

WESTERN ONTARIO
WOWC
WARDENS CAUCUS



**2025 PROVINCIAL ELECTION
CANDIDATES BRIEFING PACKAGE**

www.wowc.ca



The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) is a not-for-profit organization representing the interests of the 15 upper- and single-tier municipalities in rural Western Ontario, including 300 communities and 117 municipalities within its geographic boundaries and 1.6 million people to whom the region is home. The organization aims to enhance the prosperity and overall well-being of rural and small urban communities across the region, by working collectively with upper levels of government.

Western Ontario's small and rural municipalities are facing the need to address increasingly complex health and

social challenges, such as homelessness, mental health and addictions, and climate change, without the financial tools to solve them. They are also facing unprecedented population and housing growth which will require significant investments in municipal infrastructure.

The WOWC strives for partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with other levels of government – and embodies these values in its advocacy efforts in the spirit of maintaining and supporting these critical relationships. Investing in municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: HOUSING



ISSUE

Housing affordability, particularly in rural areas, continues to remain a strong focus within rural Western Ontario. Given the current housing and rental market, it is crucial to focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing, of all forms, so that all residents regardless of income level have a safe place to call home.



THE ASK

The WOWC requests that the Province of Ontario reinstate housing services and the cost of land as eligible development charges (DC) costs.



BACKGROUND

Together, these changes cost municipalities approximately \$4 billion over a 10-year period and will have a material impact on municipalities' ability to invest in community housing. Without DCs, there is no guarantee that developers would pass along significant savings to homebuyers.



THE ASK

The WOWC requests equity for small and rural municipalities regarding housing infrastructure funding, including final details on the Province's commitment to better assist these communities.

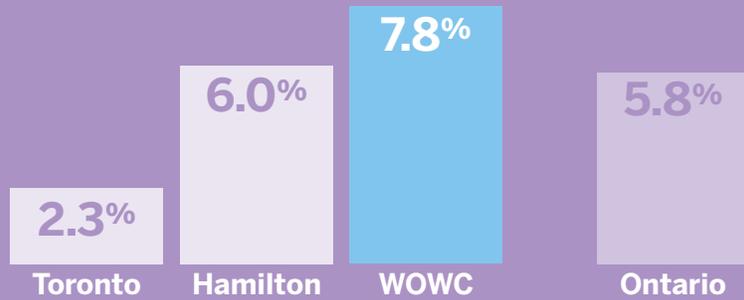


BACKGROUND

This includes future infrastructure-related funding available to small and rural municipalities, such as the Housing-Enabling Core Servicing stream of the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, namely as the 117 WOWC municipalities represent 26% of the 444 municipalities across Ontario.

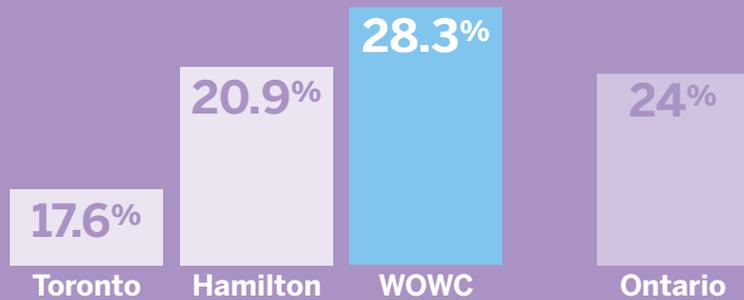
POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



ADDITIONAL HOUSING UNITS

ADDED
2016 TO 2021



POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



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

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: INFRASTRUCTURE



ISSUE

As Western Ontario continues to be the economic driver of the Province, and more investments are being made in our region, the WOWC's municipalities require the Province's support on growth-related infrastructure.



THE ASK

The WOWC requires clear communication from the Province of Ontario on the infrastructure build out in Western Ontario, including clarity from the government on what to expect for utility investments, including hydroelectricity, natural gas, water, and wastewater.



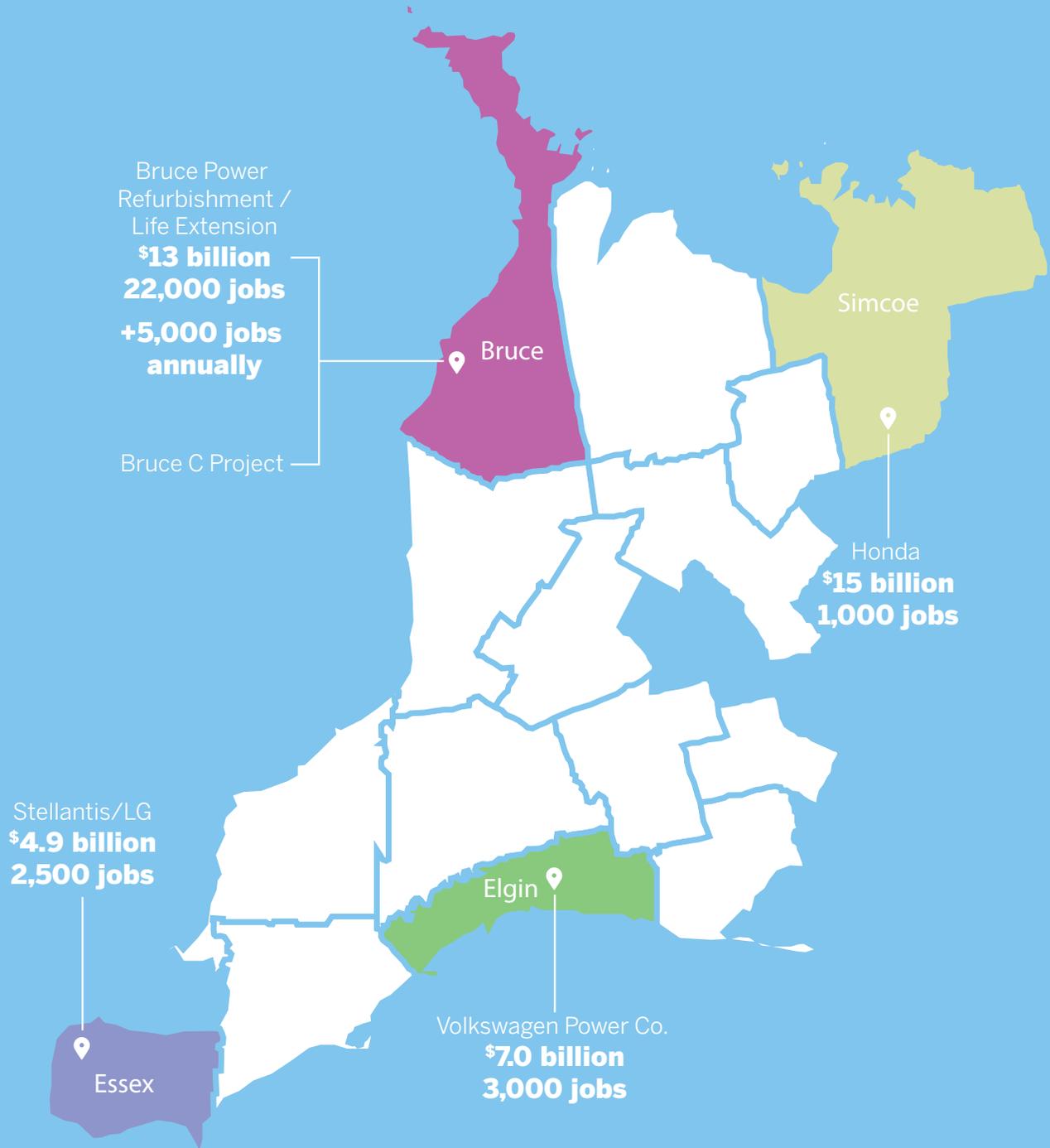
BACKGROUND

With more than \$40 billion in investment and 30,000+ jobs coming to the region through the Electric Vehicles and Clean Energy sectors, the impact of the required infrastructure upgrades that are borne by municipalities are not offset by the limited funding provided to the municipal sector. As a result, local property taxpayers living and working in small and rural municipalities are paying a significant portion of the bill for the investments being attracted and created.

Much as Ontario continues to be the economic driver of Canada, the WOWC region continues to be the economic driver of Ontario.



INVESTMENTS IN WESTERN ONTARIO



TOTAL
\$40 billion | 30,000 jobs

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH



ISSUE

There has been an ongoing focus for the WOWC over the past few years on workforce retention and expansion. This has been highlighted in the collaborative regional work through the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy.



THE ASK

Rural Western Ontario requires provincial funding for rural transportation and childcare, which are both critical factors in helping get people to work. The WOWC requests that the government consult with small and rural municipalities to focus on areas outside of major urban centres and provide more assistance in long-term care and early childhood education.



BACKGROUND

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

Projected employment in the health care and social assistance sector in Western Ontario by 2030 is estimated at 82,000 jobs. The health care sector – including long-term care and early childhood education – is expected to have 28,000 jobs that need to be filled between by 2030 to meet growth and replacement demand.

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



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS



ISSUE

The mental health and addictions epidemic is deeply affecting and impacting the communities in small and rural municipalities, while homelessness continues to increase. Service managers across rural Western Ontario are struggling to respond to the growing need for resources.



THE ASK

The WOWC continues to emphasize its request to the Province for an increase in Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) funding to account for the increased demand in homelessness-related services for small and rural communities.



BACKGROUND

Regional data from service managers in the WOWC region confirms that housing wait lists, shelter usage, and social assistance clients have all increased significantly between 2018 and 2023. The current financial support is simply not adequate.

Rather than have unhoused populations relocate to urban areas for homelessness supports, the WOWC would like to provide these services in its communities and explore solutions to address these concerns in the long term.



THE ASK

The WOWC continues to advocate for permanent funding for the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) programs, through annualized funding and permanently-funded mental health officer positions.



BACKGROUND

The MCRT funding provides critical funding support for our police forces to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls. The WOWC has expressed concerns about MCRT funding and the importance of creating permanent funding for this program, especially for small and rural communities, where these teams have had proven success.

Shelter Usage Over 5 Years



Housing Wait List Over 5 Years



Social Assistance Clients With No Known Address Over 5 Years



The WOWC strives for partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with other levels of government—and embodies these values in its advocacy efforts in the spirit of maintaining and supporting these critical relationships. Investing in municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities.



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