

## **EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR ONTARIO COMMUNITIES**

### **Investing in Prosperity for Rural, Northern and Aboriginal Communities**

The McGuinty government is promoting strong and adaptable communities by investing in strategic infrastructure projects, improving health and education resources, fostering a positive business climate and working with diverse communities across the province to address unique local challenges.

#### **Investing in Communities**

The government is continuing to make investments in communities and regions across the province that would help foster a positive business climate and address local challenges. In 2007, the government is investing more than \$1.9 billion in ongoing operating support to municipalities. This includes \$843 million through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, which is \$225 million more than 2004 transfers under its predecessor program, the Community Reinvestment Fund, an increase of 36 per cent.

Measures in the 2007 Budget that support communities include:

- \$127 million to municipalities for new affordable housing or to rehabilitate existing housing;
- Doubling funding for the Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative to \$140 million to help rural and small municipalities provide safe and reliable local infrastructure;
- Investing \$10 million in 2007-08 to help expand broadband coverage in rural southern Ontario by leveraging community and private-sector investment; and
- Bringing total investment to \$41 million for community infrastructure and multi-use facilities to promote physical activity in various communities throughout Ontario, including Port Colborne, Ottawa, Cobourg and Moosonee.

The plan to cut high Business Education Tax rates worth \$540 million after seven years will also benefit rural Ontario. Businesses in rural municipalities will enjoy an average 26 per cent reduction in provincial Business Education Taxes by 2014.

#### *Infrastructure*

Under ReNew Ontario, the government has developed the Southern Ontario Highways Program that sets out investments totaling \$3.4 billion to expand and improve the provincial highway network in southern Ontario. This will provide for construction of an additional 130 kilometres of highway; replacement of 64 bridges; and repair of 1,600 kilometres of highway and 200 bridges. In 2007-08, the government is investing \$899 million in Ontario's southern highway network.

#### *Local Health Care*

Patients in both urban and rural settings will benefit from 150 new Family Health Teams (FHT) that are planned to be fully operational across the province by the end of 2007-08. FHTs will provide care to more than 2.5 million Ontarians in 112 communities. Also, by 2007-08, the number of Community Health Centres (CHCs) will rise to 76 from the current 54, and the number of satellite CHCs will rise to 27 from the current 10. Together, these CHCs will serve an additional 200,000 people.

Furthermore, through ReNew Ontario, the government will be funding the construction of new cancer treatment programs in Barrie, Newmarket, St. Catharines and Sault Ste. Marie, as well as renovating and expanding existing centres in Ottawa and Kingston.

### *Community Justice*

To help make Ontario's communities safer, the 2007 Budget is announcing additional funding for 2007-08 of \$27 million for key initiatives in the justice sector, including:

- \$51 million over three years, starting in 2007-08, for Legal Aid Ontario to ensure access to additional services for vulnerable Ontarians;
- \$4 million for 30 new justices of the peace to assist municipalities in addressing backlogs relating to Provincial Offences Act matters;
- \$1 million for a one-year pilot project in Stratford to target producers and traffickers of methamphetamine (crystal meth) and dismantle their labs;
- \$3 million to modernize the human rights system; and
- \$4 million to promote a healthier, more diversified correctional services workplace.

### *Agriculture*

The government is working to maintain a strong, sustainable farm sector in Ontario. In the 2007-08 fiscal year, base expenditures by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will reach a new high of \$876 million.

To encourage increased ethanol production in Ontario, the government is providing \$52.9 million in 2007-08 in capital and operating assistance; this investment is part of the 12-year, \$520 million Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund. The 2007 Budget is announcing further investments of:

- \$6 million to the Ontario BioAuto Council; this multi-industry initiative will help position the province as a global leader in manufacturing auto parts and other materials from agricultural and forestry feedstocks;
- \$2.5 million to help a number of Ontario agri-food organizations that fund marketing initiatives for Ontario farm products;
- \$200,000 to the Organic Council of Ontario, which promotes industry development activities; and
- \$10 million for a strategy to raise consumer awareness and promote consumption of food produced in Ontario.

### *Municipal Water and Wastewater Systems*

The provincial and federal governments have committed almost \$380 million to help 60 small and rural municipalities across the province upgrade their water and wastewater systems. Funding for clean water and wastewater would also be available from the government's \$140 million Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative, which helps rural and small municipalities provide safe and reliable local infrastructure.

## **A Strong Northern Economy**

The Province is investing strategically to support the efforts of northern communities and businesses committed to transforming the northern economy and realizing its potential. Key initiatives for building the foundation of the new northern economy include:

- Appointing Dr. Robert Rosehart, President of Wilfrid Laurier University, as Northwestern Ontario Economic Facilitator, to work with local people and businesses to help inspire a new generation of growth in the northwest;

- Providing \$6 million to Lakehead University, which is building capacity to support competitive and sustainable development of Ontario's boreal forest;
- Investing \$2 million in the Northern Centre for Advanced Technology in Sudbury; and
- Providing an additional \$3.6 million in 2007-08 to increase the operating subsidy of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission to \$19.7 million, which will allow the Commission to improve rail service.

In addition, the Province will continue to work with the federal government, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation and other partners to establish the Molecular Medicine Research Centre in Thunder Bay.

The government will work to expand broadband and cellular services, through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, to remote areas of northern Ontario to connect most of northern Ontario within three years.

The government's policies have also set in motion initiatives to promote investments in electricity projects in the north, including an energy-efficient, combined heat and power cogeneration project in Sault Ste. Marie, which, together with cogeneration projects in other regions, will contribute 414 megawatts to Ontario's electricity supply.

Northern communities will also benefit from the plan to cut high Business Education Tax rates. Businesses in northern municipalities will enjoy an average 32 per cent reduction in provincial business education taxes by 2014.

#### *Infrastructure*

The ReNew Ontario plan has also led to the development of the Northern Ontario Highways Program, including investments totaling \$1.8 billion for the renewal and expansion of the highway network in northern Ontario. This funding will allow for the expansion of the northern highway system by 64 kilometres; the construction of 54 bridges; and the repair of 2,000 kilometres of highway and 200 bridges. In 2007-08, the government is investing \$468 million in Ontario's northern highway network.

#### **Aboriginal Communities**

The McGuinty government is working on initiatives to close the socioeconomic gap between Aboriginal Peoples and other Ontarians, including:

- Launching the Aboriginal Education Strategy and investing \$13 million to improve achievement by First Nations, Inuit and Métis students;
- Providing \$80 million in funding for up to 1,100 off-reserve housing units for aboriginal families, that the government would allocate in partnership with aboriginal communities; and
- Investing \$2 million to support the implementation of "Keeping the Land, a Land Use Strategy" for the Whitefeather Forest in Ontario's Far North in collaboration with the Pikangikum community.

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