

2023 Ontario Chamber of Commerce Policy Agenda

Annually, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) provides the Ontario Chamber Network with an opportunity for Chambers across the province to build locally informed policy agendas to be advanced to the Provincial Government. This opportunity is a vital way for chambers of commerce and boards of trade across the province to amplify and advocate about the issues impacting businesses. Through this provincial platform and collective advocacy effort, we can influence the decisions of policymakers and inspire innovative solutions to the problems affecting our business community. The [OCC will provide these recommendations](#) and ensure the government is acting on them. After weeks of diligent discussions, and revision recommendations, the Guelph Chamber of Commerce is pleased to have voted in favour of the following policy recommendations.

Below we have identified some of the most pertinent policy areas on matters that most relevant to our network and the Guelph community.

Small Business Support

Addressing the Challenges of Ontario's Largest Economic Sector: Small Business

This resolution is about addressing the cost of regulatory compliance and the difficulty navigating bureaucratic processes by establishing a regulatory concierge service for small businesses in Ontario. This service would allow small businesses to devote less resources to navigating regulations and achieving compliance.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Create and promote a provincial concierge service to provide single-window, one-on-one, customized access for small businesses to guide them through regulatory compliance processes and help them achieve compliance obligations.
2. Develop interconnectivity between municipal, provincial, and federal concierge services to enable knowledge-sharing and to ensure that each is able to provide the best guidance and expertise to its clients.
3. Continue to work with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Ontario's business community, and with small businesses in order to reduce red tape.

Regional Approach to Provincial Procurement Reform

The current province-wide design of Supply Ontario, a procurement model for Ontario's Public Service, risks leaving SMEs unable to bid on provincial contracts. A more regional approach to procurement models enables SMEs and Indigenous businesses while also being considerate of sustainability and inclusivity.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Implement regional procurement hubs that mandate public buyers to use a blended portfolio of national, provincial, and regional suppliers to derive the greatest total value for purchases.
2. Define total value as the balanced consideration of price, regional economic impact, and other important factors including but not limited to sustainability and cultural inclusion.

Environment

Align the Province of Ontario's Framework on Carbon Capture and Sequestration with Global Jurisdictions

This resolution notes that the Government of Ontario's approach to carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) lacks a clear and efficient regulation. This lacking regulation is causing Ontario to lose out on potential investment and economic competitiveness for larger emitters.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. State definitive timelines for development of a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework for Ontario CCS projects, targeting completion by the end of 2023, by leveraging industry partners versed on this topic.
2. Work with key industry partners to ensure that Ontario's approach to pore space allocation is strategic and maximizes the most efficient usage of the finite geological storage space available in the region, so that more communities and industry can benefit, and Ontario's climate targets are most efficiently addressed.
3. Develop a comprehensive regulatory framework for full lifecycle CCS project approval, from demonstration/pilot to commercial-scale development.
4. Ensure appropriate flexibility in the regulations for various types of storage applications, an expedited and timely approval process, rigorous pre-screening process for eligible project proponents and an appropriate transfer of long-term responsibilities for stored CO₂ following for example the Alberta model.
5. Explore further opportunities to maximize CO₂ capture.
6. Expedite the approval process to ensure the competitiveness of economic development in Ontario, with a goal of all regulations being fully and completely defined prior to the end of 2023.

Health Care

Diversifying healthcare to ease the burden on Emergency Rooms and family doctors

This resolution discusses pressures on hospitals caused by the lacking access to family doctors for non-urgent medical needs for millions of Ontarians. Additional measures and utilization of nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and health centres must be utilized to create a healthy workforce and an attractive community to start a business.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Provide more funding for Nurse Practitioner-led clinics, and fund additional Nurse Practitioner seats at Ontario's universities.
2. Expand funding for community paramedicine programs.
3. Support Community Health Centres as a means of addressing healthcare needs for those with barriers and needs that fall outside the scope of traditional healthcare systems.
4. Ensure communities have access to walk-in clinics.
5. Invest in mobile clinics to meet non-urgent healthcare needs in rural communities.
6. Make medical schools more financially accessible to students interested in entering the medical field.

7. Work with the federal government to Improve the mobility of physicians within Canada by broadening the national licensure program.
8. Continue to improve recognition of equivalent qualifications held by international medical graduates to integrate them into the Ontarian medical field and meet fast-growing demand.
9. Increase admission capacity for different types of health care professionals.
10. Expand programs to offer incentives for health care professionals — including physicians, nurses, specialists, and technicians — to locate in rural and northern regions experiencing higher levels of healthcare workforce shortages.
11. Ensure that communities across Ontario possess the digital infrastructure necessary for enhanced and integrated telehealth programs that bring physician teams and patients closer together.
12. Ensure the reduction of unnecessary administrative demand regarding family practitioner

Simplify information sharing to improve specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness

This resolution is focused on the rising costs for businesses and municipalities because of rising homelessness and mental health challenges. Improving the mechanisms to manage these issues is essential to promote business economic success.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Review relevant sections of the Personal Health Information Protection Act that prevent sharing of information among service providers involved in clinical case management of people experiencing homelessness, specifically, non-healthcare related sector service providers such as social service and emergency service providers.
2. Ensure a provincial funding commitment to specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness.
3. Create enhanced support mechanisms for people with mental health conditions for aftercare after being released from the hospital, so they can be monitored for a more extended period by the required mental health specialist and social service professional, in partnership with the ACT team.

Supporting Safer and Healthier communities through a Detox Centre in a collaborative approach when dealing with those experiencing Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions

Mental health, homelessness, and addictions are linked, as one increases in a community, the others follow quickly. Due to an already stretched healthcare system, the mechanisms in place are not adequately addressing the severity of the situation. The utilization of Detox Centres and Healing Lodges are effective tools in providing support for those living in these conditions and can help improve the conditions of operating a business.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Invest in integrated and specialized mental health services that meet the unique needs of communities.
2. Facilitate the creation of Detox Centres and healing lodges in communities across Ontario without existing facilities.
3. Develop a framework to allow for sustained funding agreements with parameters to ensure the viability and success of the Detox Centre.

4. Ensure that Detox Centres are provided with mental health and housing resources and integrated with mental health care providers and homeless shelters.

Housing

Empower the development of housing in Ontario

This resolution discusses the role and uncertainty of municipalities to contribute to growth targets. By establishing clear plans for compensation, the government will dispel uncertainty experienced by municipalities and empower housing development.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Introduce plans and a policy framework for the implementation of an increase of the building envelope and a timeline to expand inclusionary zoning, as-of-right building for more units, and greater densification in urban residential areas, while also ensuring investments are made in infrastructure and services that support densification.
2. Clarify their intent in regard to addressing the loss of municipal revenue from development charges and set a fiscal policy to address this impact and ensure the loss of this revenue will not result in any slowdown of construction.

Supporting Ontario Contractors and Expediting Infrastructure Builds by Addressing the Backlog of Ontario One Call Locate Requests Through Adaptive Technological Innovation

Ontario One Call, an organization responsible for organization's locate requests before breaking ground is experiencing severe backlogs and wait times. Addressing these backlogs is vital to encouraging new investment, elevating financial burden, and streamlining the efficiency of the building process.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Work with Ontario One Call to address the severe accumulation of requests for locates and consider how partnerships with independent contractors who can provide locate services can assist in moving these projects forward in a mutually beneficial way to all involved.
2. Explore ways in which adaptive and innovative technology, including the use of augmented reality and algorithmic-based response systems, further expedite infrastructure projects like what the City of Burnaby, British Columbia, has implemented.

Addressing Housing Shortage by Updating the Approvals Process

Underinvestment, poor communication, an outdated process, and a lack of repercussions for municipalities have led to a flawed approval process, contributing to the greater housing issue. It is vital to improve the efficiency of every process within the housing shortage to address the issue effectively.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Work closely with municipalities to streamline housing development approval processes, including by supporting municipalities in implementing changes and accelerating the adoption of digital platforms (e.g., e-permitting).

2. Develop a shared common data platform that will help the province to establish a comprehensive e-permitting system where agencies and municipalities can link together. This can be used to streamline the application and approvals process to ensure there is no miscommunication between the Provincial and Municipal governments, while simultaneously allowing all parties to track applications.
3. Promote greater transparency in the process, possibly by legislative means or by commissioning a body in place of the Ontario Land Tribunal. At minimum, there should be the aforementioned web-based system which gives both developers and buyers sufficient information to understand the process.

Workforce Development

More systems needed in place to encourage women to pursue a career in skilled trades

This report notes on the underrepresentation of females in the skilled trade industry. Developing tools to further the pathways for women to obtain training and careers in the skilled trades is a vital way to address shortages in skilled labour.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Continue to market a career in skilled trades as a viable employment option, and ensure intentional outreach is extended to girls and women.
2. Allow students graduating from high school with an interest in any skilled trade to apply to the college of their choice, regardless if they have found employment in the industry.
3. Consider working with industry and post-secondary institutions to offer more opportunities at colleges with skilled trades programs to host similar events modelled after Conestoga College's 'Jill of All Trades', in hopes of ensuring more high school students have the opportunity to experience skilled trades training

The Workforce Ontario Needs

Employers and employees struggle to find the right talent and opportunities to fit their needs. To encourage meaningful employment, advancements in careers, and finding suitable candidates, Ontario needs a responsive skills development ecosystem.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Expand employment opportunities for international students through the OINP by broadening the scope of study permits and introducing fast-tracked visa streams for specialized academic programs targeting fields facing labour shortages.
2. Work with post-secondary institutions to provide technology skills training to adapt an aging workforce to the changing labour market and encourage life-long learning.
3. Enable the seamless transfer of foreign professional credentials held by immigrants to enable their participation in the Canadian labour force.
4. Provide post-secondary institutions with incentive to enhance recruitment towards the skilled trades and high demand programs that are currently experiencing labour shortages.

Strengthen Connectivity Between Businesses and Post-Secondary Institution

SMES note various barriers that prevent them from employing, training, and providing learning opportunities to post-secondary students. Developing these opportunities and creating stronger

linkages between businesses and post-secondary institutions will increase the supply of qualified and skilled labour.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. In collaboration with small businesses and public post-secondary institutions, explore new programs to incentivize greater employer participation in experiential learning initiatives, including, but not limited to, co-op education, paid work placements, internships, industry-recognized in-class projects, mentorship programs and incubators, accelerators and innovation hubs.
2. Expand the Co-operative Education Tax Credit.
3. Introduce a tax credit available to employers who hire graduates of co-operative education or equivalent programs that allows employers to claim a percentage of wages and salaries for the first year of full-time employment.
4. Direct business-facing Ministries to prioritize communicating new and existing opportunities to support experiential learning opportunities and the associated benefits.

Special Issue

Supporting Ontario Craft Beverage Alcohol Producers by Updating AGCO Liquor License Rules

This resolution looks at how COVID-19 has enabled growth in the market that alcohol producers can sell take-out alcohol. Despite this, variance in licencing rules has caused confusion and the ability and legality to access this market can be questioned by businesses. Updating these rules can enable short-term and long-term economic growth.

The OCC recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Consult with Ontario craft beverage alcohol producers, hospitality establishments and licensed retail operators to document the varying application of applicable rules under the AGCO between jurisdictions and the experiences of each, with an eye to;
2. Inform the development of a province-wide liquor licensing review that would provide clarity to local enforcement agencies, hospitality operators, retail operators, and Ontario craft beverage producers interested in selling their products in outlets across the province.
3. Build into any new legislation an evaluation mechanism that would require a review of the performance of the licensing regime every three to five years with an eye for both economic and social performance monitoring.