see the tide turn, because I think it would really help with that hope.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Yes, keep doing what you're doing. We appreciate you. Keep up the fight. Thank you.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you. We'll now go to MPP Dowie.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Chair, is there any time left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Your time is up.

MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank all the presenters. First, I wanted to start with the Ontario College of Family Physicians. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate what MPP Fife had said about freeing up the administrative burden doctors face. It shows that even Conservative donors can have credibility when they speak.

I'm wondering if you could describe to us what that administrative burden looks like?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes, it ranges quite a bit, and it's sort of a number of different pieces that can affect what we do as family physicians. I think the first part is the charting. When we see a patient, we want to spend that time connecting with them face to face. It means that after we leave the room, we need to chart.

When we see a patient, we know, as well, that because our population is aging, patients have become more complex, and we're often addressing more health issues per visit. The workload per visit has increased quite significantly. A recent stat shows it has increase by 35% to 50% in the last two decade. So we're just doing more after each visit. One patient I see might require three or four referrals. I have to finish my charting. I might need to send a note to someone else on my team to connect with them. It can just require a lot of them.

I've touched on referrals. We know referrals are very, very challenging. I might send off those four referrals in the 10 minutes I have after I see the patient, and then a week later, those come back to me and I'm kind of back at square one with them.

Insurance forms can be quite lengthy. Sometimes, patients who are off for disability might require a number of different forms—one for their workplace, one for their mortgage—and they're all different and they can be pages in length, and we're often doing those at the end of our day or after-hours to try to catch up.

And then it's just things like sick notes and whatever else lands in our inbox as we're trying to help our patients navigate the system and receive the care that they need.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay, thank you for that. Just exploring a little on that before moving on: The government of Ontario did announce an effort to reduce the administrative burden just a few months ago. I'm wondering if you could share some light as to how you see that going.



**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes, I think there are a number of projects that are under way. I've touched on some of the work that we're doing to partner with Ontario Health to look at how much information is being pushed to family physicians. I know we've continued to advocate for the elimination of sick notes to try to sort of free up that little bit of time. I think there's more that can be done overall as a sector. We'll continue to sort of work through with government on that.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you.

I'm going to move on to Communitech. Thank you for being here. I know you're part of the network of regional innovation centres funded by the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Thank you for all the great work that you do trying to effectually support entrepreneurs. I had the privilege of visiting about a year ago and change—I think it was October 2022. Chris Albinson, the CEO, just treated me like a king while I was there. I appreciate all of that. It's just a wonderful facility that Communitech operates, with lots of opportunity. You walk through the door and you can feel that this is a place where things happen.

Understanding your role with developing the sector and supporting entrepreneurs and understanding that, hey, sometimes you need some additional supports—I'll say access to capital is something that I've heard over and over and over again in my portfolio as parliamentary assistant, whether it's for major corporations or for small businesses. The opportunity to develop and to grow is one that exists, but lending or obtaining the funds to actually implement and take the risk is something that very few are able to do.

I'm hoping you can elaborate on that and the role that government would play and why the private sector is a bit reluctant to be entrepreneurial and support these up-and-comers.

**Ms. Jennifer Gruber:** I would like to acknowledge that the province has created the Ontario venture capital group, which we are working with in ways of leveraging that capital for our entrepreneurs. I think, generally, Canadian investors are more risk-averse. They're looking for a more immediate return on the investment, and there are a higher number of American investors who come in in a 24-hour term sheet with better conditions than the Canadian investors. And similarly, with government, I think the restrictions are just a little bit more burdensome for some of our founders who want to move quickly and want to move fast, and so they have been going for the quickest, lowest-cost term.

I think the government, through OCGC, can commit to investing in Ontario companies to keep that equity and that intellectual property here and also look at legislation to encourage pensions to invest in Canadian corporations. Currently, our pensions invest a lot of their assets overseas, and we are working with the federal government as well to encourage them to invest here in Ontario and Ontario companies to allow them to scale and grow and succeed as well.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you for that.  
Chair, how much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** It's 2.3.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** You know what? I want to say thank you for that. You've given a great example of why the Ontario Infrastructure Bank is needed to repatriate those funds.

I'll pass the rest of the time to MPP Babikian.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you, all of you, for coming and presenting your analysis, your input, your valuable information. I'm sure that the committee will look at them very carefully.

My question is to Dr. Kumanan. Dr. Kumanan, recently, the government increased the base funding for hospitals by 4% and also added, since 2020, 14,800 health care workers to the system. I know that the health care system is under stress, but do you think those efforts of adding 4% base funding to the hospitals will give the hospitals an opportunity to have a predictable fiscal base to plan for the future?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** I'll answer your question with my primary-care lens, if I could. I can't speak overall to hospital funding, but we do know one of the major drivers of emergency room visits is patients who don't have a family physician, so I think my ask will always be to continue to look at funding for primary care and to invest in primary care. I've touched on when we look at the strongest health care systems around the world that produce the best health outcomes, it is those that have strong primary care systems with a very high attachment of patients connected to family physicians. And we know ultimately that will help our hospital sector. We'll see reduced rates of emergency room visits, reduced rates of hospital admissions, and our population will ultimately be healthier overall.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** What kind of incentives or programs should the government bring to encourage medical students to enter the family medicine practice?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** That's a great question. So we've seen a significant decline in the proportion of medical students choosing family medicine over the past many years, and really, I think it's addressing the issues that I've put on the table. We know the administrative burden is—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that answer.

1550

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to start by speaking with Dr. Kumanan. You were speaking about administrative burden. I've had the opportunity to meet with primary care physicians in my community who have been speaking about very much the same things. Nineteen hours a week is really an obnoxious amount of time to spend on paperwork when the value of your care should be with your patients.

Also, they had mentioned that within primary care, acute care and long-term care, they all have different electronic systems that do not communicate with one another. They had spoken about the need for a centralized system, whether it's e-referrals or a central booking system for procedures

such as joint replacements, as well as e-consults. I'd like to give you the opportunity to speak about the importance of Ontario looking towards that.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes, I think it's a really important point. Right now, we rely heavily on faxing, and I think we all know faxing is not always the most effective way to communicate, so it really does add a lot of inefficiency within the system.

Our systems are quite different, so when we look at the needs of an electronic medical system in primary care, that's very different than what a hospital might need, and as it stands, they're not connected. And even within primary care, we're not connected, aside from those of us who work in a team and are connected to the team members.

So I can't say enough to reinforce what you said. I think it's that lack of connections or those poor connections that really do contribute to the administrative burden. Sometimes I will send a referral, we'll check in two weeks later—haven't heard anything—and they just didn't get it.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Wow.

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** It's not a great use of my time, it's not a great use of my staff's time and it's not fair to the patient to be waiting for something that just has never happened because we're faxing. So I think if we look at things like a centralized referral system where we're better able to connect primary care to the rest of the health care system, that would make a big difference.

And then, again, within primary care, if we're looking at team-based care, one of the most significant benefits is that we're all using the same medical record. When a pharmacist sees my patient within my team, they have everything I've done at their fingertips, so it's just a really nice way of working and I think, from the patient perspective, it's much more seamless.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. They spoke about how it's a rather unfortunate position to be in for a patient, as well as for the practitioner, to have to ask and for the patient to have to explain, to go over that, because you're, of course, the expert, and that's the way they want to feel, but people can't fathom as to how that electronic information is not shared.

I could hear the government's ears perk up—not that that's necessarily physically possible—when you said “fax machines,” because I think one of their first moves was to throw out fax machines. So hopefully they will listen to primary care physicians and really discuss a more comprehensive system for electronic health records. The physicians I was speaking with were talking about how, with many of these processes, it's almost like clicking for the sake of clicking.

The physicians I spoke with had talked about increasing the number of seats, and I will not for a second diminish the importance of increasing seats within faculties of education for medicine. However, they also mentioned that there is really no guarantee that those individuals will necessarily practice family medicine. I wondered: Have you had an opportunity to take a look at the programming that is available at the Queen's-Lakeridge Health MD family medicine program?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes. I think when we look at increasing seats, it is an important step, and we know that family medicine, for whatever reason, is not an attractive choice for medical students. I think it comes down to that administrative burden being quite significant. Med students hear that. They see us working. They know how many hours we're putting into it.

And the other piece, too, is that when we train as family physicians and med students, we're often training in these really beautiful team-based care models. You graduate and you may not be able to find that as an opportunity to work. We know that with team-based care, for all of the patient benefits, we also see improved provider satisfaction. Physicians who work in team-based care models get greater satisfaction from it, and it's a greater draw. It kept me in this province; I'll be honest. I'm from Nova Scotia originally. I trained at Western, and it was really the family health model that kept me here.

So I think we have to look at what are the key pain points and how we address those so we can draw more medical students into family medicine.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Excellent. Western and the Schulich school are fantastic. That's my home riding, so good on you.

You also spoke about sick notes for employers as part of the burden, and I believe the physicians I speak with as well mentioned that. They actually indicated that any emergency room will be full of people who are simply sitting there, sick, hurt, waiting hours and hours because they don't have a primary care physician. Would removing that requirement also help diminish the administrative burden that you're currently facing?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Absolutely. It would make a huge difference. I think there are a number of issues when patients are coming in for health care, just for a sick note: (1) They're not recovering, right? When they're sick, they really should be at home giving themselves that time to recoup, rather than sitting in a waiting room. And (2), in the middle of the pandemic or in the middle of our respiratory season, they may be passing their infection on to other vulnerable patients.

They're also using that health care resource when they may not otherwise have chosen to come in. I mean, of course, if a patient is sick and needs to be seen, we're happy to see them, but it's tough when I'm booking patients in just for sick notes when they wouldn't otherwise have come in and I know I've got other people who need to see me. So it certainly is a barrier in terms of us being able to make the best use of our time each day.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. It's unfortunate that we moved forward with the pandemic, and yet we've seen Ontario fall back into its old ways by continuing to require that and putting that burden on physicians. The care that you can provide is far more valuable than writing notes, as it were.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Also, we've heard from a number of different groups at this committee about the importance of investing in home and community care, and

how all different fields of medicine are like one organism, and how all of them relate to one another. Is that something that you'd also advocate for?

**Dr. Mekalai Kumanan:** Yes, for sure. In our submission, we also touch on the importance of investments in primary care networks. I think what we're finding is challenging in primary care is that we're not well connected to each other, and we're not well connected to the rest of the system, and that would include parts of the system like home care. I think if we could strengthen primary care networks and continue with the funding and implementation, it would allow us as family physicians to be better connected to other aspects, like home care.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Wonderful.

My apologies to the great folks with Parks and Recreation Ontario and Communtech for unfortunately running the clock. I apologize. Thank you for all the work that you do and thank you for coming to committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes our time for the presentations and the questions, and we thank all the presenters for taking the time to prepare and come here and help us with our deliberations. It's much appreciated.

#### ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

DR. BARBARA SCHUMACHER

CAMBRIDGE SHELTER CORP.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** As we're changing the tables, I'll just read the instructions for the next group. First of all, the presenters are the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Barbara Schumacher and Cambridge Shelter Corp. The presenters will all have seven minutes to make their presentation. At six minutes, I will point out that there's one minute left, and at seven minutes I will say, "Thank you," and we will move on. We also ask every presenter to start their presentation with introducing themselves, to make sure we get the right name for the Hansard coming out of today's events.

With that, the first presentation will be from the Ontario Nonprofit Network. Is it a virtual one?

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Oh, I'm sorry. You were hiding.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Can I sit over here?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Yes. If you would move to the other chair, then we can have eye contact. Thank you very much. The floor is now yours.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Cathy Taylor. I'm with the Ontario Nonprofit Network, and I don't live too far from here, in Wellington county, so it's nice to come to Waterloo region. As you know, ONN is the network for Ontario's 58,000 non-profits and charities. We engage our diverse group of non-profit organizations to bring their voices to government and other stakeholders.

The non-profit sector contributes \$65 billion to our province's GDP, employing 844,000 people in Ontario

and engaging five million volunteers. I know all of you know non-profits and charities in your ridings. As a sector, non-profits receive less than half of their revenues from governments—all three levels combined, actually—which we leverage with private grants and donations, fees for service and volunteer efforts to create additional value for our communities. So with every dollar of investment, non-profits generate up to \$2.18 in GDP and \$1.76 in employment income impact, which is equivalent to many other industries in Ontario such as manufacturing and automotive.

**1600**

Non-profits create communities people want to live in and raise their families in, and as you know, each day, Ontarians across the province are supported by organizations and staff who are at the heart of the non-profit sector, such as youth employment services, service clubs, child care centres, mental health, Meals on Wheels, local art galleries and museums, soccer and hockey clubs and more. All of these things are examples of non-profits in action. So imagine for a moment if all or any of them disappeared.

I hate to end the day on a bit of a depressing note, but I'm here to tell you today that Ontario's non-profit sector is at a tipping point. Over the last few months, we have seen urgent calls from the sector—small and large non-profits, rural and urban, and across different subsectors, social services, arts and culture, sport and recreation—ringing alarm bells about potentially dire financial and human resource situations. For example, I just heard some media reporting about Harbourfront in Toronto struggling to operate due to funding concerns. A rural centre club in centre Wellington will be ceasing operations due to low membership and the difficult in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Our ability and capacity to serve communities is tied to our resources: financial and human. If one or both are not healthy, we cannot support communities. Every non-profit closure does leave a tear in our social safety net, and, to the previous presentations, every tear from a non-profit or charity will drive up cost and demand on tertiary institutions like hospitals, long-term-care institutions, treatment centres. So while we are known to be resilient and practical, the non-profit sector cannot keep running on fumes into an uncertain future.

And so, the time has come to heed the sector's budget recommendations.

We've done four surveys during the pandemic. We call them State of the Sector surveys, and our last survey in 2023 showed that non-profits are not thriving; they're barely surviving. The demand for services is sharply increasing and has grown 29% since 2020. Financial situations are on a downward spiral and organizations are struggling to meet the increasing costs based on inflation. The HR crisis continues and is driven by a lack of sustainable funding that is impacting the retention and recruitment of staff across the sector, and two thirds of the sector are reporting staffing challenges. Only 58% of our respondents said they were somewhat prepared for emergencies, which is concerning.

Non-profit closure reports are increasing with 35% of organizations reporting they know of a similar non-profit closing. So our analysis reveals that if these current trends continue and if there's no adequate public policy response through 2026, every non-profit in Ontario will be experiencing an increase in demand in service at the same time as reduce revenue, which means that every Ontarian will be impacted in some way.

So for this reason, we ask you to seriously consider budget recommendations for 2024. We know that you're hearing from the sector, individual organizations small or large, and their provincial bodies, and they're putting forth urgent and timely recommendations to support their finances and their people so Ontarians have the programs and services they need now. We ask you to take their requests seriously and provide the much-needed support. Our recommendations focus more on the policies and sector-wide strategies such as future-proofing Ontarian's social infrastructure with investments that reflect the true cost of service delivery, like transfer-payment agreements and cost-of-living increases; addressing the non-profit human resources crisis; making government activities deliver twice as much for communities, with social-procurement and community-benefit-agreement policies; and enabling communities to develop the infrastructure they need by prioritizing non-profit access to surplus lands and Infrastructure Ontario loans.

But what I really want to highlight for you today is that to make all of this happen in a low-cost and most impactful way, a home and government for Ontario's 58,000 non-profits and charities would make a difference.

We are asking for an associate-minister level appointment within a ministry such as economic development, job creation and trade, supported by a deputy or assistant deputy minister in an office to represent non-profits, charities and innovation. We think this is important to address the urgent issues that require whole-of-government approach such as the labour force crisis, regulatory burdens and inconsistency across ministries.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** It allows us to do to more complex, collaborative, innovative work without the red tape. Right now, we're working with 16 different ministries across the province on regulatory issues, program planning and policy. And it would be good for government because it would give government a one-stop shop to be able to work with the non-profit sector, identify issues and increase efficiency and effectiveness. It's very similar to the thinking around having an associate minister of small business that currently exists, and in 2021, both BC and Newfoundland and Labrador successfully created homes in government.

I want to leave you with the fact that Ontarians depend on non-profits every single day, and the non-profit sector needs the support of the Ontario government. The request for a home in government is a change you can make easily, with very limited cost, which will tangibly benefit the non-profit sector and the communities they serve. Our non-profit colleagues will also share vital information with you in

their submissions and their testimonies, which I hope you have heard and will listen to and consider carefully.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for your presentation.

We now go to Barbara Schumacher.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am Dr. Barbara Schumacher, a Woolwich resident and a retired physician.

Since retiring, I've been reading about global warming. The year 2023 was the hottest year across the globe since 1850. By February 2024, the preceding 12 months will likely exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a situation I did not expect for decades. But here we are, the point when global heating will trigger feedback loops cascading into irreversible escalating temperatures.

For where we live, for the places on earth we treasure and for the love of our children, people like me have come together across Ontario. Grand(m)others Act To Save The Planet and Seniors for Climate Action Now, together with Fridays for Future and more: We step outside our comfort zone to march in the streets, to flood your email and phone lines, and to raise our voices.

Act now, because later is too late. This government must demonstrate that it has a plan for a safe climate future. You must not abandon your responsibility to act for the safety and security of Ontario's children and all its people. Why must our provincial government do an about-face not just on the greenbelt, but on many planning, environmental and energy policies? Even as we are in the midst of an affordability crisis, the next five years are critical to stop adding pollution that is trapping heat like a blanket around the earth and to increase the resilience of our people, infrastructure and environment.

This afternoon I have four messages for this committee:

(1) The climate crisis is a health emergency happening now.

(2) Increase renewable energy, not electricity generated by fossil gas. Fossil fuels pollute. We need to stop.

(3) Implement the recommendations from your government-appointed panels, advisory boards and auditors. Their advice is in the public interest.

(4) The costs of delay justify spending what it takes now. Pollution was responsible for nine million deaths worldwide in 2019; six million were caused by air pollution.

Small particulate matter weakens the immune system, and long-term exposure leads to chronic diseases. Heart disease is at the top of the list, followed by respiratory disease, cancer and diabetes. Wildfire smoke adds to pollution. Gas stoves pollute indoor air and increase the incidence of asthma in children. Air pollution harms fetal development, and climate change impacts neurological and immune function for both children and adults.

Researchers warn of increased infectious disease and more pandemics. The World Health Organization says between 2030 and 2050 climate change will cause one quarter of a million additional deaths per year from under-nutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress.

Climate change is directly contributing to humanitarian emergencies following heat waves, wildfires, floods, tropical

storms and hurricanes, which are increasing in frequency and intensity.

**1610**

Extreme weather disasters contribute to mental health problems, including PTSD. Young people are suffering from climate anxiety and fear bringing children into an unsafe world.

Climate change is making insurance more expensive and more limited, and it's only going to get worse. Disaster claims in Canada have risen from \$400 million in 2008 to \$3.1 billion in 2022. The industry expects another \$3 billion for losses from wildfires in 2023. In Ontario, flooding is the risk we face. The Insurance Bureau of Canada and UW's Intact Centre report that 10% of Canadian homes are already uninsurable for floods.

According to the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, climate is a risk to the economy. During this affordability crisis, higher insurance premiums are adding to the misery. This is the reason I am cautioning you that delaying action to stop pollution will only increase the cost to our economy and to taxpayers.

Sustainability professionals have found emergency energy efficiencies generate huge savings. The Ontario Clean Air Alliance urges the government to triple Ontario's solar and wind capacity by 2035, and in a letter to the Independent Energy System Operator provides the rationale and strategy for the transition to renewable energy, showing how we will produce more energy than we will need.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** The budget must prioritize investments in climate resilience, especially in natural infrastructure. Ontario's recommends to this committee a good place to start: Advance the delivery of Ontario's flooding strategy, protect our fertile farmland and make investments to support the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks needs appropriate levels of funding to act on the climate change impact assessment and to execute the recommendations of the advisory panel on climate adaptation. These reports from government-selected experts are released now.

Fund the inspectors required in the management of the aggregate resources report written by the Auditor General.

And finally, my four messages to you: Act to mitigate the climate crisis, which is a health emergency. Fund energy efficiencies and stop adding pollution—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation.

We now go to Cambridge Shelter Corp.

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for this time to share. My name is Wayne Paddick, and I'm the executive director for the Cambridge Shelter Corp. here in Cambridge. We were originally designed as a 50-bed shelter about 15 years ago. Across our three facilities right now, we currently house anywhere from 130 to 140 individuals on any given night. At our 50-bed facility, we average about 84 individuals a night. As you can imagine, there's strain on our programming and staffing needs.

For several years, we have advocated for shelters to be 100% funded by the different levels of government. As we all know, the homelessness problem has reached epic proportions, and it has caused a lot of our individuals to go into encampments and into sleeping outdoors, which is not ideal. Funding a charitable shelter is a monumental task, with only one third of our budget being covered by federal and provincial dollars. As you can imagine, coming out of the pandemic, it has been even harder to raise those funds.

While we continue to advocate for 100% funding for all qualified shelters, we would like to shift our focus to solutions that can happen in real time. In 2023, our housing team was able to house 97 unique individuals, and since February 2020, the onset of the pandemic, we've been able to house over 300 individuals in various accommodations across not only the city but also the province.

Our programming has been designed to not only provide shelter when in need, but also to provide a hand up to participants on their housing journey. We currently have two housing programs, with four full-time staff leading the charge. Our shelter housing program has two full-time staff who meet with individuals as they enter the program to discuss and map out housing goals. Shelter participants must meet with them on a regular basis to continue working on their plan to move themselves forward.

One of the biggest aids to our housing program being successful as it has been, and part of our ask today, is portable rent top-ups. Over the years, we have seen several types of rental top-ups and programs that afford our clients on a lower income the ability to move into a market rent apartment and live with dignity in a decent home. The latest such rent top-up, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, COHB, has allowed our team and others alike the freedom to search for a wider array of apartments and housing options for those looking to get out of shelter.

In September 2023, for example, we were afforded 20 of these COHBs to be distributed across to Ontarians, also to refugees and refugee claimants. Within a matter of three months, we had used up all 20, and we had 20 more people housed. As we, as a society, continue to struggle with building affordable housing and battle rising rental cost, portable rent top-ups are a fastidious way to house folks and decrease the numbers in shelters or encampments.

Portable rent top-ups allow us to distribute those folks needing support across the community, so it's not falling on certain neighbourhoods or sectors of a city. These rent top-ups allow us to support our aging shelter population as well as those with low mental health issues, who often fall into the shelter system due to lack of housing options. Forty per cent of shelter-goers are seniors on fixed incomes who simply can't afford rent. Investing in portable rent top-ups gives us solutions to our ever-growing number of new homeless and could even prevent those who are at risk of homelessness from losing their current accommodations and keep them housed.

Our ask today is to continue to invest in portable rent top-ups and rental programs, which is a scenario where everyone wins. Landlords get their units filled, those on fixed incomes can be housed and not forced to live in uninhabitable units, and we can finally start to see a de-

crease in the number of folks living without permanent housing.

Housing is a right in Canada, and as with other rights we recognize—freedom of speech, health care, freedom of religion, equality rights and so on—we need to provide an opportunity for our most vulnerable populations to maintain affordable housing.

I mentioned that we had two housing teams at the Cambridge Shelter Corp. The other program that we have is the scattered site supportive housing program. This department is fairly new to us but has been existing in the region of Waterloo for seven to eight years. This program allows us to work with folks who are at a higher level of need, both mental health and otherwise, and provides supports across all units that traditionally would be confined to living in group environments. This program allows our team to work with both landlords and tenants on making the relationship work and gives both sides the opportunity to resolve issues before it becomes a landlord-tenant concern.

Currently, we support seven individuals in these units and look to build more relationships with landlords to increase that number to the afforded 20 units. This program is also dependent on government subsidy, and we ask that dollars continue to flow into scattered site supportive housing initiatives.

The housing crisis is real, and while we wait for new units to be built, the solutions I have mentioned today give us the ability to house people quickly and with dignity. Flowing dollars into rental top-ups and scattered site supportive housing programs are not quick fixes; they are permanent solutions that will ease the backlog when new units are in fact built. We're not asking for a one-time payment, but ongoing rental support to ensure that those who can acquire housing can sustain it.

In Canada, we pride ourselves on upholding our rights and freedoms, and we ask that we finally make housing one of those guarantees so that those living within the marginalized population won't have to worry about where they're going to sleep on any given night.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations.

We will now start the questions with the government. MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** This is for Cathy and Wayne, but I'll invite Cathy to respond first.

Speaking as an individual, I actually agree with you about the idea of bringing non-profits under more government direction, but I want to talk about what—I've been in office for a year and a half. I wasn't involved in politics before; I was a crown attorney. What I've been experiencing, as far as the non-profit sector, is that in some ways, this is a great problem to have, because it means we have a lot of people that want to donate, a lot of people that want to help. But when you're a local politician, you end up spending far more time than the average person touring not-for-profits, meeting people and that type of thing.

1620

I'm based here in Waterloo region, and what I have found increasingly, to be honest—I'll use the word "frus-

trating"—is the proliferation of not-for-profits offering the same service that don't communicate with each other, that compete for the same resources. So I will meet organizations operating in the exact same region that have grant writers working for the same grants to deliver the same services. Even in just Cambridge alone, the number of organizations that exist with the idea of dealing with food insecurity is becoming maddening to me.

What I'm asking is, this idea of having more government oversight of part of this sector: What do you think about the concerns that I'm seeing? What do you think about the idea—and I'm just sort of stream of thought at the moment—of government, in fact, having the ability to direct or dissolve not-for-profits? Because that, to me, is one of my main frustrations.

And the second point as well is: When, as a politician, you're being asked to advocate for funding, a lot of the time—most of the time—you're being asked to advocate in areas that you have no expertise in. I'm a very evidence-based person. I like to see your ROI. I like to see proof that what we are investing taxpayer money in will work as an individual. And I end up feeling like I don't know which one of you identical organizations to advocate for because I have no idea which one of you does it best.

I would really love to hear, starting with Cathy and then going to Wayne, your thoughts on just what my experience has been. Because I don't know what to do with it as an MPP.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes, great question, and I appreciate the observation. To be honest, I get asked all the time, "Do we have too many non-profits and charities in Ontario?" And the answer is probably yes and no. What I would say is that, in a healthy democracy, any group of citizens can start a non-profit or charity, and if there is a demand for their services, if they have the support to do it, it's not up to us or, frankly, governments to say, "You should exist and you shouldn't exist." Because a lot of the organizations, even in food security in a community, may have different target audiences; they may have different expertise working with one cultural community, for example, or another. And so, is there duplication? Probably. Throughout the last five years, the duplication has been reduced because organizations really collaborated during the pandemic and are continuing to collaborate.

So we are seeing a lot of collaboration. We are seeing both funders and organizations coming together to figure out how to work together and partner together to take programs from one community and replicate it in another without starting from scratch. I think that is happening, for sure.

And I would clarify that, when we're looking for a government department to be a liaison and to help us navigate within government, we're not looking for them to do more oversight in terms of individual non-profits or charities. It's more about taking a big picture sector approach, like they support the small business sector. Government would never say, "That coffee shop should close on that corner because it has less business than the one on the other corner." And so we want to make sure that non-profits and charities

still have the resources that they need to do the work that they need to do.

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** I echo Cathy's sentiments about collaboration. Unfortunately, and fortunately, there are not a lot of folks who want to get into the shelter business, so there is not a lot of competition in our field. But I have noticed in the last five to 10 years, the collaboration among shelter providers, especially in our region, has been improving greatly. I've even had conversations with other communities who have called us to see what we're doing as a shelter here to collaborate to make their shelter space and their homelessness sector a little bit better.

But yes, I do agree: When you talk about food insecurity and other non-profits, there probably could be some streamlining there, but as Cathy mentioned, while there may be some overlap within those organizations, I think they all have a bit of a uniqueness to them that we don't want to see one go away or another go away. Maybe streamline what individual organizations are doing so there is less overlap and more concentration on that, getting rid of that silo effect.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Okay.

I was scanning, Cathy, the budget submission you did. What other areas could we, as a government—I'm thinking small, meaningful changes, like something that would be a single legislation piece or a policy change versus an associate ministry.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes, for sure. One example is transfer payments. A lot of organizations get transfer payments from the government, about 15,000 a year. So not even half the sector gets government funding from Ontario, but about a quarter. But those transfer payment agreements often are only one year in length, and by the time you get it, you can't hire staff because you only have nine months left on the contract, and it's hard to recruit people. So longer-term transfer payment agreements that include inflationary or cost-of-living increases is a small thing, but it makes a huge difference for the stability and certainty of recruiting and retaining staff.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** The government already also has some loan programs. Infrastructure Ontario does loans for buildings like hospitals and YMCAs and expanding that, so when non-profits and charities—and it is a loan. They pay it back; it's not a grant. We're seeing child care centres, shelters and lots of folks wanting to build and expand, and going through banking and financial organizations, they don't see us in the same way. So accessing Infrastructure Ontario would be amazing. There are lots of things like that that can be done.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to our presenters here today. It's good to see you again, Cathy. I'm going to begin my questions with you. I just want to thank you so much for your ask. I think the appointment of an ADM in

the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade focusing on non-profits makes a tremendous amount of sense. I remember you making this request last year in Toronto and let's hope we see some action.

One of the things that I hear over and over, and one thing that this committee has heard, is that non-profits are carrying a lot of the heavy load that has been given to them by government in action—so much of service and health care and so many things. You think about whether it's mental health, women's shelters, hospice beds; the fact that non-profits are looking after these vital health care services, and they do it while begging for pennies. It can be very frustrating when people come to this committee and are met with a lack of understanding and a lack of empathy.

You mentioned, Cathy, that less than half of your funding comes from government. Where does the rest of the funding come from?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Great question. When you look at non-profits and charities, all three levels of government, municipal, federal and provincial, represent half of the sector's funding as a whole. The rest of the funding comes from sales of goods and services. If you think about registration fees for minor hockey or soccer or ticket sales at a museum or an art gallery, they're all non-profits and charities. So the fees, sponsorships, donations, both individual and corporate, fundraising and other activities that they might do, like a Habitat for Humanity that has a ReStore—there's a lot of entrepreneurial spirit in this sector for sure. We're seeing an increase in that, which is great, because it's a way to generate revenue.

On the flipside, we just did a briefing note for the Ministry of Finance around declining charitable giving. So at the same time that all this is happening in terms of demand for service, charitable giving is actually at an all-time low in Canada and in Ontario. So that's also a problem when we're trying to—you can't just tell a non-profit or a charity, "Go do some more fundraising." That's not a solution right now and it's not working.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** No, absolutely. It's something we are hearing across the board, that fundraising dollars are dropping. It makes sense. Everybody is struggling. Quite frankly, that means there is a greater need for service.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes, the demand is going through the roof.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely.

One thing that is also quite interesting: The government is quite often fond of saying that, "Everything should run like a business." I'm sure you've probably heard this, but to everyone else: I very much recommend watching a little video called Everyone Deserves A Fair Slice. It's what would happen if a business was expected to run the way governments expect non-profits to run, and all of the obstacles and barriers they put in their way and the nonsense that is expected of non-profits.

I just wanted to also quickly ask you about wage parity. You mentioned there are struggles with retention of staff. What does it mean for folks in your sector when you can't

match the salaries of other sectors? What does that do, and also, what is it like when your staff are also struggling to maintain their quality of life and keep a roof over their head?  
1630

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Stats Canada is finally doing some great research about salaries and comparing the non-profit to the public and private sectors, so we actually have some really good data now. Our sector is paid considerably lower than most other sectors, often doing harder work and doing difficult work.

What we're seeing is that lots of young people want to work in the non-profit and charitable sector. They come in our sector and either they get recruited by the public or private sectors, because they pay more—so we train them and they leave—or they leave because there are pensions, top-up funds and better benefits in other industries.

We're particularly seeing that in health and social services, because we actually have similar jobs. You can be a PSW or an early childhood educator or a disability worker in the non-profit sector. You can also do that in a school board or in a hospital, and so they tend to get their training in the non-profit sector and then go to those organizations where the pay is better. So one of our requests to the provincial government is—they're funded by the same government, the same ministry, the same department, and one gets funding at one level and the non-profit sector gets funding at a lower level.

It should be thought of as holistic. If we need ECs, disability workers and PSWs, we should treat them all the same way, especially if it's government funding. So wage parity is really important, because it's really hard to recruit and retain staff, and we really believe that non-profits and charities should pay more. We need to provide decent work to our employees. We are doing important work, and so that's a conversation we continue to need to have with governments, donors and funders, about the importance of investing in our people.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. At this point, when you see the glaring gaps in wage parity, you wonder, after so many years, if it is deliberate neglect. But I just want to thank you for everything, and I look forward to continuing the conversation.

Wayne, I would like to speak to you next. The work you do is incredibly important. It's life-saving. It is life-changing. It's cold here today in Cambridge. It has been incredibly cold for the last few days. You think about those minus-30 temperatures and all of the people who are sleeping rough, who don't have the opportunity to stay at the Bridges or another organization.

We very much agree that shelters should be 100% funded. Housing is not only a human right, but housing is health care. Can you share with us what it's like to get funding for your shelter?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** Well, as Cathy mentioned, we're only a third funded by the government, so the rest comes from fundraising dollars, grants that we can acquire, charitable partners at United Way—and Hockey Helps the Homeless is a great organization that helps us raise money.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** We just started doing bingos. We've started doing some other initiatives.

But during the pandemic, we relied on COVID aid. We couldn't do a lot of the online or any of the fundraising that we could do. Any of our donors that were donors before didn't have the dollars themselves to be able to donate, so it was a struggle. I remember, at the time, our executive director coming to me and saying, "Do we have to close our doors?" So, it was a real concern for us: Did we have the money to stay open? Since the pandemic has waned a little bit, we've been able to start some new fundraising initiatives. Our donations have been going up.

Part of my job is getting out in the community, meeting with service groups, meeting with schools, meeting with our neighbours, talking about the good work that we're actually doing in the shelter: that it's not simply providing a roof over their head; that we have an ID clinic, that we have housing programs, that we started a social enterprise this year that provides meaningful work opportunities for folks who are staying in shelter or recent graduates of shelter. We're really trying to make a positive impact in our community so that we're not just—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time.

We will now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Thank you for coming in and presenting today. Thank you very much. I want to go to the Ontario Nonprofit Network first, Cathy, and then I'll get to Wayne.

I want to go to two of your recommendations, because that's what stuck out to me in your submission. One is to secure adequate funding. What does that mean, securing adequate funding? And then you mentioned enhancing community benefits, so those, too.

But before you answer, I want to talk about a crucial crisis that the not-for-profit organizations are experiencing. From speaking to my not-for-profit organizations in Scarborough—in my riding, Scarborough–Guildwood—it is the lack of volunteers from pre-COVID to post-COVID. What this government may not know is the crucial benefit of volunteers to the not-for-profit organizations, as it is.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** We are hearing that, loud and clear, across the province, in every community, rural and urban: that volunteers are not coming back post-COVID, for a number of reasons. A lot of our volunteers are seniors, and seniors haven't returned in the same way. They're either doing different things, taking care of their children, still worried about their health, for example.

And because of the hybrid, remote world now, a lot of younger people want to volunteer in different ways. They don't want to come in to the Red Cross and answer the phone on Monday afternoons; they want to do virtual things. They want to do pop-up volunteering. When their schedule changes, they want to be able to just go somewhere and volunteer.

We're not ready for a huge shift in volunteerism as a sector. We really need to engage people in what it means to be civically engaged in communities. The example of the Fergus Rotary Club, which is actually closing their



doors because they don't have volunteers anymore, is really concerning. And so we think—obviously a government doesn't have control over recruiting and retaining volunteers, but having a promotional campaign, doing some advocacy, showing how you're volunteering or supporting volunteers—I think there's a big opportunity for government to play a role to inspire volunteerism.

We had five million volunteers in Ontario. There will be a new Stats Canada study soon, but we're expecting it to be quite a bit lower.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** And can you detail your funding needs and your budget pressures right now?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Sure. We won't ask for funding specifically for individual organizations or subsectors; they're the best ones to tell you what community health centres need, or what mental health needs, or what food banks need, or what shelters need, so we hope that they have submitted budget submissions to you all. One of our financial requests is that when governments do agreements, they do, as I mentioned, longer-term and include cost of living in those agreements, so that organizations aren't behind. Every time we do a new round of granting, we lose ground every time, because we're still trying to keep up from the last time.

And there's no doubt that the Trillium Foundation needs extra support as well. They are oversubscribed. They're one of the biggest sources of funding for interesting projects and capital equipment in Ontario, and in the last five years they have been so oversubscribed, and their budget hasn't changed for years and years.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** I'm going to quickly go to Wayne. Wayne, thank you for the work that you do to shelter those vulnerable people. We need centres like you. There is not enough, because if we had enough, we wouldn't have this crisis of homelessness, right?

You received \$2.5 million from the region of Waterloo in 2022. Did I get that right?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** Yes.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** And \$24,500 from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. A big congratulations to you for raising in donors' money over \$500 million.

But my question is: You received most of your funding from the region of Waterloo, in a time when municipalities are facing major budgetary crises. Meanwhile, the provincial government only gave you that \$25,000—I'm just reiterating that again. Should the ministry get in the business of directly funding shelters in your—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Smith.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Once again, thank you for being here, especially our not-for-profits. Our not-for-profits support the community, so we like to support our not-for-profits.

But I do have to share in MPP Dixon's concern, because sometimes it does get to be very problematic when I have

very viable, wonderful organizations that are well-meaning, that are competing for the same funds, and they provide duplicate services. Sometimes they're not even aware of the other, and I might add that she's right: They have the same grant writers, and it's a racehorse. That's challenging for me.

We've provided funding to support community organizations that deliver supportive housing, and funding to help homelessness prevention programs, Indigenous supportive housing programs—actually, I don't know if this is the exact number, but over \$4 billion to support housing initiatives that deal with the more needy on the scale. But the fact of the matter is—and I should add that we're the first province, in Ontario, to provide a program that specifically deals with individuals who have mental health issues—and you highlighted that—which is so important to our community because especially over the last couple of years, that is something that we've seen.

1640

I know MPP Dixon talked about expanding on the little tweaks, and you gave a little bit of information about expanding on Infrastructure Ontario grants to increase not-for-profits, to find a door so that you can find the funds, or you can take advantage of these funds. Is there anything else that you can provide that would help us open the doors for you?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Sure. So one of the things that I know the government is looking at is, even on their website, having a place for non-profits and charities to go for grants, for contracts, for social procurement; for example, like the social enterprise that Wayne mentioned. A lot of non-profits are running social enterprises, hiring staff to do catering and landscaping. So prioritizing social procurement and prioritizing even government dollars that are already going to be used for non-profits and charities to provide those services would be very helpful.

One of the other smaller things, which is a big thing for our sector, is reducing the fees or eliminating them for volunteers for police record checks, which gets at the issue of volunteer engagement. We have—

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Sorry, I just need to interrupt. We actually did that with the OPP just recently, but I don't—

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes, not for—it's only half done. There are three levels of police checks, so it's free now for a levels 1 and 2 but not for level 3. We're hoping that that comes in as well because that makes a big difference for the vulnerable sector checks for non-profits and charities, because they pay thousands of dollars for police checks.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I was just going to ask you the same question.

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** What was the question again? Sorry.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** It's okay. What can we do to enable you? Your colleague talked about expanding Infrastructure Ontario grants to include the not-for-profits, providing that door opening for you to better get in on the possibility of funding. What I'm asking is, is there anything we can do to make that easier for you?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** Well, I like the idea of a centralized hub that would streamline a lot of the non-profits. If there is duplication, let's reduce some of that duplication, right? When I say let's put money into rental top-ups, I'm not saying necessarily for the Cambridge Shelter; I'm saying for the region and for the sector that we serve. If another agency gets 100 rental top-ups that are going to house 100 individuals, I'm happy with that. I would like to see that money flow through the Cambridge Shelter, but I think collaboration and breaking down silos is what should be at the forefront now.

We're starting to see some of that happen now. The non-profits are getting to the table. We're starting to work together. I have a weekly or a biweekly meeting with the other shelter leaders; we're collaborating. So again, as long as the money is coming into the sector and into the various organizations, then everybody wins.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you so much.

I don't know if Dr. Barbara Schumacher is still there. Is she still with us? No? Have we lost her?

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Hi. I thought we lost you there. Hello.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** Yes, hello.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Hi. Thank you so much for your presentation. I wanted to talk to you because I see your passion and I understand your worry about global warming. I just wanted to bring up that the fact of the matter is that—and we do our best; we all attempt to and the province is no different—China is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions. Just looking at 2020, they emitted 13.2 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, amounting to 27% of the greenhouse gas emissions according to data.

I guess what I wanted to say is, given we know this information—and I understand that regardless of what your neighbour is doing, you should do better, and to that end, Toronto is transforming our markets, so to speak. We've been talking about this a lot today, but I think it's worth reiterating that we're transforming communities and bringing plants for EV batteries and factories for vehicles. One's happening in St. Thomas, not too far away from here. And we've launched a number of innovation funds to strengthen the specific green economy—a \$5-million innovation fund, a made-in-Ontario supply chain. I would just say as an advocate, obviously, for a greener world, what are your comments to that?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** Well, I would say that Canada is not meeting its targets. Our Arctic is warming faster than other parts of the world, and waiting for somebody else to make the change is not going to help our children.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** But we're not.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** There are lots of things that we can do. The clean air alliance report that I talked about I think is probably one of the most important things for the government to act on because we will immediately reduce emissions and make the situation of air pollution reduced.

Air pollution is one of the major causes of health problems. So I think that's where we need to put our energy.

I'm not able to respond to your concerns about China. I'm concerned about our children here in Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time for that question.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Barbara, nobody expects you to solve China's global warming issues. It's a strange place to find ourselves in. But we are focused on Ontario, what we can do as a province and where we can allocate funding so that we can actually do our part. So thank you very much for your presentation today.

I find the conversation around the not-for-profit sector really interesting this afternoon—in a twofold part. The Cambridge shelter: You are absolutely saving lives. The not-for-profit sector: At every budget consultation, every executive director of every single not-for-profit in Ontario has told us, "We are at a tipping point. You cannot stretch those dollars any further. The cycle of reapplying and applying for new funding—we are fundraising to feed children. We are fundraising to house people. We are fundraising to keep women safe in Ontario." Right? The problem is not the not-for-profit sector; the problem is how we end up having to catch these people and human beings in our communities from experiencing the worst of the worst.

So I'm going to start with you, please, Wayne, because I think it's important to know: Who are you serving?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Who are you serving? And why do you have to keep begging for funding from a government that says, "Well, we don't know if you're doing your job quite right"? Please go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** The folks that we're serving right now, I think your heads would spin if I told you all the stories of the individuals that come through our doors. Currently, we have a gentleman who was a lawyer up until year ago. We've had university professors go through our shelter. We've had truck drivers. We've had nurses. Basically, any walk of life you can think of has gone through our doors.

Life happens. We're all going along, we're all working, we're all making our money and have our house, our cars and our boat, and all of a sudden, you're hit by a car and life changes. A brain injury happens. Workplace accidents happen. All of a sudden, now, you're hooked on a painkiller and you're going down that path of addiction when, two months ago, you were planning a trip to the cottage with your family.

So we have so many folks coming through our doors that have these tales. I task myself with meeting as many of these individuals and hearing as many stories as I can because, for me, it's important to be able to share these stories so that when I talk to folks like yourselves or when I'm talking to the community, I can share real stories about individuals who are coming through our doors.

When I say 40% seniors are in shelter, we just had a gentleman come through our doors last week—he's 87 years old—who is now homeless for the first time. To me,

that's criminal, that, as a society, we're allowing that to happen.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So is the problem that there are too many shelters?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** No, I don't think there are too many shelters. But I don't—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, that's the question, though. You require stable funding. Is it fair to say that it is not sustainable for your organization to continue to fundraise non-stop to ensure that that 80-year-old, that 70-year-old isn't on the street? This is the financial ask. So your specific thing is around portable rental top-ups. What would that mean if the government accelerated and increased that funding specifically on housing security?

**Mr. Wayne Paddick:** We have 85 people that stay in shelter right now. If we could house 20 individuals every two or three months, we'd be out of business, and that's our goal. I don't want to be in the business of having to shelter individuals any more. When I look at the folks that have been cast into our shelter—folks with high mental health, high addiction, seniors—those are the folks that we should be caring for the most, and they've been dropped, for lack of a better term, into our space by services, by family members—whatever that looks like—saying, “Here, you look after them. We can't do it anymore.” As we mentioned earlier, the non-profit sector is shouldering that burden and having to finance and raise money to care for our loved ones as a society, when we need that support to be able to care for whoever is landing in our space.

1650

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you for that. Thank you for telling the stories of who you're serving. There is a cost when we don't deal—like with the seniors—with compassion. There's actually a higher cost down the line in the health care system and sometimes justice—and so I do appreciate that you mention that.

And the food banks, the not-for-profits around the province right now, they are dealing with a surge that they've never seen before. One in four are children, 25% now are seniors—first time going there. Locally, we've had some good leadership. Wendi Campbell just passed away. She was the executive director of the food bank here in Waterloo region. The need never stopped, right?

Cathy, I just wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about—because I've written to the finance minister about the way that not-for-profits are funded and the cycle, the reapplication and this never-ending wheel of grant writing and applying. I've asked the finance minister to consider a three-year funding model for not-for-profits so that you can plan for that time period.

Can you give us some sense of the energy and the effort to continually apply for the same insufficient amount of money for the not-for-profit sector?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes, this is one of the top issues we hear from non-profits and charities for sure because so many programs, government and foundation programs as well, are shorter-term project funding. One thing I'd like to clarify: It's not about accountability. Non-profits want

to be accountable for the money. They are accountable for their money. There are very few cases of non-profits not using it for the intent it was intended for.

The time that they spend writing the grants, which often are the exact same as the previous year, reporting on them, making sure some programs across ministries have different definitions of what a full-time staff is, what administrative costs are, how much are eligible for insurance—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Even one organization that might get funding from multiple programs is actually doing completely different budgets, completely different reporting. So having streamline reporting, one system, definitions across government; at least three years, so you can recruit staff and do the work; get rid of quarter 1 reporting—it's not helpful anyway. There's lots of things like that that can be done.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So the government would call that red tape, and it is right?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** Yes. We've called it red tape.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So let's get rid of the red and the blue tape and make sure that the money goes directly to the people that you're serving.

The government currently right now has \$5.4 billion in an unallocated contingency fund. This is money that didn't get spent. It was budgeted, but it didn't get spent, including an organization like home care—\$79 million went back in 2021 because you don't have the people. So that \$5.4 billion, what would you say to the government is a smart place to invest that money?

**Ms. Cathy Taylor:** I would say that—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much, because the time is up.

With that, we'll go to the independent, MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to Cathy, Wayne and Barbara for your presentations today and highlighting the needs and the crises that we're facing in all of your areas of interest.

I will pick up on MPP Fife's comments about red tape because, certainly, when I heard that the sector deals with 16 different ministries—I've worked with organizations as a volunteer myself where I've talked to the ED about the number of hours she spent—this is a women's support organization, not a shelter—writing grant applications every year, the number of times that they would try to get their own network together to share best practices and the benefit that would come from that, but the challenge in getting money to do it.

So I certainly think a task force around reducing red tape for the not-for-profit sector would be of significant value, both for the government in terms of driving efficiencies within the government's work, public service, but also more importantly for organizations like yours who are working in this space and trying to leverage, as you say, every dollar.

One thing we heard from other not-for-profits is that, with the challenges in fundraising and getting funding, the volunteer coordinator position has been one of the first to

go. And that does, of course, affect your ability to leverage your dollars by recruiting volunteers and supporting them and encouraging them, giving them the skills they need.

I think that we need to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers and the not-for-profit sector. Volunteers and organizations like yours enrich our communities. You don't just lift people up and help them by putting a roof over their head. You enrich our communities. Giving back enriches our communities and enriches our own lives. So I believe this is a sector we absolutely need to support. Of course, there are always ways to do things more efficiently, and I would encourage that both within government and within the not-for-profit sector, but we need to support you, not criticize you. And so, certainly, you have my support.

Barbara, I want to just talk to you a little bit about the climate change impact assessment that came out recently. As you know, I think it came out in January. I commended the government for doing the report. But they kept it hidden for about eight months, I think because it is scary. There are a lot of big red flags in that report about the impacts of climate change—not just global warming, which is a softer word, but climate change and the impacts it's having.

I just want to give you a chance to reiterate the importance of taking action now to reduce greenhouse gases. We know, under this government, that our electricity grid went from being, I think, 86% clean energy down to, I think, 82% now because of their actions around reducing solar, reducing wind, cancelling contracts. They are now, it seems, reluctantly acknowledging that they need to get back in that business to both provide energy, but also to potentially help protect our environment. So could you talk a bit again about the findings from that impact assessment report?

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** Well, I think that was a really great report.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Dr. Barbara Schumacher:** The government pulled together experts to give them that advice. As a matter of fact, the University of Waterloo's Intact Centre has people that were participating in that panel and also in the one on climate adaptation. And this is part of what has motivated me, is that the future—and it's not far down the road—is looking very scary: the number of days that we'll have of excess heat, the heavier rainstorms and all that kind of stuff.

One of the things that they point out in that report is that Ontario is going to experience a lot of flooding. That's going to be our risk. We're not going to have the wildfires like BC does; we're going to have floods. And so that means we have to pay attention to the ways in which the natural environment, the wetlands and so on, help us to prevent flooding, how they manage storm water—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation, and it concludes the time for this table. I want to thank all the presenters for the time that they took to prepare to be here today and the great job of delivering your message for our deliberations in preparing the 2024 budget. Thank you very much for doing that.

## COALITION FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD

MS. ISABELLA STEFANESCU

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** As we're changing, we'll introduce the next panel: the Coalition for Healthy School Food and Isabella Stefanescu.

I'll give the instructions for the panel. You will have seven minutes to make a presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." At seven minutes, I will say, "Thank you." We do ask you all to introduce yourself before you make your presentation to make sure that we get the right name in Hansard covering the great presentation you're going to make.

With that, we'll start with the Coalition for Healthy School Food.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I'm Erin Moraghan, the CEO at Nutrition for Learning in Waterloo region. I just wanted to say thank you for having us here tonight.

Nutrition for Learning has been providing student nutrition program support to schools in Waterloo region for 26 years. Obviously, as you know, student nutrition programs play a really critical role in creating positive shifts in community health and well-being.

**1700**

Nutrition for Learning provides universally accessible meals with fresh produce, proteins and whole grains to pretty much nearly every single school across both boards in the region. We support just under 180 programs this year, meaning about 100,000 students can access our nourishing food at their school.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers at the school level work the front lines to ensure that the food that we procure and deliver to schools gets in the hands and bellies of students K to 12. Many of those volunteers actually include students of all ages, meaning student nutrition programs also serve as an opportunity to really elevate food literacy, life skills and a sense of purpose and belonging for students, which is more important than ever right now.

I know there is no need to explain to you today why food at school is important. I think we can all recognize that when students are nourished, capacities to learn, play, imagine and connect elevate. Academic outcomes and behavioural challenges improve, and food, of course, has played a very strong role in repairing some of the social fracturing young people experienced during COVID-19.

The province's leadership in implementing standards requiring that student nutrition programs be universally accessible has absolutely changed the game for young Ontarians. The elimination of stigma for utilizing nutrition support at the school level truly ensures that no young person is left behind. This is really critical. If you come to school hungry, for any reason whatsoever, food is there for you during the school day with no questions asked. This is why the programs that exist across Ontario work as beautifully as they do. Youth hunger is absolutely not isolated to low-income families. There are infinite reasons a child may arrive at school hungry.

Student nutrition programs create safe and equitable school experiences for students: a place where they can break bread, which is so important, and share, practice language, connect with food, make new friends and just feel part of a community in general.

Of course, organizations like ours are facing unparalleled challenges. I know you have been hearing about this already. The need has spiked exponentially, while food, resource and delivery costs are obviously climbing at pretty alarming rates. We're seeing the cost of some of our food programs as much as triple and even quadruple recently from what they were just one year ago. That's four times for some of our highest-needs schools.

Further, school populations are obviously continuing to rise. New schools are opening, and for the first time in our history at Nutrition for Learning, we have massive waiting lists and huge budget guardrails that are being rolled out next month for our schools, for the very first time in our history.

As you know, we receive partial funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for some local coordination and direct food procurement. That funding covers a portion of the cost for each program, and last year represented about 30% of our overall revenue. Unfortunately, this provincial funding has not seen a very meaningful increase since 2014, which is quite a long time ago, and things have really changed since 2014, obviously, despite the massive increases that we're seeing ongoing in the community need.

In September, the province committed an additional \$5 million towards the Ontario Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program for this particular school year. Our portion at Nutrition for Learning here in the region was roughly \$80,000, an important acknowledgment that school meal programs are an essential pillar in food security. Student nutrition programs across Ontario are sounding the same alarm bells, and we're all in a position of asking our schools to reduce their food orders, which is a heartbreaker, and align with budgets that honestly just cannot meet their growing needs. This translates to meaningful reductions in quality of life for young people right here where we live.

Last year, our food spend at Nutrition for Learning doubled to nearly \$1.5 million, compared with the previous school year. Truthfully, to be honest, if I had the budget, I could double that food spent again this school year and still not meet the need. While the small increase in funding from the province was meaningful for a handful of schools that did benefit, I do lose sleep at night wondering how we'll address new schools and increased populations in ever-growing need next September.

The Ontario chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food is asking the government to double its current investment in student nutrition programs from a total of \$32.3 million, which includes Ontario student nutrition and First Nations student nutrition, to \$64.4 million in 2024. Not only would this funding stabilize and enhance programming, it's also a smart economic investment that provides relief for families who are struggling due to the affordability crisis. It includes many working parents.

A recent report by Ruetz and colleagues showed that, for every dollar spent on food, the ROI is 2.5 to seven times that in terms of increased human health and the economic equity that it leads to. School food can lead to healthier life-long eating habits, which in turn can help reduce spending on diet-related diseases, which is estimated to cost just under \$6 billion annually in Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Our local agri-food sectors also stand to benefit through increased business and employment, which aligns with the Grow Ontario provincial agri-food strategy.

Your current investment is changing lives and your consideration of increased core funding would be very meaningful. Feeding kids is truly a non-partisan issue. School food programs offer a massive opportunity for the government of Ontario to support the health and the learning of our future leaders and healthier, more whole communities overall.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We'll now hear from Isabella Stefanescu.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Hello. My name is Isabella Stefanescu. I am an artist. I have been involved in making art and supporting artmaking in Waterloo region for over 30 years.

In September 2023, the cultural life in our region suffered a major blow when the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony suspended operations and declared insolvency. But all is not lost. The musicians of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony immediately started fundraising a series of benefit concerts. They raised funds and now are planning with the community for a revived and restructured symphony.

I belong to a group called Citizens Supporting the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, and we are convinced that we can have our cultural jewel back in its splendid concert hall, the Raffi Armenian hall at the Centre In The Square.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony is not only a huge cultural asset of our region; it's also an economic driver. In September 2023, the orchestra employed 52 full-time musicians. They were the only artists in our region who were employed and paid to do artistic work. All the other artists have to have second jobs, to teach or do whatever they can to support their practice. The organization also had 10 full-time staff, 85 part-time volunteers, about 85 part-time workers and about 120 volunteers. It has an annual budget of \$5 million.

You must know that for every dollar spent in culture, there is at least as much coming back in other things, anything from hairdressers to drycleaners to restaurant meals. There's a lot of spinoff economic benefit from culture.

The crisis in which our beloved symphony finds itself is symptomatic. The performing arts in Ontario suffer from long COVID. Culture is huge in Ontario. Before the pandemic, the contribution of culture to the economy-wide Ontario gross domestic product was 3.3%, which amounts to \$25 billion.

In setting the budget and the priorities of the province for the next year, I ask you to consider some measures. First of all, I have to mention that the Ontario Trillium Foundation was a lifesaver for many of us who work in culture. The Resilient Communities Fund of the Ontario Trillium Foundation has saved our bacon, and it's a program that has now ended.

1710

I also would like you to consider a version of the Canada Cultural Investment Fund called Limited Support to Endangered Arts Organizations. This is a program that helps organizations such as our symphony restructure and make a plan to come back online. I think some help from the province along the same lines, looking at this program, would be extremely helpful, not only to our region but to many other organizations that find themselves in very precarious situations.

The second thing that I would like you to consider is an annual increase of at least \$5 million to the Ontario Arts Council. It is a major arts funder in Ontario and its criteria is artistic merit. It has helped many, many projects and organizations in our region, but also across Ontario. It's really important.

Finally, what I would like to ask you to consider is to help us grow the next generation's audience by making sure that every child in the province gets the experience, at least once a year, of attending an in-person, live arts performance. There is a program in Quebec—it's called *Soutien aux sorties scolaires en milieu culturel*—which actually subsidizes the visits of children to a concert hall to hear something like the K-W symphony or to a theatre, and those experiences are indelible.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Looking at these kinds of programs is really, really crucial, and by supporting them, we support a generation that has the experience of being with a lot of people—those communal experiences that are so important in a democratic society.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We now start the questions with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Erin and Isabella. Thank you for coming out in person and sharing your expertise. You are the last delegations of the day, but certainly, arts and food security are not last on the priority list.

Erin, the coalition has, I guess, formed out of necessity. I think all of us should be ashamed that so many children go to school hungry. Your stat that you shared with us, that even if we doubled the amount, you still wouldn't see the need, is pretty discouraging in some regards.

Nutrition for Learning—I'm a donor, because I was a school board trustee and the first time I ever went to a breakfast program, there were three siblings, like little stair steps, waiting for that program to open at 7:30 in the morning. And the staff, the volunteers at the time, they told me that they would wrap up the breakfast for lunch and sometimes even for supper. So the need has been there.

Can you just pinpoint, though, the need for sustainability around funding and why the province needs to step up in this regard?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Well, I think for the first time, what we're seeing is folks who have never experienced any level of food insecurity before trying to understand how they can navigate some of those resources and supports. Truly, I feel like our role right now has to be in really collaborating with other folks working in food security, both in the region and across the province as well, to look very differently at how we're meeting these needs together. To me, at this stage in the game, having that additional support allows us the ability to use some of our resources to think differently and to recalibrate, rather than feeling like we're band-aiding a growing problem that we just can't get ahead of with this model.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Can you speak a little bit of volunteer fatigue? Because this has been a theme that we've been hearing as a committee across the province.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I mean, it's like nothing we've ever seen, and I think that not only is there volunteer fatigue, unfortunately, there are no paid staff positions at the school level to roll out or to lead these student nutrition programs, so the folks at the school level who are leading these programs are tired too. They're having a hard time finding the energy to lead the students, to really come up and bring their good energy to the program.

So many of the community centres, church groups etc. that have been leading so many great breakfast initiatives with Nutrition for Learning for many years—things are habit-based, so during the pandemic, when those types of activities weren't possible, those activities stopped, and it's really hard to get people back out into those routines.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** You make a very good point: How can you build an efficient, responsive program without the dedicated funding for the administration of that program? This has been a long-standing issue. So this is one of your key recommendations today, is to fund those programs?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** It's huge, and when we lean on the schools, to really just lean on that one caring person, that one person who really just has a passion for student nutrition, is not really scalable. It doesn't help us meet those benchmarks that we have around ensuring there's enough food, that it's universally accessible, that it's truly delivered in a non-stigmatizing way, with access to those food groups that we want to see, in a balanced fashion. It's very tough to have the success benchmarks met without those funded positions at the school level.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The stigma piece is really important. When I toured Food4Kids recently, the fact that—obviously, school is a good place to have eyes on children who are hungry and families who are struggling, but reducing that stigma of accepting food is really key. I think a key part of that is the universality, offering it for everybody. When I did tour, I was in a school, and the teacher told me that the healthy—the apples, the fruit, versus the granola bars—was what the kids were hungry for, because they're not getting it as they should.

That stigma piece: Is that something that the coalition is also concerned about?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I think that the coalition is really hand in hand with the province on this one, because that universality is one of the ministry guideline pieces that has to be followed in order for schools to participate in the program. We know that the program only works when it's universally accessible. That's the only way that we can really assure ourselves that the students who need that food the most are accessing it without hesitation.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much for being here today.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Thank you.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Isabella, thank you very much for coming forward. I met with you in my office. Certainly, what happened with the symphony in Waterloo region really took a lot of people by surprise. I think that they felt that it was on stronger ground, and perhaps people may have taken it for granted.

We do know that most arts organizations rely on contributions from commercial companies, sponsorships or even private trusts to donate and to hold these organizations up, as the public's support sometimes wanes. You say that you're still fighting for these resources.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The arts council, which you also referenced in your comments has been struggling for years to receive sustainable funding. Can you talk about the importance of the arts council as a funder and why the province needs to stabilize that funding?

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Essentially, most arts organizations that have been around for a while do get operating funds from the Ontario Arts Council. There's a three-year cycle which stabilizes organizations a little bit, especially in the case of the symphony, for example, that employs a lot of people and that has to plan two or three seasons in advance, that kind of support is essential. Now, it's a fraction of what the Canada council provides, but it is an important fraction, so I think an increase there for the Ontario council and support for the work it does—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. We'll have to take that on in the next round.

1720

We now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to both of you for being here today. I remember being in the car, and I think I was actually in this region, and hearing about the symphony closing down, and it really took me by surprise. It was a real loss for this community, I know, and a loss to the industry across the province, so thank you for taking time to be here.

I will start with the Coalition for Healthy School Food. Erin, thank you again for your presentation. There's an organization in my riding of Don Valley West called Summerlunch+. I don't know if you're familiar with them—

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** —but I talk with them regularly, and they provide food and, actually, training to children, to students, to help them prepare their own meals for their family. They're also looking at how they can do that over the summer, because, again, as we know, those families

and children who have food insecurity during the school year also face that during the summer. Their ask was actually to get a bit of money from the government to do an audit, so I continue to ask Minister Parsa for that. I think it would be really helpful data to have, to know the impacts of not having those school food programs to support families over the summer and how many families are facing that kind of food insecurity.

So my question to you is—you talked about the increase, the number of new people, new families, new children needing food in schools. Could you talk about what you're seeing in terms of the reasons that more and more people are needing to rely on food programs? Again, we know that there's an affordability crisis, we know we have new immigrants, but we also know that we have government to try to support people when they're in need, and these people are in need. And so, I want you to, again, just talk a little bit more about who those people are, why they're in need and how your program helps.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I want to say that I'm so excited that you mentioned Summerlunch+. They're a good friend to us and it's important. And just talking about the collaboration that's needed, of course, ministry funding supports bell-to-bell during the school year, right? But the need is holistic and continuous, so that's really key.

Obviously, there is an affordability crisis, and we know that people who have maybe never struggled before are struggling now for the first time. But I think the other piece that's really critical that we're seeing is simply just the mental health fallout from the pandemic. There are many, many families who are in higher socio-economic positions who are struggling with mental health and addiction, and we know that dollars don't always equal parenting outcomes that we want, right?

Many, many people are struggling for a huge variety of reasons, and while those reasons are important to us from a data perspective, they're not important to us on a day-to-day operations level. We always say we don't care why those kids are hungry; we just want them to have the food that they need. So, yes, we're definitely seeing a massive amount of challenges for folks on the other side of this pandemic.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thank you.

Isabella, over to you. Again, I took piano lessons for many years. I have to say, I enjoy the arts and I think sometimes people think that it's a luxury.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** They think of it as a luxury, but when I get the chance—not so often these days—to go to an event, even the symphony, it's people from all income levels, right? They're looking to nourish their souls in a way that the arts can provide. So I just want you to, in these last few seconds, again reiterate the importance of the arts for our community and for our overall mental health.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Well, of course food is important, but we do not live by bread alone. Yes, the kids go to school and food is important but, ultimately, they go to school to learn all those other things. I think an educated imagination is at the bottom of our prosperity. This is an

educated imagination. Those ways in which the arts teach you to make connections between things that nobody—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you again. We're cutting you off again. Time is up.

MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** My question is for Erin. Thank you so much for coming today.

I'm trying to understand a little bit about the structure of this. So Nutrition for Learning is part of the—is it the central-west? You've got the Halton and Wellington region and YMCA?

**Mr. Erin Moraghan:** So, yes. Student Nutrition Ontario oversees 14 lead agencies. Our lead agency is the YMCA of Three Rivers, and in the central-west group is Halton, Peel, Guelph, Wellington and ourselves.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Okay, thank you. And I'm sorry, I don't have the numbers in front of me, but you were talking locally about the wait-list. Can you tell me a little bit more about the numbers associated with that wait-list and the price tag on that wait-list?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes, so we have been very cautiously bringing our wait-listed schools in, just at the start of this calendar year. We don't have the funding to bring them in.

Right now, we have five new schools that we've onboarded. Depending on—the average school program tends to cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$20,000, but that's climbing. Some of my highest-need schools are trending towards a six-figure student nutrition budget this year. So we're really chasing our tails to try and not leave anybody out. We have about five schools that we're waiting to onboard now and really wanting to try and do what we can to include them in some way, even if it's not with the fulsome program.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Okay. So are we talking—at a low estimate, then—\$100,000 per year for those additional five schools, at the bottom end?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** That would be at the bottom end and that's only the food costs, right? That does not factor in all of those other margins around delivery and operations at our warehouse.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Yes. Because we are local and you are local, are you able to give me any sense about how we're doing in Waterloo region compared to elsewhere?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I can. When you look at Feed Ontario's hunger map, which is a really interesting resource, Kitchener is growing in need in parallel with inner-city Toronto and Hamilton. We have some of the highest-need families here in Waterloo region from across southern Ontario, and that always throws people for a loop. We are really growing in need here and it's something that can be very invisible for the average person.

One of the challenges that we find we have in Waterloo region is sometimes—unlike Toronto, where I'm from, where folks are often exposed to people experiencing homelessness on a very daily basis, here, it can often be very invisible. So we have to sort of push through that hurdle of first convincing people that the need exists in order to bring them into our partner family.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Okay. And do we, as part of this—or, initially—do you have the finance request or proposal as far as Waterloo region is concerned, specifically?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** No, but I certainly could.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Please.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Please do. Yes, that would be very, very helpful. Sometimes grant advocacy is possible, but sometimes local advocacy and illustrating it through local examples is a little easier. As somebody that has lived in this region for most of my life, I agree that, outside of this region, there's not as much understanding about how incredibly quickly we are growing, and the challenges that we face are just like other places that are seen as big cities, which we are.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes. Our annual operating budget is at around \$3 million and, as I said, if we had that full \$3 million to spend on food alone, we really still would not meet the need. So it's definitely a growing situation, and quickly.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** All right. Well, I look forward to receiving those numbers.

1730

I will turn it over to MPP Smith.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you.

How much time do I have?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have 2.4.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Thank you very much. And through you, Chair, thank you both for being here.

I was just going to talk very quickly about the arts, because it is an important issue for me. Arts organizations play an important role in building a strong, prosperous economy. They are an economy itself. They require people to purchase tickets, they require people to attend and they provide a valuable contribution to the province's communities.

Saying that, in 2023-24, we provided the Ontario Arts Council with a \$16-million operation allocation. This included the \$5-million bump that you were referring to. It fosters the OAC—that's the Ontario Arts Council—and gives them a mandate to create art for the benefit of all Ontarians. At this point, the OAC has provided over 2,269 grants to individuals and over 1,023 grants to organizations.

Now, circling back to the issue of the symphony: It was actually provided since 2018, more than \$2.3 million in funding to support the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony through the Ontario Arts Council and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, also known as the OTF. I wanted that to be comprehensive, so that people know that there is an understanding and that efforts were made. But most valuable, I think that we should obviously continue to explore opportunities.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** Have you looked at the private sector? I don't know how involved you are at this stage, but have you gone to the private sector for funding?

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Definitely. As you know, raising money in the private sector, especially at this point



in time, is not very easy. What has happened, though, is the kind of funding that the players have raised just in the GoFundMe, which were unreceipted donations—they raised \$475,000 in three months. They raised about as much from benefit concerts where the musicians were not paid. Everything went into this fund that will restructure the symphony.

So yes, definitely, the private sector—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Again, that time is up.

We'll have to go back to the official opposition. Mr. Kernaghan.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our presenters here today. I'd like to begin with you, Erin. Thank you very much for the work that you do. It's often been said that water is life, but food is love. What happens in a classroom when kids go hungry?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** The biggest thing that we hear is around the behaviour piece and how quickly food can mitigate a behaviour situation. The other piece is just really around that feeling of disengagement, right? They're not putting their hands up to volunteer for something, maybe not signing up for that volleyball tryout. It's just so many missed opportunities.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Absolutely. Have you studied other jurisdictions that provide food for students on a regular basis as part of the school operations?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes. We work very closely with all the organizations, for the most part, right across Ontario who are providing this partially ministry-supported student nutrition programs, and we gather fairly regularly to share best practices and talk about what we're seeing.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Very good. It's so incredibly important. How much does a hot meal or hot lunch cost? Is that something that is provided through your organization?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Yes. We're able to provide a meal featuring three food groups—which we consider a protein, a produce and a whole grain—for \$1.30. So it's really meaningful for schools to be able to have us as a resource, because we're obviously able to stretch their dollar.

Now, that's not necessarily a hot-meal program. The pandemic really forced organizations like ours to scale to those grab-and-go models, but the hot programs are coming back and usually a hot breakfast we can do for around \$2 a student.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** That's impressive. In the richest province in Canada, I don't think there should be a fight between food and the arts. I think kids should have both, but here we are at the finance committee.

I'd like to move over to Isabella. Isabella, I want to thank you for your presentation. The arts give us the opportunity to become better people. They help us to see through somebody else's eyes, experience their emotions, investigate their biases—you know, understand their perspective. Too often, in times of economic difficulty, the arts are the very first on the chopping block. It's a nice-to-have for many people, which is incredibly unfortunate.

I wanted to know, have you looked back in history, like when tobacco companies and liquor companies used to be

major patrons of the arts and what happened as a result of them being disallowed from being patrons of the arts? Would you be able to speak to that?

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** I cannot exactly speak to that, but I want to—something that you mentioned earlier, namely the arts being a luxury and first on the chopping block. I want to refer to something about how essential the arts are for mental health. We talk about mental health being a problem for people of all incomes, and we know that practising the arts and participating in the arts is something that is essential an individual's stability. So I think they're far from being a luxury.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely. People often will say that the arts are what got people through the pandemic, whether it was simply watching something on the screen—but that was created by somebody who is involved within the arts.

Too often, people expect the arts to be given a financial number or to explain themselves as generators of economic activity. I wanted to give my final time to you, if you'd like to speak about the importance of art for art's sake.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** So it's something, as you know, that the Massey report started, from the idea of being a Canadian. It's something about our stance in the world. It's extremely important for a democratic society.

In Waterloo region, however, the arts are really quite an economic driver. What people don't realize is that there was a study done that arts in our region are very good at earned revenue, in other words, bringing in and having those people buy tickets. The arts are very good at raising money from the private sector and from donors. Some donations are as small as \$10—ordinary people giving to the arts, other than the ticket.

But we have had trouble engaging the business sector, except when the business sector is looking at the number of doctors who might want or not want to move in the cultural environment is very important. So that's when the business people start getting concerned about the arts—not a criticism. But I think that ordinary people are really, really supportive.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Most definitely, I think it is of vital importance. It helps people become a better person. The arts show us what life is like from somebody else's eyes, and it's deeply important. I want to thank you for that, and I want to thank you for advocating for children to also have that opportunity to experience music. We know that there are ties between music learning and math education, for instance. They follow similar modes of thinking, and both can reinforce one another. So thank you very much.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Perhaps food for the stomach and food for the heart.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** There you go.

No further questions, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We'll go to the independent, MPP Hazell.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** To both of you, thank you for coming in, and thank you for being so patient with us. You're the last, and it says, "Leave the best for last," right?

I'm going to go to Erin from the Coalition for Healthy School Food. We've heard from other organizations that are doing the same work that you do. You're speaking to the choir here, and I think we've heard you loud and clear. But I want to reiterate that this is about investing in our future generations. You're serving the most vulnerable of our population, and you are able to put food in about 100,000 students' bellies last year. Congratulations for that. You still have a massive waiting list. You're asking to double the funding from \$32.3 million to \$64.6 million. That's like doubling, and maybe you can't even get to the nation that you need to feed because you have a growing population.

1740 Can you—and I want to quote this, because you said that “no young person is left behind.” Thank you for that quote. Erin, can you take my time and summarize your key budget pressures and priorities for 2024? What do you want to leave this committee with?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Well, I think, as I said, by doubling the budget, we still are just laying the foundation for what the future needs to look like. We all know that we're the only G7 nation in the world without a national strategy and view to what student nutrition priorities need to look like. So while we need that investment of dollars, clearly—and the coalition is asking the government to double the budget—we also need innovation; we need a view to commit to the future, as you say.

This is an investment in health care. It's an investment in excellence on all levels. I always look to overseas, where we see student nutrition as something that truly creates a more holistically successful and connected set of communities, so we need to shift our mindset from a hunger gap band-aid to an investment in our collective future.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** So if you did not get this \$32.3 million, what's going to happen to your program?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** At the end of the day, we are cutting programs off for the first time in history right across Ontario. There are going to be very hungry children and there is going to be reduced academic scores and elevated behavioural challenges. We're going to see huge problems at the school level, and it's already critical.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** What's going to happen to the morale of this community?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** I think it's difficult, especially in a community like Waterloo region that prides itself on being innovative. It's a turning point at the moment, right? We have the opportunity to really step up and look differently at what's possible, or we can continue to leave organizations like ours in a position of scrambling and just trying to play catchup every single year and never getting ahead.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Yes, well, I really thank you for that and thank you for putting it on the record.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** One minute?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Fifty-five seconds now.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you to the presenters. I appreciate hearing from what you're doing and what you're doing in the community.

Erin, I just want to question further a little bit with you. I want to understand a little bit more on the volunteer issue. You've talked a little bit about it and we're hearing that in many different sectors. It's a different culture of folks volunteering than the way they used to. Can you give me a sense of what it was like three or four years ago when the network was more active versus now? Are you seeing, in this post-COVID world, some return of people, or is it still challenging?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** It's a really good question. We are seeing a little bit of an increase in a desire from corporate to come out with their groups, which also really serves as a team-building piece. And sometimes that brings also some—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If I could just stop you for a moment? Just move a little back from the mike.

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Move back? Yes.

Sometimes that adds some cost to us, right? Oftentimes, managing and leading volunteers and coordinating volunteers is demanding on our resources.

At the school level is where we're seeing the biggest decrease, and one of the challenges with that is obvious. I think that pre-pandemic, we had a lot of parent-council folks who would lead student nutrition programs and really own the full execution of those programs and the imagination behind those programs, and that is almost 100% gone, to be honest. All schools eliminated the opportunity to include outside volunteers during the pandemic, and the majority of schools have still not lifted that rule. We're starting to see a little bit more involvement from parent council, but it's very limited. Even grandparents and folks who used to come in on a semi-regular basis, we just don't have those friendly faces at the school anymore at all.

The upside is that students are more involved, which is a really important opportunity for them and they're getting their volunteer hours at the high school level. But it's a huge shift. It's a culture shift. We need to bring volunteerism back, absolutely.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Interesting. Well, your kind of program would be hopefully the one that does that.

Just on the funding level, you did acknowledge your organization got \$80,000 more from the \$5-million program; I appreciate that. But is it only—and you may have commented on this before, and I apologize if you have—public sector? Do you do any fundraising?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Oh, yes.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Parents in other communities, and—

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** Absolutely. Government funding—ministry funding, rather—accounts for about 30% of our overall revenue. It's 30-30-30: corporate, foundations, and the rest comes from individuals, and a little bit of school fundraising, as well.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** And has that ratio changed? Do you see, going forward, more from corporate? Is that an opportunity?

**Ms. Erin Moraghan:** The ratio has changed because the significance of the provincial funding has reduced as costs of programs go up. We are seeing, definitely, an

increase in more folks at the corporate and foundation level really prioritizing basic need, which is a real struggle for the arts etc., but we are seeing more individuals who are really recognizing that food and shelter needs are just not being met.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you very much.

I'll pass it over to MPP Dowie.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Which one?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Andrew.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank both presenters for being here, for staying so late with us. My question is for you, Isabella. I'm wondering if you could share with us the framework of the financials of the symphony. I think back to my home community, Windsor, where we had a similar situation, and we found a path to sustainability through management of the building and having the building available not only for the symphony but for other rentals: film festivals and things like that. What kind of model exists for the structure in Kitchener-Waterloo?

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony does not own its own building. It actually rents, at present, the Conrad Centre, which is a small theatre, and then rents space at the Centre In the Square.

Most of the revenue for the symphony is ticket sales. The problem that developed, developed because people are reluctant to buy subscriptions. It's not because they're not buying individual tickets. As a matter of fact, the individual tickets have been quite strong. However, for an organization that has to plan ahead, the subscriptions are essential. Somehow, I think, there was some miscommunication there between the symphony and the community about the subscriptions, and I confess myself guilty: I went to get symphony tickets and bought my individual tickets.

But a symphony has to plan ahead. It has to engage the soloists. It has to be able to pay its musicians and all this

sort of stuff. So that model wasn't quite working. I think a lot of performing arts will have to rethink their model.

I also could say that if there had been more artists on the board, perhaps alarms would have been sounded sooner and the community would have in force much sooner. The community is behind the orchestra.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Well, thank you for that. I guess where I wanted to explore it a little bit was, is the symphony open to going beyond being a symphony and being a facility operator, to take on the management and attract other parts of the entertainment sector, so that the facility can be used better, and then they can get—

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** The facility that was custom-built for the symphony—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** Yes—is actually owned by the city of Kitchener, and they manage it.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay, so the city of Kitchener manages it. Have they offered to have the symphony manage it or considered that?

**Ms. Isabella Stefanescu:** No. The symphony manages the Conrad Centre.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Okay.

Thank you very much, Chair. That's all.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much, and I thank the panellists very much. This concludes the time for this panel, and we very much appreciate the time you took to prepare to be here and to bring your stories to the committee.

With that, that concludes the business for today. I want to thank all the presenters again today for a great job, and the committee for a great job for keeping us on time.

With that, the committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, when we will resume public hearings in Brockville, Ontario.

*The committee adjourned at 1750.*

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